

# Snapshots of Malaysian Academics in International Engagement

## Malezyalı Akademisyenlerin Uluslararası Çalışmalarından Örnekler

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### Özet

Malezya'daki yükseköğretim akademisyenleri, kampüs dışındaki etkileşimler yoluyla sosyal yardımlarını ve uluslararası deneyimlerini geliştirmeye teşvik edilmektedir. Bu tür faaliyetler, bir bütün olarak Malezya yükseköğretim sisteminin yeterliliğini, güvenilirliğini ve uygunluğunu geliştirmede çok önemli olarak kabul edilir. Bu çalışma, Malezya yükseköğretim kurumlarında (2019–2020) akademisyenler ( $n=4368$ ) ile ilgili Bilgi Tabanlı Toplumda Akademik Meslek (APIKS) küresel anketine dayalı uluslararasılaşma deneyimlerini ve algılarını araştırmaktadır. Birincil amaç, Malezyalı akademisyenlerin öğretim, araştırma ve yayın faaliyetlerinde uluslararasılaşma algılarının yanı sıra kurumsal stratejileri ve uluslararasılaşma desteği de dahil olmak üzere uluslararasılaşmanın sonuçlarına ilişkin algılarını ortaya koymaktır. Ayrıca, uluslararasılaşma faaliyetlerinde aralarındaki farklılıkları görmek için eğitim geçmişi, akademik unvan ve üniversite türleri bakımından çeşitli grupların kesitsel analizleri yapılmıştır. Bulgular, Malezyalı akademisyenlerin öğretim ve araştırma yönelimlerinde oldukça uluslararası olmalarına rağmen, uluslararasılaşmanın yayınlarında daha az belirgin olduğunu göstermektedir. Uluslararası sonuçlar, kurumsal itibarı ve akademik kaliteyi artırmaya güçlü bir şekilde eğilir. Kurumsal uluslararasılaşma stratejileri konusundaki görüşleri olumlu olsa da katılımcılar bilimsel faaliyetleri desteklemede yeterli kurumsal finansmanın verilip verilmediği konusunda daha az emin görünmektedirler. Bulgular ayrıca bireysel uluslararası araştırma ve yayınlarda yaş grupları, kurum türleri ve unvanlar bakımından farklılıklar bulunduğunu doğrulamaktadır. Çalışma, akademik hareketlilik, araştırma desteği ve mesleki gelişim konusunda politika ve uygulamaya yönelik önerilerle sona ermektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Akademik hareketlilik, akademisyenler, Malezya, uluslararasılaşma, yükseköğretim.

### Abstract

Higher education academics in Malaysia are encouraged to enhance their outreach and international experience via engagement beyond the campus. Such activities are considered paramount in fostering competence, credibility and relevance of the Malaysian higher education system as a whole. This paper explores the experiences and perceptions of internationalisation based on the Academic Profession in the Knowledge-Based Society (APIKS) global survey on academics ( $n=4368$ ) in Malaysian higher education institutions (2019–2020). The primary purpose is to highlight Malaysian academics' perceptions of internationalisation in their teaching, research and publication activities as well as their perceptions of the outcomes of internationalisation, including their institutional strategies and support for internationalisation. In addition, cross-sectional analyses of various groups (education background, rank and university types) were carried out to see the differences between them in internationalisation activities. The findings indicate that while Malaysian academics were quite international in their teaching and research orientations, this was less pronounced in their publications. International outcomes leaned strongly towards enhancing institutional reputation and academic quality. While the respondents had positive responses to institutional strategies for internationalisation, they seemed less assured of sufficient commitment, in terms of funding, to support scholarly activities. The findings also confirm the existence of differences among age groups, institution types and ranks on individual international research and publication practices. This paper concludes with recommendations for policy and practice on academic mobility, research support and professional development.

**Keywords:** Academic mobility, academics, higher education, internationalisation, Malaysia.

In 2019, slightly more than 48,000 academic staff, 7.2 percent of them international, devoted their time and effort nurturing over 1.01 million students across 20 public universities and 98 private universities and university colleges in Malaysia. These lecturers/academic professionals strive to edu-

cate and train students who are mostly seeking better social mobility and professional development opportunities to improve not only their own lives but also those of their families and communities. Even as the country's higher education system undergoes rapid privatisation, corporatisation, resource

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rationalisation, with increasing embedment of quality assurance in all functions and operations (Lee, 2015), they remain committed to their vocation, developing study programmes, curricula, teaching policies, and conducting valuable research.

Under the Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA) and Code of Practice for Programme Audit (COPPA) issued by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), one of the nine areas of evaluation in the provision of quality higher education is academic staff. Academic staff are expected to participate in “four interrelated academic activities” (MQA, 2009, p. 40): teaching, research, consultancy, services and community engagement. However, the degree of involvement in these activities varies between academic ranks and types of higher education institutions (HEIs). Institutions must adhere to seven benchmarked standards for recruitment and management, and five benchmarked standards for service and development to support their academics in their productivity and delivery of academic programmes. Institutions must also ensure their staff receive systematic training throughout their service, and that incentives to reward service excellence are put in place, such as promotion, and attractive salary increments.

The academic community is also instrumental in driving transformation for Malaysia’s higher education system, which has undergone numerous waves of change within the past 25 years. Sack and Jalloun (2017) recount a series of mergers and demergers of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) which have taken place since 2013 which were mostly economically and politically driven. Azman and Wan (2021), and Wan and Abdullah (2021) describe a series of policy changes underlying internationalisation of the country’s higher education system since 2007.

### Policy Considerations for Internationalization

Malaysia is committed to increasing the visibility and prominence of its higher education system globally through internationalisation. This commitment can be traced through four ministerial documents issued over the past fifteen years.

The first document is the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP), launched in 2007. In this document, Malaysia is envisioned as an international education hub, becoming a country of choice for students to pursue quality and affordable higher education. The government set a target of 150,000 international student enrolment by 2015, and 200,000 international students by 2020. To achieve this goal, four strategies were introduced: increase global network and collaboration with international institutions; increase academic programme offerings to international students; increase international student recruitment at private higher education institutions; and enhance promotion and branding of

Malaysian higher education institutions at the international level (MoHE, 2007). Action plans that were specific to academics included international attachment programmes at foreign institutions as well as integration of comparative and international elements in the curriculum.

The second document is a complementary document to the NHESP launched in 2011, titled “Malaysia’s Global Reach: A New Dimension”. This document expresses Malaysia’s intention to increase its global reputation on the basis of soft power in higher education, defined as “... capabilities and intentions of institutions to capture the hearts and minds of local and international stakeholders to collectively accept values, ideologies and cultures of learning that can benefit communities...” (MoHE, 2011a, p. 18). Action plans specific to academic staff include expert sharing, diplomatic bonding, community exchange, student and institutional fellowship, as well as skills and technology transfer among partner countries (Azman & Wan, 2021).

The third document is the Internationalisation Policy for Higher Education Malaysia, also launched in 2011. In this document, a total of six strategic areas are identified for the acceleration of internationalisation of higher education institutions, in particular, the public institutions: student mobility, staff mobility, academic programmes, research and development, governance, as well as social integration and community engagement (MoHE, 2011b). Action plans specific to academics include recruitment of international academic staff, outbound mobility of Malaysian academics, as well as professional development and training for academic and non-academic staff to support and enhance institutional internationalisation activities.

The fourth and final document, the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025, attempts to situate the Malaysian academic profession in higher education transformation. Launched in 2015, the document outlines 10 transformative shifts in Malaysian higher education for a 10-year horizon. Shift 2 (Talent Excellence), Shift 7 (Innovative Ecosystem), and Shift 8 (Global Prominence) are calls for the academics to support Malaysia’s aspirations in becoming an international education hub, through the provision of value-driven and globally relevant education, as well as establishing herself as a globally-connected player for academic and research in niche areas (MoHE, 2015). Towards this end, each academic staff is expected to take on one of the following four “personas”: inspiring educator, accomplished researcher, experienced practitioner, and institutional leader. They are also expected to be solution providers to industries and communities, and build Malaysia’s capacity in strategic areas that are critical to national development. In other words, academic staff are even more obligated to teach, conduct research, provide consultancy services, and engage with the international community, as contributions from these academic activities



are considered instrumental to increasing the competitiveness and prestige of the country in the global arena.

