

**STRATEGIC INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (SIHRM)
PRACTICES AS PREDICTORS OF INTERNATIONALIZATION IN AFRICAN
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

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Publication Date: July 2026

ABSTRACT

Strategic International Human Resource Management (SIHRM) practices are increasingly recognized as critical drivers of internationalization of African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This systematic review, following PRISMA guidelines, synthesized 70 studies from an initial 1,704 records across five databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, ProQuest). Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV), Bartlett and Ghoshal's Transnational Model, and Institutional Theory, the study identifies five SIHRM practices that predict internationalization outcomes in HEIs: strategic recruitment and selection; training and development; performance management; retention and talent management; and cross-cultural development. These practices predict four internationalization outcomes: staff and student physical and virtual mobility; strategic research and innovation partnerships; internationalization of the curriculum and harmonization of quality assurance frameworks. The study concludes that SIHRM practices significantly predict internationalization, but their effectiveness depends on contextual factors examined separately. Virtual mobility offers a viable, inclusive pathway for resource-constrained African HEIs. Policy harmonization, digital infrastructure investment, increased funding, and HR reforms are urgently recommended.

Keywords: *Strategic Human Resource Management Practices, Internationalization and African Higher Education Institutions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education has become an imperative for universities worldwide, driven by globalization, knowledge-based economies, and advances in Information Technology (Knight, 2012; De Wit, 2019). For African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), internationalization is essential for achieving development agenda such as global Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) Number. (4) on Quality Education, Number. (8) On Decent Work and Economic Growth, Number. (9) on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure development number and 10 on Reduced Inequalities, and Africa Agenda 2063 Goal 2 on (2) Well Educated Citizens and Skills revolution underpinned by Science, Technology and Innovation, and Number (4) Transformed Economies and also the realization of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 2016–2025) among other regional development agenda.

Central to successful internationalization of HEIs is the strategic management of human resources which is a critical factor in achieving sustained competitiveness. Strategic International of Human Resource Management (SIHRM) practices considered include recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, talent retention, and cross-cultural development that have shown to predict positive HEIs outcomes including staff and student mobility, strategic partnerships in research and innovation projects, curriculum internationalization, and harmonization of quality assurance frameworks (Patrick, Jha & Sharma, 2023; Boxall & Purcell, 2022). However, the extent to which these practices predict internationalization in African HEIs remains underexplored.

Most studies on SIHRM have been conducted in North American, European, East Asian, and Australian contexts, with little research published on the African context, particularly within higher education (Patrick et al., 2023; Muhajan, 2024). The diversity and increasing mobility of students and staff to and from the African continent demand that HR issues be addressed strategically and therefore, there is a pressing need to understand which SIHRM practices are most relevant to African HEIs and how they predict specific internationalization outcomes. This study addresses this critical gap by systematically identifying the SIHRM practices that predict internationalization in African HEIs and analyzing how these practices enable specific Internationalization of HEIs outcomes. Drawing on the Resource-Based View (RBV), Bartlett and Ghoshal's Transnational Model, and Institutional Theory, the review provides a theoretical lens for understanding the predictive relationship between SIHRM and internationalization of HEIs in Africa. The study shall be significant to policy maker, university administrations, future scholars and HR practitioners seeking evidence-based guidance for strategic HR investments.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) increasingly recognize that internationalization of their operations is essential for achieving continental and global development goals. However, a persistent problem across the continent is that the translation of internationalization aspirations into tangible outcomes remains limited. While many African HEIs have adopted internationalization policies and strategies, the actual levels of staff and student mobility, strategic partnerships, curriculum internationalization, and quality assurance harmonization remain low compared to global peers.

The Human Resource Management (HRM) function in many African HEIs continues to be largely transactional, concerned primarily with basic recruitment, payroll, and compliance, rather than strategic alignment with internationalization goals (Perumal et al., 2019). Faculty and researchers often lack the intercultural competences, digital skills, and global research networks necessary to serve multicultural student populations or engage meaningfully in international knowledge production (Vakulenko, Świerk & CohenMiller, 2024). Performance management systems rarely reward international engagement, whereas training budgets prioritize basic skills over cross-cultural and digital competences. Talent retention strategies fail to address brain drain, brain gain and brain circulation concerns.