As a result of the policies introduced, Malaysia became an exporter of education services to the world. In 2008, the country hosted a total of 69,174 international students and 2895 international academic members. By 2018, the country recorded 131,514 international student enrolment, a two-fold increase within a span of 10 years with 4462 international academic members (Wan & Abdullah, 2021). These numbers only constitute about 8.2 per cent of the academic staff in all higher education institutions (54,508) in 2018. The private higher education sector remained a major host throughout the years, with seven out of 10 students pursuing their studies in private higher education institutions across the country.

Even though the State is deeply committed to internationalising its higher education system, it remains to be seen whether its academic members are following the lead. In all the ministerial documents mentioned above, academic staff are expected to initiate, strengthen, and sustain cross-border collaboration in teaching, research, and services. Specific action plans related to academic staff include expert sharing, diplomatic bonding, community exchange, student and institutional fellowship, as well as skills and technology transfer among partner countries (Azman & Wan, 2021). They are also expected to increase the visibility of the Malaysian higher education system abroad, through representation at conferences, meetings, and other international academic and research events. However, their perceptions of internationalisation, as well as the extent of their involvement, have not been reviewed at large. A descriptive review of academic staff involvement in internationalising Malaysia's higher education system is therefore critical and necessary in order to inform policymakers on potential interventions to be introduced in the future.

This paper focuses on a review of Malaysian academics' involvement in internationalisation. Indicators derived from the Academic Profession in the Knowledge-Based Society (APIKS) global survey were used to assess international engagements of academics in Malaysian higher education institutions. In this survey, the internationalisation of the academic profession refers to the increasing permeability of national boundaries in academic research, teaching and service, and to the increasing mobility of students and academics across borders (Finkelstein, Walker, & Chen, 2013). The conceptual underpinning for this paper is built on previous works contributed by Knight (2004, 2008) and Finkelstein et al. (2013) relating to academics' engagement in internationalisation at both individual and institutional levels. This paper also builds on contributions from Finkelstein and Sethi (2014) as well as Marquina and Ferreiro (2015), who highlighted that international mobility, such as attachments and international

travel for scholarly purposes, is a strong conduit affecting internationalisation in teaching and research of higher education institutions. We hypothesised that academics are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to partake in internationalisation activities. They align their efforts with institutional priorities that are deemed both profitable as well as compatible with the overall goals and values of the institution. Our contribution in the continuing conversation is the financial agenda that is less discussed, particularly within the context of Malaysian higher education. We argue that while the State is highly invested in internationalising its higher education system, significant financial investment is still required in enabling these academics to pursue their cause. The academics can only fully benefit from internationalisation if the biggest leveller - funding, is made available to them.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we outline conceptual considerations underlying the rationale and significance of this paper. Next, we briefly introduce the APIKS global survey, the indicators selected for analysis, and sampling of the survey. We then present findings and discussion on particular trends identified throughout our analysis before highlighting implications for policy and practice.

## Literature Review

An international dimension to the work of academics in higher education will always exist. Buckner and Stein (2020) note an ingrained imaginary of the "internationalised" academic professional that is pervasive across the global academic community. These include: international staff recruitment; international mobility; internationalisation of curriculum; international research; collaboration with international researchers; and participation in capacity development activities internationally, either as a transmitter of knowledge, or as recipient of skills and competencies from an international partner.

In order to carry out their responsibilities, academics need to have a multicultural worldview, intercultural sensitivity, and an international mindset to effectively educate students in their socially diverse classrooms and prepare them for multicultural workplaces (Donald, 2007; Sanderson, 2008). They are also expected to advance and disseminate knowledge by collaborating with their peers overseas (Finkelstein & Sethi, 2014; Teichler, Arimoto, & Cummings, 2013). Appe (2020) found that academics have significant influence in determining institutional participation in study abroad activities. They may be familiar with the country in which a collaborative partner is located, have strong personal relationships with his/her peers in university, government agency, or non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the country, or have particular research and/or travel interests in the country.



Despite the various benefits for teaching, research, and networking, not all academics warm up to the idea of internationalisation (Dewey & Duff, 2009). This may be attributed to their lack of: language skills, exposure, awareness of international opportunities (Andreasen, 2003), or understanding of internationalisation initiatives (Friesen, 2013). Those academics with international experience were found more likely to stay internationally connected with colleagues from other countries (Webber, 2012). In cases where institutional support is lacking, international initiatives are often seen by academics as additional work with little or no benefit (LeBeau, 2010). Without incentives for internationally oriented activities (Li & Tu, 2016), such as structural and financial resources (Finkelstein et al., 2013; Teichler et al., 2013), academics may not be keen to initiate or sustain their involvement in internationalisation.

Additionally, internationalisation policies tend to be developed and monitored at the institutional level. Previous studies have tended to focus on macro-level investigations, rather than from the perspectives of individuals affected by the process (Finkelstein et al., 2013; Li & Tu, 2016; Sanderson, 2008). Such a trend seems to run counter to claims by Teichler et al. (2013), Finkelstein and Sethi (2014), and Huang, Finkelstein and Rostan (2013), about the crucial role that academics play in shaping internationalisation through teaching, research, and service. It also contradicts studies that demonstrate significant correlations between the quality of scholarly production and institutional internationalisation (Abramo, D'Angelo, & Di Costa, 2009).

## Method

### Instrumentation and Sampling

The research reported in this paper is based on a descriptive study that utilised a survey for data collection. We report selected findings from a global survey (APIKS) to ascertain the current state of play for academic staff's involvement in internationalisation. We are concerned with the following question: have the policies and two-fold increase of international student enrolment in the country piqued the interest of Malaysian academic staff, and increased their participation in internationalisation?

APIKS is the most recent iteration of a survey entitled "Changing Academic Profession" (CAP), a global initiative held since 1992. Research teams work together across borders to examine the changing nature in the world of academic work. The survey uses both closed and open-ended items. The closed items use single-answer multiple choice, rating and Likert scale questions. The open-ended questions require respondents to type their answer into a box. The questions are divided into themes that describe the various facets of academic work, such

as current career and professional situations, teaching and research, external activities, as well as governance and management. A new theme on academics in formative career stages was added to the current iteration of the global survey. With a commonly agreed upon protocol for data collection and analysis by a community of practice, the validity and reliability of the survey is well-established.

Data for APIKS-2019 was collected online between June 2019 to July 2020. The population sampled for this study comprised academics from public universities (31,626) and private universities and university colleges (16,755), totalling 48,381. Using cluster sampling (university types: public university, private university, private university college) and stratified sampling (discipline, academic rank, and gender), a total of 4368 academics responded to the survey, constituting about 9.0 per cent of the total academic staff in Malaysia. ■ Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The majority of the respondents were from public HEIs (92.1%). Of the total number of respondents, 44.4 percent were male while 55.6 percent were female. The respondents were predominantly Malaysians (4227 or 96.8%) who worked full time (4280 or 98%). Over 75 percent (3283 respondents) of them had a doctoral degree.

The variables and items from the APIKS survey depicted in ■ Table 2 were chosen to shed light on the internationalisation practices both at the individual and systemic levels. Teaching

■ Table 1. Demographics of APIKS respondents ( $n=4368$ ).

Characteristics	Profile
Higher education institutions	Public: 4022 (92.1%) Private: 346 (7.9%)
Gender	Male: 1938 (44.4%) Female: 2430 (55.6%)
Citizenship	Malaysian: 4227 (96.8%) Non-Malaysian: 141 (3.2%)
Academic rank	Professor: 7.3% Associate professor: 19.8% Senior lecturer: 49.8% Lecturer: 21.0% Others: 2.1%
Tenure	Full-time: 4280 (98.0%) Part-time: 26 (0.6%) Others: 62 (1.4%)
Doctoral degree	Yes: 3283 (75.2%) No: 1085 (24.8%)
Degrees outside Malaysia	First degree: 869 (19.9%) Second degree: 930 (21.3%) Doctoral degree: 1306 (29.9%) Postdoctoral: 127 (2.9%)



■ **Table 2.** APIKS indicators and items analysed.