This disconnect between the potential of Strategic HRM practices and its current operational reality represents a critical knowledge gap. Without understanding which SIHRM practices predict internationalization outcomes of institutions of higher learning and how they do so, African HEIs cannot make informed decisions about HR investments. Policymakers may allocate resources to ineffective interventions and University administrators may implement practices that do not align with their higher education internationalization goals. Moreover, HR practitioners may lack evidence-based guidance for designing HR strategies in all their thematic areas of operations. This study addresses this knowledge gap by systematically identifying the SIHRM practices that predict internationalization of African HEIs and analyzing how these practices enable specific internationalization outcomes.

3. STUDY OBJECTIVES

3.1 Main Objective

To examine the extent to which Strategic International Human Resource Management (SIHRM) practices predict internationalization outcomes in African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

3.2 Specific Objectives

- i) To identify the SIHRM practices relevant to African HEIs.
- ii) To analyze how SIHRM practices predict internationalization outcomes in African HEIs.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Theoretical Review

Three theories guide this study which are the Resource-Based View (RBV) that is the overarching theory, Bartlett and Ghoshal's Transnational Model, and Institutional Theory.

4.1.1 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (Barney, 1991) posits that organizations achieve sustained competitive advantage through internal resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). Later refinements led to the VRIO framework, adding "organized to capture value"

(Barney and Hesterly, 2010). In higher education, resources extend beyond physical and financial assets to include human resources that comprises the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of staff and organizational resources include finances, physical and ICT infrastructure, culture, reputation, policies and systems (Wright, Dunford & Snell, 2001).

RBV provides a compelling rationale for why SIHRM practices matter. Globally competent faculty with international research networks and cross-cultural teaching skills are valuable because they enable universities to attract international students and win global research grants. Such faculty are rare across most African HEIs, making them a differentiating asset. The combination of local knowledge and global competences is difficult for non-African universities to replicate. Finally, the value of human resources is realized only when institutional systems ensures that recruitment and selection, training and development, talent retention, and performance management are organized to capture, retain and motivate the best talent. Musakuro (2022) applied RBV in a South African university context, demonstrating that talent management processes create sustainable competitive advantage when human capital was both globally competent and locally rooted.

4.1.2 Bartlett and Ghoshal's Transnational Model

Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989, 1998) developed the transnational model to describe how organizations can simultaneously achieve global efficiency, local responsiveness, and worldwide learning. The model identifies four characteristics of assets and capabilities that are distributed across locations; roles are flexible; knowledge development is shared; and integration is based on coordination rather than hierarchy.

This model is highly applicable to African HEIs, since Universities face conflicting pressures which include the need for global efficiency and becoming world-class research while achieving international rankings and maintaining local responsiveness by serving local communities, decolonizing curricula and pursuing worldwide learning by participating in global knowledge networks. Patrick, Jha and Sharma (2023) explicitly drew on this model in developing their SIHRM framework, arguing that HR practices must balance global standardization with local customization. For African HEIs, recruitment should balance international search with local language requirements; training should encompass cross-cultural competence alongside indigenous knowledge; performance management should include international publication targets while weighting local service.

4.1.3 Institutional Theory

Institutional theory explains how external pressures shape organizational behavior through three mechanisms which are coercive isomorphism that occurs when organizations adopt practices due to pressure from governments, funders, or accreditors. Mimetic isomorphism which occurs when organizations copy successful peers under uncertainty and Normative isomorphism that also occurs when professional networks spread common practices and standards (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014).

This theory justifies why African HEIs adopt SIHRM practices in the management of human capital. Coercive pressures arise from governments, international funders, and regional bodies like the African Union. Mimetic pressures operate when prominent universities successfully internationalize, leading others to imitate their practices. Normative pressures spread through professional networks such as the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA). However, decoupling and adopting practices symbolically without substantive implementation may make institutions face resource constraints or experience conflicting pressures (Oliver, 1991).

4.2 SIHRM Practices Relevant to African Higher Education Institutions

The literature consistently identifies five categories of SIHRM practices that are relevant to African HEIs pursuing internationalization.

Strategic recruitment and selection are critical for attracting globally competent faculty. Osabutey, Nyuur and Debrah (2015) argued that deliberate recruitment and selection strategies must target both local academics and diaspora professionals. The World Bank (2025) emphasized that African universities must move beyond traditional, locally focused recruitment and selection methods to attract and onboard candidates with international exposure. However, many African HEIs continue to rely on informal networks and local advertising, resulting in a narrow applicant pool (Perumal, Perumal and Govender, 2019). Musakuro (2022) found that strategic workforce planning – including competency modeling, international job postings, and diaspora outreach – significantly improve new hire quality, though bureaucratic processes often deter qualified candidates. From a Resource-Based View perspective, globally competent faculty are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate.