Description	Items in APIKS survey	Response	Analysis and presentation
International orientation	<p>C4 (teaching) – 3 statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your courses you emphasize international perspectives or content</li> <li>• Since you started teaching, the number of international students has increased</li> <li>• Your research activities reinforce your teaching</li> </ul> <p>D1 (research) – 1 statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you collaborate with international colleagues?</li> </ul> <p>D2 (research) – 1 statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International in scope or orientation</li> </ul> <p>D4 (publication) – 3 statements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have published in a foreign country</li> <li>• Have co-authored with colleagues located in other (foreign) countries</li> <li>• Percentage of peer-reviewed publications</li> </ul>	<p>Five-point scale from <i>strongly agree</i> to <i>strongly disagree</i></p> <p>Yes or No</p> <p>Five-point scale from <i>not at all</i> to <i>very much</i></p> <p>Open ended</p>	<p>Descriptive - Percentages of <i>agree</i> and <i>strongly agree</i></p>
Institutional involvement in internationalisation	<p>F6 - 8 statements on institutional strategy, recruitment of international faculty, opportunities for exchange programmes and conferences; international publications, undertaking research abroad, visiting international students and scholars</p> <p>Your institution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has clear strategy for internationalisation</li> <li>• Provides various international exchange programmes for students</li> <li>• Provides various opportunities/funding for faculty members to undertake research abroad</li> <li>• Provides various opportunities/funding for visiting international students</li> <li>• Provides various opportunities/funding for visiting international scholars</li> <li>• Encourages the recruitment of faculty members from foreign countries</li> <li>• Provides various opportunities/funding for faculty members to attend international conferences abroad</li> <li>• Encourages faculty members to publish internationally</li> </ul>	<p>Five-point scale from <i>strongly agree</i> to <i>strongly disagree</i></p>	<p>Descriptive - Percentages of <i>agree</i> and <i>strongly agree</i></p>
Internationalisation outcomes	<p>F5 - outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced prestige</li> <li>• Enhanced academic quality</li> <li>• Increased revenue</li> <li>• Enhanced research networks</li> <li>• Increased mobility of students</li> <li>• Increased mobility of faculty</li> <li>• Does not weaken cultural identity</li> <li>• Increased brain gain</li> <li>• Increased costs</li> </ul>	<p>Five-point scale from <i>not at all</i> to <i>very much</i></p>	<p>Descriptive - Percentages of <i>a lot</i> and <i>very much</i></p>
Variables affecting internationalisation	<p>Respondents' education background (A5 to: D1-5, D4-2, D4-4)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A5: Degree</li> <li>• D1-5: Do you collaborate with international colleagues</li> <li>• D4-4: % co-authored with colleagues located in other (foreign) countries</li> </ul> <p>Academic rank (A1 to: D1-5, D2-5, D4-4, D6-6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A1: Academic rank (professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, lecturer)</li> <li>• D1-5: Do you collaborate with international colleagues</li> <li>• D2-5: International in scope or orientation</li> <li>• D4-4: % co-authored with colleagues located in other (foreign) countries</li> <li>• D6-6: % international funding agencies</li> </ul> <p>Institution type (A0 to: F5, F6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A0: Institution type (research university, comprehensive university, focused university, technical university)</li> </ul>	<p>Open ended; Yes or No</p> <p>Multiple choice; Yes or No; five-point scale from <i>not at all</i> to <i>very much</i>; open ended</p> <p>Multiple choice; five-point scale from <i>not at all</i> to <i>very much</i>; five-point scale from <i>strongly agree</i> to <i>strongly disagree</i></p>	<p>Descriptive - Cross tabulation (percentages)</p>

The codes (e.g., C4, D1, D2, etc) represent item codes used in the survey.



variables included the presence or absence of international perspectives or content in their courses, whether their external activities reinforced their teaching, and if there was perceived increase in the number of international students since they started teaching. Research variables included two items, namely research collaboration with international colleagues, and the international scope or orientation of their primary research. Publication variables included three items: published in a “foreign” language; works were peer reviewed; and co-authored with colleagues located in other countries. Information on all three variables was used to determine the existence and scope of the academics’ individual approaches to internationalisation.

In order to examine the academics’ perceptions of the outcomes of internationalisation activities, nine variables related to rationale or motivation for internationalisation were used. Demographic variables affecting internationalisation included mobility across borders, i.e. whether they had received their degrees abroad, academic rank, and type of university. The difference in perceptions of the connection between mobility of scholars and the internationalisation of the academic profession was analysed with the assumption that experiences abroad may have had an impact on academic activities. International aca-

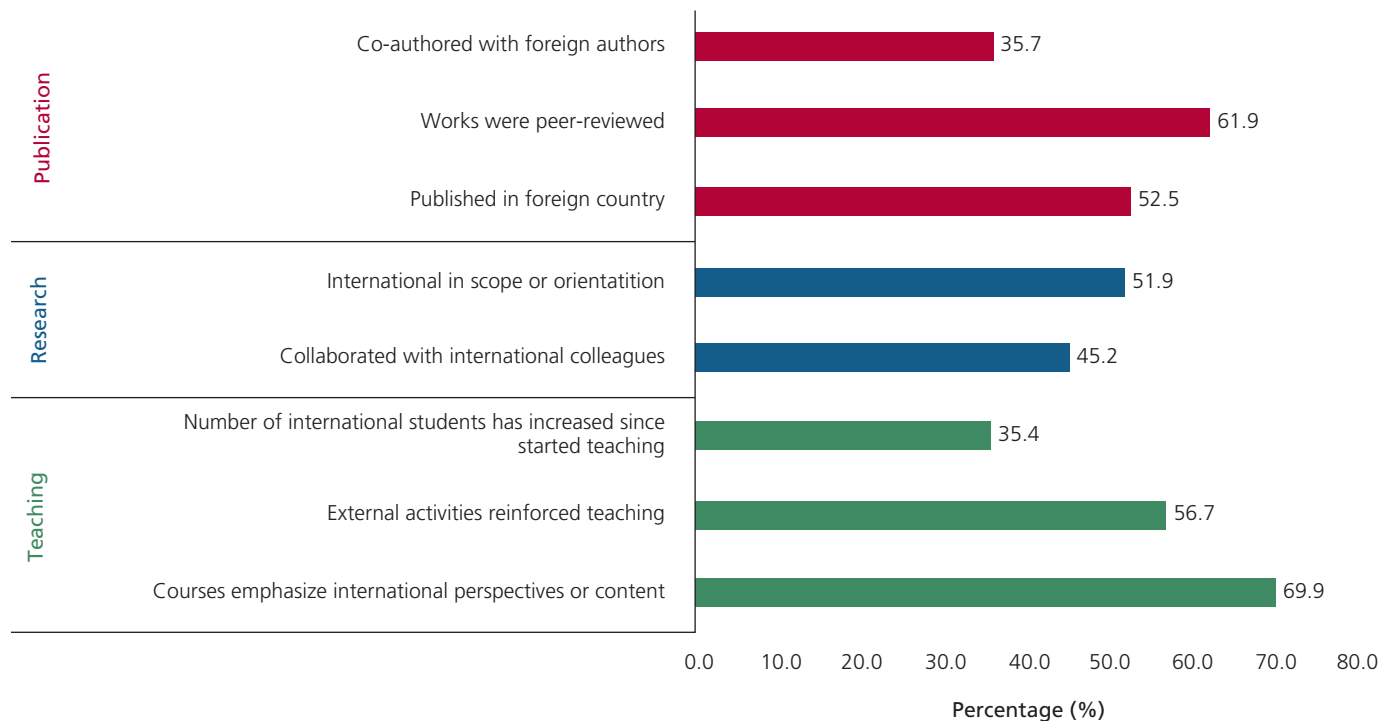
dem activities are likely to vary according to both structural and institutional features within which academics are embedded as well as according to their positions or academic characteristics, i.e. ranks, and types of universities which were used for the variables. These cross-sectional analyses of various cohorts or groups enabled a clear comparison between the groups in their internationalisation activities.

## Results

The results section is divided into two levels of analysis: individual and institutional orientation for internationalisation.

### International Orientation of Individual Academics Overview of Teaching, Research and Publication

The respondents were prompted to characterise the “international” orientation of their teaching and research activities. A glance at Figure 1 suggests that the internationalisation of the contents of teaching is the most pervasive aspect of the internationalisation with 69.9 percent of the respondents reporting that their courses emphasised international perspectives or content. More than half of the respondents (56.7%) believed that their external activities reinforced their teaching.



■ **Figure 1.** International orientation in teaching, research and publication (percentages responding to agree and strongly agree; Yes or No; a lot and very much and open-ended statement).



A small proportion of academics were exposed to, or were part of, a growing global higher education market as only 35.4 percent observed that the number of international students had increased since they started teaching.

The proportion of academics who were internationally active in research varied, to a greater extent, among the respondents than the respective proportion active internationally in teaching. About 45 percent of the respondents collaborated with international colleagues, while slightly over half (51.9%) believed that their research was international in scope or orientation. As for the international orientation for publication, more than half of the respondents (52.5%) had published in a foreign country. A slightly higher percentage (61.9%) of respondents stated that their works had been peer-reviewed. However, only 35.7 percent of the respondents claimed to have co-authored publications with foreign/international authors.

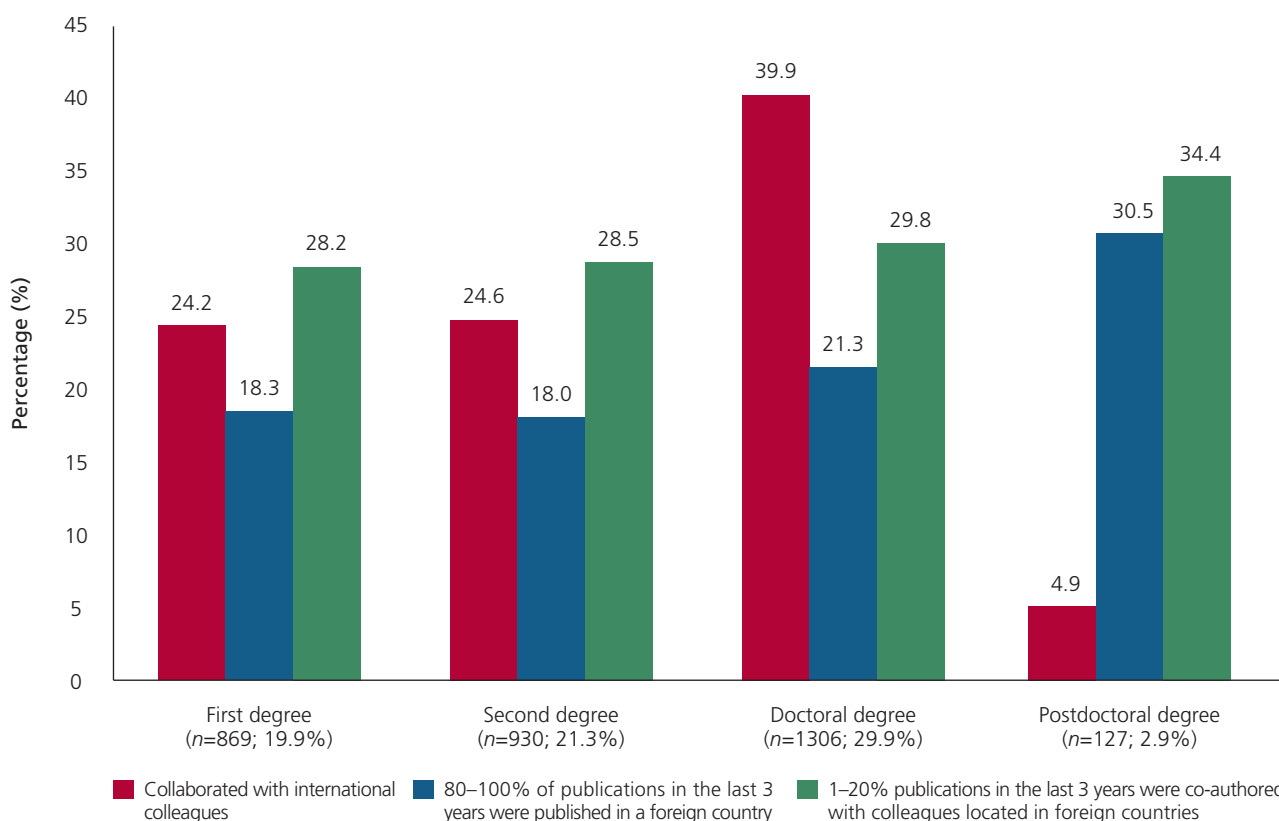
In the following sections, we discuss the internationalisation of research by looking at two basic dimensions: a focus on the international content of research, and international collaboration in the research process and publication. Two demograph-

ic variables were selected for analysis: each academic's education background and academic rank.

### Education Background

Of the 4368 respondents, 127 respondents (2.9%) had experienced post-doctoral stints abroad, while 1306 respondents (29.9%) had completed their doctoral studies abroad. A slightly lower proportion of respondents (21.3%) had obtained their second degree abroad, and a yet smaller proportion (19.9%) had received their first degree outside Malaysia. The largest group of respondents who had earned a degree abroad consisted of doctoral candidates (■ Figure 2).

Next, the level of degrees obtained abroad was cross tabulated with the respondents' involvement in internationalisation activities. Differences in the ratings given for internationalisation of scholarly activities seemed to be related to education background. In terms of collaborating with international colleagues in research, those with doctoral degrees from abroad reported the most activities (39.9%). This group also reported higher percentages in publication in foreign countries (21%)



■ Figure 2. Degree outside Malaysia vs involvement in internationalisation activities (percentages responding to Yes or No; and to open-ended statements).

and publications co-authored with international colleagues in the last three years (29.8%) compared to those who had received their master's and undergraduate education abroad. The most interesting results came from those respondents with postdoctoral experience abroad who reported the highest ratings on the two items. This group of academics seemed to be more inclined to publish in foreign countries (30.5%) as they reported that over 80.0 percent of their papers had been published in a foreign country and with international colleagues (34.4%). Thus, although the number of respondents who went abroad for their post-doctoral training is notably small, it seemed that their stints abroad enabled them to integrate and reinforce the international orientation in their research activities more than was seen among their colleagues.

Appendix 1 provides data on differences in teaching activities by the groupings of academics with doctoral training from abroad and those with doctoral training in Malaysia. The *t*-test analyses showed no statistical difference between the two clusters of academics' doctoral training backgrounds (doctoral degree from abroad and doctoral training from home) in all the three teaching activities.

### Academic Rank

The findings show that those Malaysian academics characterising their research as international in scope and collaborating with international colleagues in their research projects were unevenly distributed across academic ranks. Figure 3 shows stark differences between the respondents' academic rank and their involvement in internationalisation activities. Being in a higher academic rank seems to facilitate academics in accessing international opportunities in research and publication. The professors, being at the top of the pecking order of the academic profession, seemed to have greatly benefited in this respect: a higher proportion of the professors reported that they collaborated with international colleagues (82.9%), conducted research that was international in scope or orientation (75.0%), received funding from international agencies (17.3%), and published with colleagues located in a foreign country (73.1%).