Training and development are essential for building international capabilities. Caligiuri et al. (2024) noted that global talent management encompasses ongoing training and development to meet evolving international demands. For African HEIs, this includes cross-cultural training, language support for non-native speakers, and professional development in international grant writing (Mofolo & Novukela, 2024). Mtebe and Raisamo (2014) added that digital skills training is imperative given the growing role of virtual mobility. Czerniewicz et al. (2022) confirmed that COVID-19 exposed severe gaps in faculty digital readiness, revealing technical and pedagogical deficits in online learning. From a Transnational Model perspective, training and development must balance global best practices with local contextual knowledge.

Performance management is a critical but underdeveloped area. Mofolo and Novukela (2024) demonstrated that integrating performance management with strategic plans improve faculty engagement and research output. However, performance metrics rarely include international collaboration or global partnerships as valued activities. Faculty who invest time in building international networks often find these activities unrecognized in promotion decisions (Perumal et al., 2019). Musakuro (2022) found that successfully internationalized universities reformed appraisal systems to weight international publications and cross-cultural teaching competences.

From an Institutional Theory perspective, performance systems are shaped by coercive pressures from accreditors and mimetic pressures from successful peers.

Talent retention and address persistent brain drain and Boxall and Purcell (2022) argued that talent retention requires clear career pathways, competitive compensation, and supportive environments. Teferra and Altbach (2004) documented that up to one-third of African-born academics with doctoral degrees work outside the continent. This weakens SIHRM effectiveness directly through loss of talent and indirectly through demoralization of remaining faculty. Osabutey et al. (2015) suggested that diaspora engagement programs and return fellowships can help mitigate this loss. From a Resource-Based View perspective, talent retention preserves valuable human capital that competitors cannot easily replicate.

Cross-cultural development is the most underdeveloped SIHRM practice. Yang and Zhong (2024) demonstrated that curriculum internationalization requires deliberate cross-cultural competence development. In African contexts, faculty must navigate differences in communication styles, learning preferences, and academic expectations (Vakulenko, Świerk and CohenMiller, 2024). Altbach and De Wit (2018) argued that without intentional cross-cultural development, internationalization risks reinforcing inequalities. Brewster and Haak-Saheem (2020) found that expatriate faculty experience high failure rates when institutions provide no cross-cultural orientation. From a Transnational Model perspective, cross-cultural development enables balance between global engagement and local responsiveness.

4.3 How SIHRM Practices Predict Internationalization Outcomes

The literature identifies four internationalization outcomes predicted by SIHRM practices.

Staff and student mobility is significantly predicted by formalized HR policies. Temirxonova and Ziyavetdinova (2026) found that institutions with dedicated mobility coordinators, pre-departure training, and repatriation support achieved higher exchange participation and lower attrition. Virtual mobility has emerged as an accessible alternative. Davies-Vollum et al. (2024) demonstrated that HR-supported virtual programs achieve intercultural outcomes comparable to physical mobility. Kuchenbauer and Aigner (2026) conceptualized virtual exchange as removing financial and visa barriers. Vakulenko, Świerk, and CohenMiller (2026) emphasized that successful mobility requires HR practices addressing language, cross-cultural training, and digital literacy. The predictive mechanism is institutional capacity: SIHRM practices create infrastructure enabling both physical and virtual mobility.

Strategic academic partnerships are predicted by dedicated HR capacity. Lokeshwari (2026) concluded that institutions with partnership coordinators, faculty release time, and reward systems achieved more sustainable transnational relationships. Özturgut (2026) found that HR practices facilitating joint appointments and industry sabbaticals predicted partnership depth. Piyasena, Mohammed, and Dhanapala (2026) showed that successful partnerships require clear HR policies

governing roles and recognition. The predictive mechanism is relationship continuity: SIHRM practices anchor partnerships in institutional structures rather than individual relationships.

Curriculum internationalization depends on faculty competence and motivation cultivated through SIHRM. Ji, Mydin, and Azman (2026) found that faculty engagement is predicted by workload allocation, promotion recognition, and training provision. Kumar and Thakur (2026) demonstrated that HR practices valuing indigenous knowledge produce more authentic internationalized curricula, supporting decolonization alongside internationalization. Riera, Gausí, and Villagrasa (2026) found that structured faculty training in cross-cultural teaching methods improved curriculum outcomes. The predictive mechanism is faculty readiness: when HR practices equip faculty with skills and motivation, curriculum change follows.

Academic quality assurance harmonization is predicted by SIHRM practices. Radkevych et al. (2026) found that effective quality assurance requires trained officers and faculty development in assessment methods. Petrenko (2025) demonstrated that harmonization depends on HR capacity to map qualifications and train faculty in competency-based assessment. Inamdar and Paul (2026) found that implementing quality assurance frameworks requires HR capacity to assess equivalencies and train admissions staff. The predictive mechanism is regulatory competency: SIHRM practices build institutional capacity to navigate regional and global quality assurance frameworks, enhancing recognition of African credentials

5. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative, systematic literature review design. Following Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021), a systematic search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ERIC, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (2000-2025).

From an initial pool of 1,704 records identified through the database search, the screening process yielded 70 studies that were subsequently included in the final synthesis. To be included, studies had to be from peer-reviewed sources published in English, focus had to be on SIHRM, HRM, or talent management within higher education settings, the studies had to address African contexts or provide findings clearly applicable to African HEIs and they had to discuss barriers, challenges, enablers, facilitators, or success factors related to internationalization. Conversely, studies were excluded if they were non-peer-reviewed sources such as opinion pieces or editorials; if they focused exclusively on non-African contexts without offering transferable insights; or if they concentrated solely on primary or secondary education rather than higher education.

Data extraction captured bibliographic information, barriers, enabling factors and key findings. Quality assessment used Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) and Mixed Methods Appraisal Tools (MMATs). Conceptual and theoretical papers were assessed using adapted criteria developed specifically for non-empirical sources. Thematic synthesis (Thomas and Harden, 2008) was performed in three stages: line-by-line coding,

descriptive themes, analytical themes. Dual independent reviewers achieved 92% inter-rater agreement. Limitations include English-language bias and potential publication bias.

6. FINDINGS

6.1 SIHRM Practices Relevant to African HEIs

The systematic review revealed five categories of SIHRM practices consistently discussed as relevant to African HEIs pursuing internationalization.

6.1.1 Strategic Recruitment and Selection

African HEIs face significant challenges in attracting globally competent faculty. Osabutey, Nyuur and Debrah (2015) found that deliberate recruitment strategies targeting both local and diaspora academics are essential for developing strategic international human resource capabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank (2025) emphasized that African universities must move beyond traditional, locally focused recruitment methods to attract candidates with international exposure and cross-cultural pedagogy expertise. However, many HEIs continue to rely on informal networks and local advertising, resulting in a narrow applicant pool that lacks the diversity and global competences required for internationalization (Perumal, Perumal & Govender, 2019).

A 2025 study by Nzimande, Ruggunan, Maramura, and Olabiyi on human resource management practices in the South African public sector examined recruitment, selection, and talent retention practices, finding that while policies exist, implementation remains inconsistent due to resource constraints and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Nzimande et al., 2025). Musakuro (2022) found that strategic workforce planning – including competency modeling, international job postings, and diaspora outreach – significantly improved new hire quality, though bureaucratic processes often deter qualified candidates. From a Resource-Based View perspective, globally competent faculty are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate, making strategic recruitment a critical predictor of internationalization success.

6.1.2 Training and Development

African HEIs underinvest in faculty development programs that support internationalization. Caligiuri, Collings, De Cieri, and Lazarova (2024) argued that global talent management encompasses not only recruitment but also the ongoing development of employees to meet evolving international demands. For African HEIs, this includes cross-cultural training for faculty who will teach increasingly diverse student bodies, language support for non-native English speakers, and professional development in grant proposal writing for international funding sources (Mofolo & Novukela, 2024).

Mtebe and Raisamo (2014) added that digital skills training is imperative given the growing role of virtual mobility and online learning in internationalized higher education. Their study of Tanzanian universities revealed that faculty lack basic digital competences for online teaching, virtual collaboration, and use of open educational resources – all essential for international

engagement. Czerniewicz et al. (2022) confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed severe gaps in faculty digital readiness in South African universities, revealing not only technical deficits but also pedagogical gaps in online and blended learning. A 2025 bibliometric analysis by Wang and Ghasemy on virtual mobility found that research on digital competencies for international collaboration has grown significantly, yet implementation in African contexts remains limited (Wang & Ghasemy, 2025). From a Transnational Model perspective, training must balance global best practices with local contextual knowledge.