The picture is bleak for senior lecturers and lecturers, who made up approximately more than 70 percent of the study sample, and are located at the low pecking order of the academic community. They reported lower levels of collaboration with

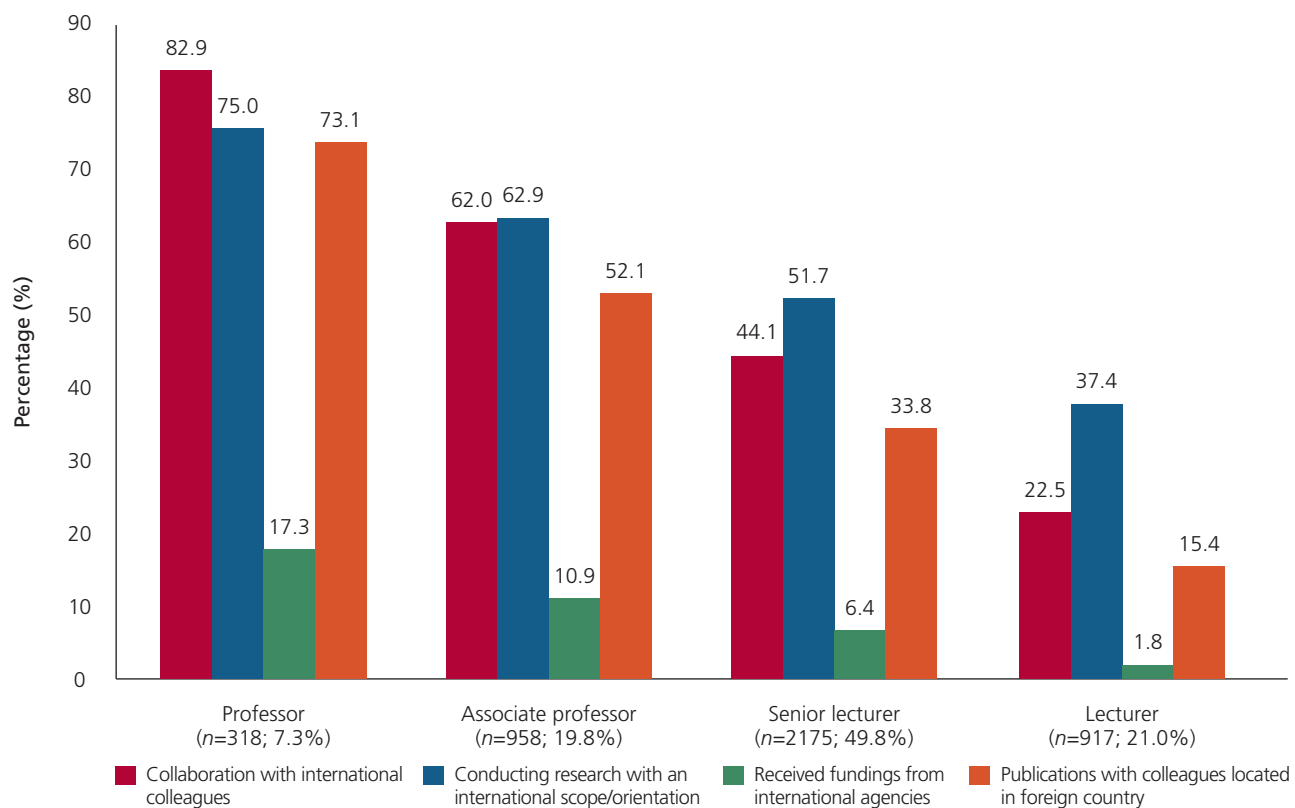


Figure 3. Academic rank and involvement in internationalisation activities (percentages responding to a lot and very much; Yes or No; and open-ended statements).





international colleagues (44.1% for senior lectures and 21% for lecturers), and conducted less research that is international in scope or orientation (51.7% for senior lecturers and 37% for lecturers). A much lower proportion of senior lecturers (6.4%) and lecturers (1.8%) claimed to have received funding from international agencies, and both groups had fewer opportunities to publish with colleagues located in a foreign country (33.8% and 15%, respectively).

Appendix 2 illustrates the results of the *t*-test showing differences between two career stage groups - junior (early career academics) and senior (late career academics) in their teaching activities. The career stage was divided into four ranks: lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, professor, dichotomised into two subgroups of junior academics (lecturer and senior lecturer) and senior academics (associate professor and professor). The results indicate that differences exist in the mean scores of only one of the three items: external activities reinforced teaching ( $t=6.406, p<0.045$ ).

### International Orientation and Outcomes of Institutions Institutional Involvement in Internationalisation

The respondents were asked to rate their institution’s involvement in internationalisation. A total of eight statements were

presented for rating under this item (Figure 4). In general, the respondents believed that their respective institutions had a clear strategy for internationalisation (62.5%). They observed that their institutions encouraged the recruitment of academic members from foreign countries (44.3%). They also believed that their institutions provided various international exchange programmes for students (67.5%). Only a small proportion of the respondents (37%) indicated that their institutions provided opportunities for academic staff to attend international conferences abroad. An overwhelmingly positive response was given to the statement regarding international publications: over 85.4 percent of them believed that their institutions encouraged them to publish internationally.

The remaining three statements had almost equal proportions of positive (Likert scales 4 and 5), and neutral responses (Likert scale 3), and should be interpreted with caution. First, when asked whether their institutions provided opportunities for academic staff to undertake research abroad, 39.2 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, in contrast with 32.7 percent of respondents who were ambivalent on the subject. Next, when they were asked about opportunities for visiting international students, approximately one third of the respondents (32.8%) believed that their institu-

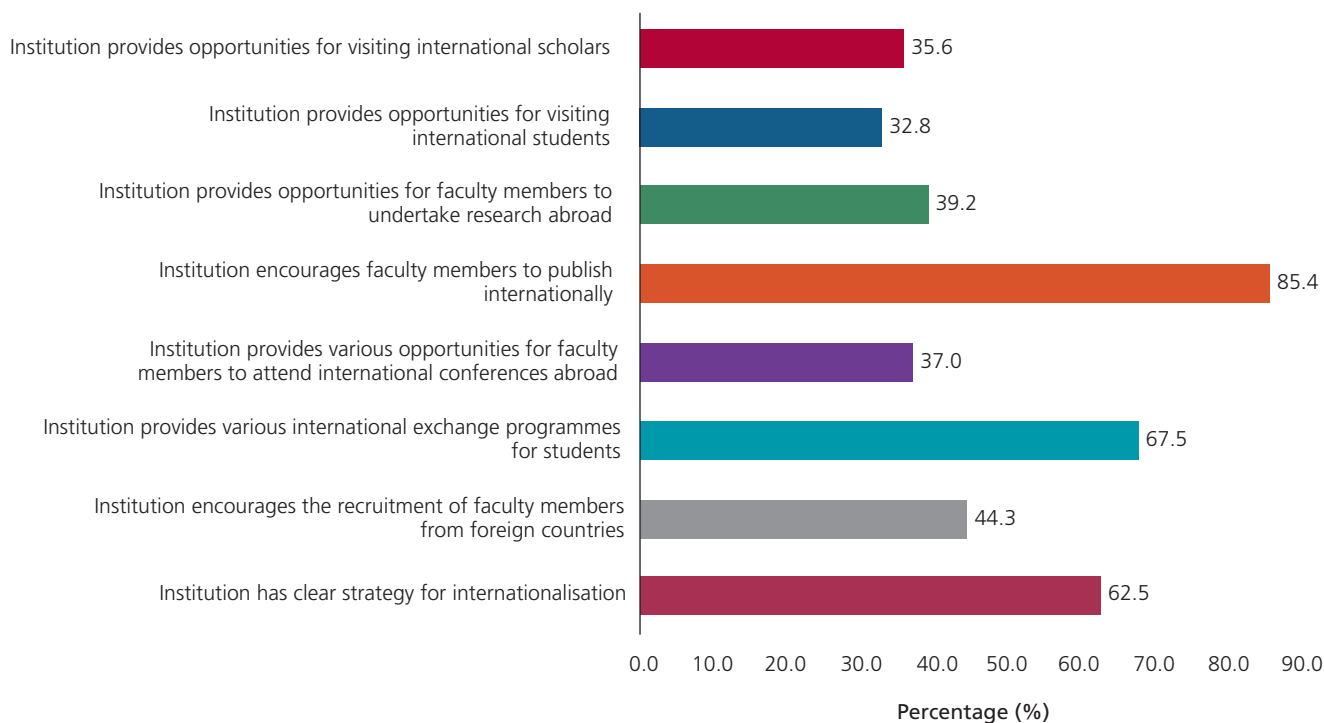


Figure 4. Institution’s involvement in internationalisation (percentages responding to agree and strongly agree).



tions had made such opportunities available for prospective international students, in contrast to 38.8 percent of respondents who were unsure of their institution's contribution in this aspect. Finally, with regard to opportunities for having visiting international scholars, 35.6 percent of respondents believed that their institutions had made such opportunities available for prospective international scholars; however, 38.6 percent of respondents were unsure of their institution's contribution in this aspect.