6.1.3 Performance Management

Most African HEIs operate appraisal systems that do not reward international engagement. Mofolo and Novukela (2024) demonstrated that integrating performance management systems with institutional strategic plans in South African universities improved both faculty engagement and research output. However, the same authors noted that performance metrics rarely include international collaboration, cross-border mobility, or global research partnerships as valued activities.

Faculty who invest time in building international networks or teaching diverse student populations often find that these activities are not recognized in promotion and tenure decisions (Perumal et al., 2019). A 2025 study by Nzimande and colleagues found that performance management systems in the South African public sector, including higher education, suffer from poor implementation, lack of alignment with strategic goals, and inadequate training for managers conducting appraisals (Nzimande et al., 2025). Musakuro (2022) found that universities that successfully internationalized had reformed their appraisal systems to weight international publications, successful grant applications to international funders, and student feedback on cross-cultural teaching competence. Without such reforms, faculty face disincentives to engage in the very activities that drive internationalization. From an Institutional Theory perspective, performance management systems are shaped by coercive pressures from accreditors and mimetic pressures from successful peers.

6.1.4 Talent Retention

Brain drain remains a critical challenge for African HEIs. Teferra and Altbach (2004) documented that up to one-third of African-born academics with doctoral degrees work outside the continent, representing a profound loss of human capital. Boxall and Purcell (2022) argued that retention of high-performing faculty requires clear career pathways, competitive compensation, and supportive work environments.

The 2025 study by Nzimande and colleagues examined talent retention practices in South African public sector organizations, finding that a lack of career progression opportunities, inadequate compensation, and poor working conditions are primary drivers of attrition (Nzimande et al., 2025). Osabutey et al. (2015) suggested that innovative talent retention strategies, including diaspora engagement programs and return fellowships, can help mitigate this loss. The World Bank (2025) added that bilateral labor agreements between African countries and high-income nations

could include provisions for knowledge exchange, sabbatical arrangements, and shared appointments that benefit both sending and receiving institutions rather than simply facilitating one-way brain drain. From a Resource-Based View perspective, talent retention strategies preserve valuable human capital that competitors cannot easily replicate.

6.1.5 Cross-Cultural Development

Cross-cultural development is the most underdeveloped SIHRM practice in African HEIs. Yang and Zhong (2024) demonstrated that internationalization of curriculum requires deliberate development of cross-cultural competences among faculty and staff. In the African context, where student populations are becoming more culturally diverse due to intra-African mobility and international enrollment, faculty must be equipped to navigate cultural differences in communication styles, learning preferences, and academic expectations (Vakulenko, Świerk & CohenMiller, 2024).

Altbach and De Wit (2018) argued that without intentional cross-cultural development, even well-intentioned internationalization efforts risk reinforcing inequalities in knowledge production and dissemination. A study by Nzimande (2025) et al noted that cultural diversity management is rarely integrated into HR training and development programs in African public sector organizations, representing a missed opportunity for building inclusive workplaces (Nzimande et al., 2025). Brewster and Haak-Saheem (2020) found that expatriate faculty recruited and selected to African universities experience high failure rates when receiving institutions fail to provide cross-cultural orientation and ongoing support. The 2026 study by Vakulenko, Świerk, and CohenMiller emphasized that successful internationalization requires rethinking mobility and proactively addressing cross-cultural challenges systematically rather than ad hoc and reactionary approach (Vakulenko et al., 2026). From a Transnational Model perspective, cross-cultural development enables the balance between global engagement and local responsiveness.

6.2 How SIHRM Practices Predict Internationalization Outcomes

The systematic review revealed four internationalization outcomes predicted by SIHRM practices in African HEIs.

6.2.1 Staff and Student Mobility (Physical and Virtual)

SIHRM practices significantly predict both physical and virtual mobility outcomes. Temirxonova and Ziyavetdinova (2026) found that institutions with formalized HR policies dedicated to mobility coordinators, pre-departure training programs, and repatriation support systems achieve higher exchange participation rates and lower attrition among participating students and staff. The study emphasized that systematic HR support, rather than ad hoc arrangements is the key predictor of students and staff mobility success.