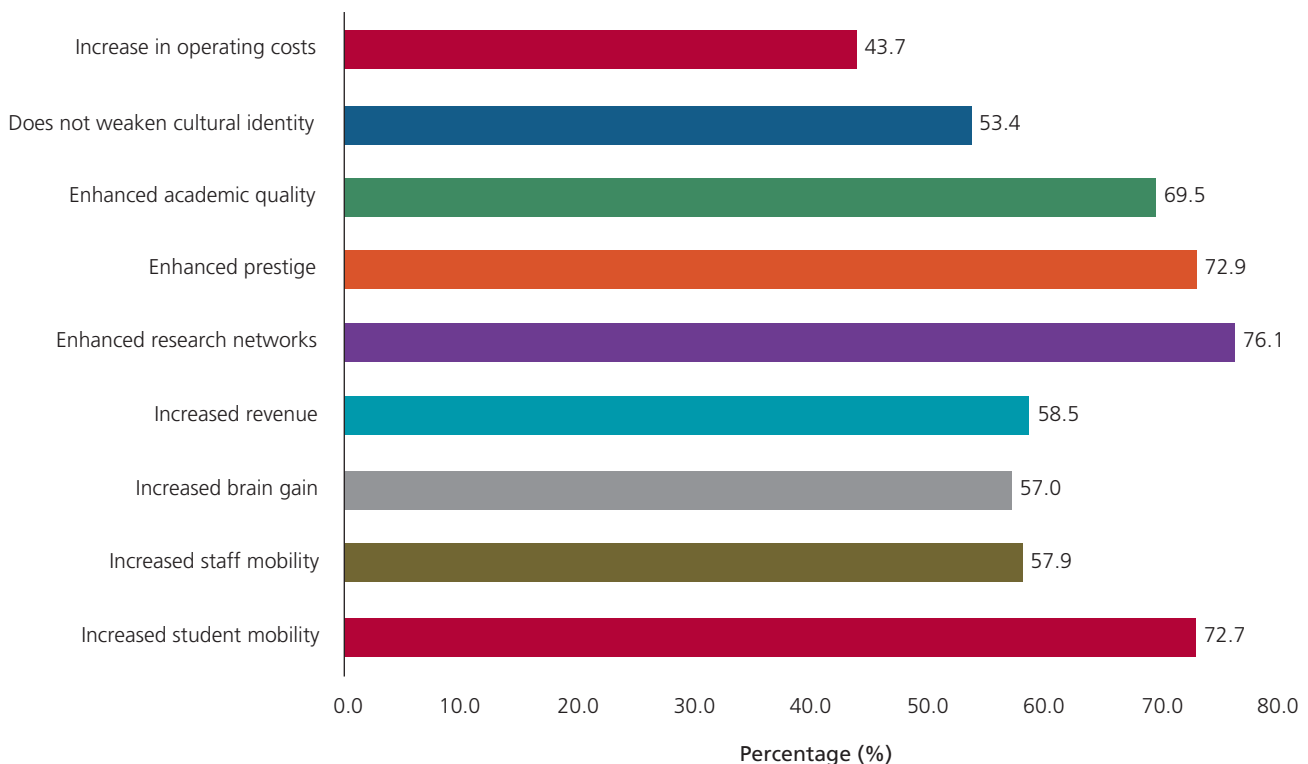
The *t*-tests were also performed to see the differences between academic and career/stage groups with regard to institutional involvement in internationalisation. Results presented in ■ Appendix 3 indicate that differences exist in the mean scores of five out of nine items: (i) institution encourages the recruitment of academic staff from foreign countries ( $t=0.511$ ,  $p<0.000$ ); (ii) institution provides various opportunities for academics to attend international conferences abroad ( $t=0.945$ ,  $p<0.049$ ); (iii) institution encourages academics to publish internationally ( $t=5.621$ ,  $p<0.000$ ); (iv) institution provides opportunities for visiting international students ( $t=-1.916$ ,  $p<0.033$ ); and (v) institution provides opportunities for visiting international scholars ( $t=-0.420$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). These

results indicate that differences between how the academics perceived institutional support for internationalisation seem to be dependent on the stage of their career and their academic experience.

■ Appendix 4 also illustrates the results of the *t*-test for differences in the respondents' responses to institutional involvement based on their doctoral education background. Results of the *t*-test on the nine indices of internationalisation involvement indicate significant differences in only two items ( $p<0.05$ ): (i) institution has clear strategy for internationalisation ( $t=7.021$ ,  $p<0.000$ ); and (ii) institution provides various international exchange programmes for students ( $t=3.720$ ,  $p<0.000$ ).

### Internationalisation Outcomes for Institutions

The respondents were asked to rate the outcomes attained by their institutions through internationalisation. The term 'outcome' indicates an understanding of consequence, result, or effect that occurs due to internationalisation activities. A total of nine statements were presented for rating in response to this question (■ Figure 5). Enhanced research network (76.1%), enhanced prestige (72.9%), and increased student mobility



■ Figure 5. Internationalisation outcomes (percentages responding to a lot and very much).



(72.7%) were considered the most pervasive outcomes of internationalisation. The next most prevalent outcome of academic internationalisation was the enhancement of academic quality (69.5%). More than half perceived that internationalisation had impacted staff mobility (57.9%), and had increased brain gain for their respective institutions (57%). More than half of the respondents (58.5%) also believed that internationalisation had increased revenue for their institution as a result of the incoming flow of international students. Slightly more than half of the respondents (53.4%) remarked that despite the intensity of internationalisation activities at their respective institutions, it did not weaken the cultural identity of their university community. However, there was still a price to pay for internationalisation as 43.7 percent respondents believed that their institutions had incurred an increase in operating costs associated with internationalisation activities.

Academics at different career stages/ranks (senior and junior), seemed to exhibit some patterns of differences in their institutional orientation for internationalisation. The results in ■ Appendix 5 show evident differences in five out of nine items: increased revenue; enhanced research networks; increased mobility of students; increased mobility of academics and increased brain gain ( $p < 0.05$ ). Academic members at different career stages seemed to have different perceptions regarding mobility activities.

The *t*-test analyses were also conducted to see if differences existed between those who had received their doctoral training from abroad and those who had received their doctoral training locally regarding outcomes of internationalisation (■ Appendix 6). The results indicate significant differences in seven out of nine items: (i) enhanced prestige ( $t=4.390$ ,  $p < 0.002$ ); (ii) enhanced academic quality ( $t=7.501$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ); (iii) increased revenue ( $t=5.132$ ,  $p < 0.004$ ); (iv) increased mobility of students ( $t=4.039$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); (v) increased mobility of academics ( $t=6.048$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ); (vi) does not weaken cultural identity ( $t=0.708$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ); and (vii) increased brain gain ( $t=5.716$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). This means that consistent patterns of differences on aspects of internationalisation outcomes are evident between those who had their PhD experience abroad and those who experienced it locally.

### Type of Institution

To further examine the institutional dimension of internationalisation, this section explores types of universities and their internationalisation outcomes and involvement. Seventeen cross tabulations were conducted using nine items from the institutional outcome variables and eight items from the institutional support variable. Of these seventeen cross tabulations, five outcomes variables and seven involvement variables respectively

were shown to be statistically significant using chi-square statistics. Therefore, it appears that the institutional type is related to some aspects of internationalisation involvement and outcomes. ■ Table 3 shows the items included (institutional involvement and international outcomes) and whether the chi-square test showed statistical significance (S) or statistical insignificance (I) (at the 0.05 level;  $p=0.01$ ) between the responses.

Some conclusions can be made from the data: a high proportion of academics from the research universities (RU) either strongly agreed or agreed with all the statements on institutional involvement and international outcomes compared to academics from the other types of universities. Academics from RUs demonstrated statistical agreement on the following internationalisation outcomes: enhanced prestige, increased revenue, enhanced research networks, increased mobility of academics, and increased costs. Conversely, academics from the technical universities (TU) seemed to show the least agreement on all the items on outcomes. The chi-square results are statistically significant for outcomes in enhancing prestige, research networks, as well as increasing revenue, mobility of academics, and costs. Other outcomes, although not statistically different across types of institutions, have more than 50% agreement on the opinion that these institutional outcomes are important.

In terms of internationalisation involvement, seven of the eight variables are statistically different across types of institutions. Academics from RUs show stronger agreement that their institutions have clear strategies for internationalisation (68.2%) and encourage them to publish internationally (90.8%), as compared to their peers in other types of institutions. Those in TU share the opinion that their institutions provide various international exchange programmes for students (77.0%), while those in focused universities (FU) agree that their institutions provide opportunities for academics to undertake research abroad (42.6%), opportunities to receive visiting international scholars (42.6%), and encourage the recruitment of foreign academics (59.8%). The agreement that their institutions provide opportunities for visiting international students has no statistical difference across different institutions where the level of agreement is between 32.2 percent and 36.6 percent.

### Discussion and Conclusion

In the conceptual and policy considerations for this paper, we put forward our observations with regard to academics' involvement in internationalisation. First, that academics are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to engage in internationalisation activities, and international mobility is the main activity undertaken by them. Second, there is strong

**Table 3.** Type of institution vs institutional outcomes (percentages responding to *a lot* and *very much*) and involvement (percentages responding to *agree* and *strongly agree*).

Construct	Item	RU (n=1731)	CU (n=878)	FU (n=868)	TU (n=421)	Chi - square
Outcomes	Enhanced prestige	78.1	72.3	75.2	72.2	S
	Enhanced academic quality	72.4	70.5	73.7	70.1	I
	Increased revenue	61.8	57.9	60.1	59.1	S
	Enhanced research networks	80.5	77.0	78.8	76.5	S
	Increased mobility of students	73.0	73.6	77.9	78.4	I
	Increased mobility of faculty	60.7	57.9	62.7	56.5	S
	Does not weaken cultural identity	54.7	55.2	58.8	54.2	I
	Increased brain gain	59.7	57.1	60.3	59.6	I
	Increased costs	45.7	41.0	49.1	44.2	S
Involvement	Institution has clear strategy for internationalisation	68.2	62.5	65.3	59.4	S
	Institution encourages the recruitment of faculty members from foreign countries	38.9	41.9	59.8	48.7	S
	Institution provides various international exchange programmes for students	71.4	63.6	69.1	77.0	S
	Institution provides various opportunities for faculty members to attend international conferences abroad	36.9	39.5	48.5	41.1	S
	Institution encourages faculty members to publish internationally	90.8	86.0	89.9	83.4	S
	Institution provides opportunities for faculty members to undertake research abroad	37.7	35.6	42.6	40.9	S
	Institution provides opportunities for visiting international students	33.3	32.3	36.6	35.2	I
	Institution provides opportunities for visiting international scholars	36.8	33.1	42.6	36.3	S

CU: comprehensive university; FU: focused university; I: statistical insignificance at 0.05 level,  $p=0.01$ ; RU: research university; S: statistical significance at 0.05 level,  $p=0.01$ ; TU: technical university.

legitimation of the role of academics in the Malaysian higher education sphere to spearhead internationalisation through international mobility, community engagement, and research activities. We then used findings from the APIKS global survey to ascertain whether the two hypotheses are valid among academics in Malaysian HEIs. The main conclusions on the trends in the perceptions of Malaysian academics on internationalisation activities are summarised below.

Firstly, it was found that the Malaysian academics were rather international in their teaching and research orientations. This is in line with the findings of CAP 2007 indicating that the internationalisation of teaching is the most pervasive aspect of the internationalisation of the academic profession at the global level (Rostan, 2015). Malaysian academics seemed to be able to integrate an international dimension in the teaching content. The findings on international research collaboration corroborated with findings from the 2011–2012 international survey of university academics in five Asian countries (Cambodia, China, Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia and Vietnam) showed that the proportion of Malaysian academics collaborating with international

colleagues in research is higher compared to the average in Asia, but lower compared to the average in Europe (Huang, 2015; Huang et al., 2013).

Secondly, while international research collaboration was quite widespread among Malaysian academics, international publications were much less common. The data on co-authoring publications with colleagues in other countries shows that Malaysian academics reported higher percentages than those from North America but lower than those in Europe (Huang et al., 2013). Evidently, publishing with colleagues in other countries is most common for academics in mature systems, especially those in Western Europe, i.e. the Netherlands and Germany, and is also notable in Hong Kong, and in Australia (Rostan, Finkelstein, & Huang, 2014). As co-authorship is considered one of the reliable indirect indicators of international collaboration (Ductor, 2014; Slipersaeter & Aksens, 2010), it can be argued that if co-authorship among Malaysian academic staff increases, scientific collaboration across national borders will increase too.

Thirdly, with regard to the outcomes for international activities, prestige for individual institutions and quality enhance-



ment of academic programmes were perceived to be the most important. These outcomes leaned strongly towards the academic dimension of outcomes (Knight, 2008, 2012; Seeber, Cattaneo, Huisman, & Paleari, 2016), reflecting the institutionally organised efforts to achieve international recognition for quality higher education, considered necessary in a highly competitive higher education system and marketplace, as stated in the Malaysian Higher Education Blueprint. The respondents also reported that their institutions encouraged them to publish internationally; however, they could be lacking in the know-how and experience for pursuing publication activities with international partners. They seemed to be aware of institutional strategies in internationalisation, but were not fully convinced of sufficient commitment, in terms of funding to support the in/outbound movement of scholars for academic experience and research. They perceived internationalisation to be an expensive affair, and were concerned with the hefty cost that would be incurred with increased participation in internationalisation activities.

Fourthly, academics with prior international mobility experience, in particular those who had completed their doctoral and postdoctoral studies abroad, appeared to be more active in internationalisation. International mobility in the form of advanced degrees abroad appears to be strongly related to international research, and dissemination. The present finding seems to suggest that study mobility at advanced levels is a key factor in fostering international research activities among Malaysian faculties. It also supports previous CAP findings indicating that international mobility has a strong impact on international research activities (Hoffman, 2009; Rostan & Hohle, 2014). We observe that personal resources fostering international research activities, such as international visibility and professional expertise, or access to international research networks and capacity to attract external funding, start to accumulate very early in the careers of academics, mostly during their education. Thus, those having earned an advanced degree abroad may be more international because their experience abroad would have provided them with international networks, better foreign language proficiency, better intercultural competencies, and better knowledge of international colleagues/experts (Rostan et al., 2014; Rostan & Hohle, 2014). As a result, they might be more productive in terms of research publication, with greater access to international collaborators, as well as prior training and exposure to publication opportunities and platforms.

Such observations are perhaps the most important for policy makers, as they highlight aspects likely to affect institutional research collaboration and productivity. Institutional leaders cannot underestimate the significant role of international experience and socialization in their internationalisation efforts

(Festervand & Tillery, 2001; Finkelstein et al., 2013; Huang, 2007). Policies and programmes that enhance academics' mobility and international networking capacity will likely foster higher research productivity for those involved, particularly if the opportunities occur early in the academics' careers. Thus, strategic research investments should be targeted at young academics without international experience, and also those whose research niches have the greatest potential impact for society both at the national and international levels. These types of investments would require rethinking/reconstruction of the academic mobility, study abroad and postdoctoral policies by the Ministry of Higher Education and at the institutional level, so that every academic benefits from international experience and networking, subsequently building the social capital needed for international academic and research collaboration.

Fifthly, international involvement and outcomes seemed strongest within RU, followed by FU, and the weakest in TU. This is not surprising, as HEIs oriented towards research activity are more likely to adopt strategies for internationalisation as they are embedded in a global context more frequently and therefore tend to conceive of internationalisation as instrumental to prestige (Horta, 2009).

Finally, higher-ranked academics (professors) tend to be more involved in internationalisation, with the generalisation that the higher up one stands in the academic hierarchy, the greater is his/her engagement in internationalisation. In particular, Malaysian university professors report that they have an international scope in their research and collaborate internationally more often than junior academics. Patterns of differences between seniors and juniors were evident in mobility and networking-related institutional support as well as in providing opportunities for visiting international students and scholars. These findings confirm the existence of differences in age and ranks regarding international collaboration practices, perceptions on international outcomes, and institutional support (Rostan et al., 2014). Significant differences between academics with different doctoral training backgrounds (doctoral degree from abroad versus a local doctoral degree) were also evident in some aspects of institutional orientation to internationalisation and internationalisation outcomes. These findings show that experiences during doctoral education may have had an impact on the academics' perceptions on the role or inclination of institutions towards internationalisation, and the outcomes of internationalisation.

Findings of this study, although general in scope and descriptive in its presentation, presents different realities between what is envisioned by the State (represented by MoHE) in internationalisation, what is carried out by the HEIs, and what is actually implemented and experienced by the individual

academic. Such a dichotomy is typical of policy implementation that fails to strike a balance between short- and long-term goals in managing a multiplicity of stakeholders with competing interests and expectations (van Der Wal, 2017). The State's responsibility is in investing resources to HEIs, and in allocating resources to individual academics, in order to align national interests and political goals on internationalisation across all levels (Amaral, 2008). In the Malaysian context, the intent and commitment has been well ascertained through various ministerial documents; what is lacking at present is the effort to incentivise and acknowledge academics' involvement in internationalisation.

At this juncture, it is also appropriate to review professional development and training of academics across all academic ranks. Tran and Nghia (2020) argue that higher education leaders must develop new capacities, knowledge and skills beyond their traditional expertise in order to effectively shape the internationalisation agenda of their institutions. Although their study focuses on senior leaders in Australian higher education, we believe that their recommendation on the five dimensions of professional development needs is also applicable for the Malaysian academic profession. The five dimensions are: awareness and skills to work across cultural differences, knowledge of policy changes and emergent trends with expertise to respond, leadership and management skills targeted for internationalisation, networking and relationship management skills to work with increasingly diverse and non-traditional stakeholders, and research skills. Within the context of this study, these dimensions are appropriate for inclusion in professional development plans for academic staff, beyond the conventional training in teaching and assessment methods.

Reflecting on findings from previous iterations of APIKS, of which Malaysia was a participating member country for 2007 and 2019, it was found that international mobility remains a consistent feature in the internationalisation of Malaysian academics. This finding contributes to the growing research interest in strategic approaches to internationalisation targeting emerging higher education systems in developing countries. However, as pointed out by de Wit and Altbach (2021), the COVID-19 global pandemic has upended the notion of travelling, both within and outside the country for academic conferences, research attachments, and other forms of knowledge sharing and international collaboration activities in all higher education systems. It might be appropriate to look at Mittelmeier, Rienties, Rogaten, Gunter and Raghuram's (2019) concept of Internationalisation at a Distance (IaD), defined as "...all forms of education across borders where students, their respective staff, and institutional provisions are separated by geographical distance and supported by technology..." (p. 2).

Academics should leverage on the use of the Internet and video conferencing facilities to continue their pursuit of collaboration and excellence via the computer screen, and consequently maintain, to an extent, the lustre and possibilities of international mobility in such difficult times.

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**Appendix 1.** Differences in internationalization of teaching activities based on doctoral degrees from home and abroad.

Construct	Item	<i>p</i> *	<i>t</i>	Mean diff.
Teaching	Courses emphasize international perspectives or content	0.108	-4.117	-0.128
	Number of international students has increased since started teaching	0.442	-2.679	-0.127
	External activities reinforced teaching	0.219	-0.227	-0.009

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; home ( $n=1719$ ); abroad ( $n=1154$ ).

**Appendix 2.** Differences in international orientation in teaching by academic career stage/rank: senior and junior.

Construct	Item	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	Mean diff.
Teaching	Courses emphasize international perspectives or content	0.410	5.251	0.159
	Number of international students has increased since started teaching	0.272	6.908	0.321
	External activities reinforced teaching	0.045*	6.406	0.244

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; senior ( $n=1034$ ); junior ( $n=2604$ ).

**Appendix 3.** Differences in perception on institutional involvement in internationalization by academic career stage/rank: senior and junior.

Construct	Item	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	Mean diff.
Involvement	Institution has clear strategy for internationalisation	0.420	1.528	0.049
	Institution encourages the recruitment of faculty members from foreign countries	0.000*	0.511	0.019
	Institution provides various international exchange programmes for students	0.938	2.163	0.069
	Institution provides various opportunities for faculty members to attend international conferences abroad	0.049*	0.945	0.041
	Institution encourages faculty members to publish internationally	0.000*	5.621	0.146
	Institution provides opportunities for faculty members to undertake research abroad	0.916	-2.129	-0.086
	Institution provides opportunities for visiting international students	0.033*	-1.916	-0.075
	Institution provides opportunities for visiting international scholars	0.000*	-0.420	-0.016

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; senior ( $n=1034$ ); junior ( $n=2604$ ).

**Appendix 4.** Differences in perception on institutional involvement in internationalization by doctoral education background: doctoral training from abroad and doctoral training from home.

Construct	Item	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	Mean diff.
Involvement	Institution has clear strategy for internationalisation	0.000*	7.021	0.240
	Institution encourages the recruitment of faculty members from foreign countries	0.088	4.992	0.185
	Institution provides various international exchange programmes for students	0.000*	3.720	0.123
	Institution provides various opportunities for faculty members to attend international conferences abroad	0.531	6.714	0.302
	Institution encourages faculty members to publish internationally	0.470	0.239	0.007
	Institution provides opportunities for faculty members to undertake research abroad	0.343	6.934	0.294
	Institution provides opportunities for visiting international students	0.547	7.376	0.294
	Institution provides opportunities for visiting international scholars	0.619	7.843	0.303

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; home ( $n=1816$ ); abroad ( $n=1228$ ).





■ **Appendix 5.** Differences in perception on internalization outcomes by academic career stage/rank: senior and junior.

Construct	Item	p	t	Mean diff.
Outcomes	Enhanced prestige	0.139	2.668	0.083
	Enhanced academic quality	0.621	1.828	0.059
	Increased revenue	0.001*	-0.551	-0.020
	Enhanced research networks	0.002*	0.653	0.020
	Increased mobility of students	0.010*	-0.066	-0.002
	Increased mobility of faculty	0.010*	0.405	0.015
	Does not weaken cultural identity	0.992	0.500	0.020
	Increased brain gain	0.000*	-3.193	-0.110
	Increased costs	0.113	2.664	0.085

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; senior ( $n=1102$ ); junior ( $n=2796$ ).

■ **Appendix 6.** Differences in perception on internalization outcomes by doctoral education background: doctoral training from abroad and doctoral training from home.

Construct	Item	p	t	Mean diff.
Outcomes	Enhanced prestige	0.002*	4.390	0.145
	Enhanced academic quality	0.000*	7.501	0.257
	Increased revenue	0.004*	5.132	0.191
	Enhanced research networks	0.938	4.196	0.132
	Increased mobility of students	0.001*	4.039	0.130
	Increased mobility of faculty	0.000*	6.048	0.225
	Does not weaken cultural identity	0.005*	0.708	0.029
	Increased brain gain	0.000*	5.716	0.200
	Increased costs	0.959	-1.427	-0.048

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; home ( $n=1816$ ); abroad ( $n=1228$ ).

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