Virtual mobility has emerged as an accessible alternative to physical exchange, particularly for resource-constrained African HEIs. Davies-Vollum, Ribchester, Danso-Wiredu, and Raha (2024) demonstrated that virtual programs supported by HR policies which include staff training in virtual

facilitation, workload allocation for international collaboration, and recognition of virtual teaching in performance evaluation achieve intercultural outcomes comparable to physical mobility programs. Kuchenbauer and Aigner (2026) conceptualized virtual exchange as "study abroad without the baggage," removing financial and visa barriers that have historically excluded many African students and faculty from international experiences. A 2025 bibliometric analysis by Wang and Ghasemy confirmed that virtual mobility research has grown substantially, with studies consistently showing that institutional support structures, including HR policies, are critical success factors (Wang & Ghasemy, 2025).

Vakulenko, Świerk, and CohenMiller (2026) emphasized that successful faculty and student's mobility, whether physical or virtual, requires HR practices that addresses three interrelated areas: language barriers (through language support and training), cross-cultural training (pre-departure and ongoing), and digital literacy (for virtual engagement). The predictive mechanism is institutional capacity: SIHRM practices create the infrastructure, policies, and trained personnel that enable both physical and virtual mobility to function effectively.

6.2.2 Strategic Academic Partnerships and Collaboration in Research and Innovation

SIHRM practices predict the formation, sustainability, and productivity of strategic academic partnerships and collaboration. Lokeshwari (2026) conducted a systematic review of transnational partnerships and concluded that institutions with dedicated coordination office on linkages, partnership and collaboration manned by competent staff, faculty release time for collaborative activities, and reward systems recognizing partnership-building achieve more sustainable transnational relationships. The review found that HR capacity was the strongest predictor of partnership and collaboration success, outweighing even funding levels in some studies.

Özturgut (2026) examined university-industry partnerships and found out that HR practices facilitating joint appointments between institutions, industry sabbaticals for faculty to participate in research and joint innovation projects significantly predicted international partnership depth and longevity. The study emphasized that HR structures that do not formally recognize and reward partnership and collaborative research and innovation activities remain dependent on individual relationships and are vulnerable to sustainability challenges. Nzimande et al., (2025) study revealed that effective partnership and collaboration in HEIs requires clear HR policies governing roles, responsibilities, intellectual property, and recognition of contributions across partner and collaborating institutions.

The predictive mechanism is relationship continuity is SIHRM practices anchored on partnerships and collaboration in institutional structures rather than individual relationships. When partnerships and collaborations are institutionalized through formal HR policies including memoranda of understanding that specify HR provisions, joint appointment agreements, and cross-institutional performance recognition, they are more likely to survive leadership changes, budget cuts, and other disruptions.

6.2.3 Curriculum Internationalization

Curriculum internationalization depends on faculty competence and motivation, which are cultivated through SIHRM practices. Ji, Mydin, and Azman (2026) conducted a mixed-methods study of faculty engagement in curriculum internationalization and found that HR practices including workload allocation (recognizing the time required for curriculum redesign), recognition of internationalization activities in promotion decisions, and provision of training and resources for internationalizing course content were significant predictors of faculty engagement.

Kumar and Thakur (2026) demonstrated that SIHRM practices valuing indigenous knowledge including recruitment and selection of indigenous faculty, culturally inclusive training and development programs, and recognition of indigenous scholarship in performance evaluation produce more authentic internationalized curricula that do not simply replicate Western models. This finding is particularly significant for African decolonization agendas, as it suggests that internationalization and decolonization can be pursued simultaneously rather than as competing priorities. Riera, Gausí, and Villagrasa (2026) found that structured faculty training programs focusing on international case studies, cross-cultural teaching methods, and inclusive pedagogies significantly improved curriculum internationalization outcomes, with effects lasting beyond the training period.

The predictive mechanism is faculty readiness: when HR practices equip faculty with the skills, motivation, time, and resources to internationalize their teaching, curriculum change follows. Without these HR supports, even well-intentioned faculty cannot effectively internationalize their courses.

6.2.4 Academic Quality Assurance

SIHRM practices predict institutional capacity for quality assurance harmonization. Radkevych, Titova, Onyshchenko, Kolyshko, Kravets, Luzan, and Lapa (2026) conducted a comprehensive study of quality assurance in vocational and professional higher education and found that effective quality assurance for internationalized programs requires trained quality assurance officers, faculty development in international assessment methods, and systematic evaluation protocols that accommodate diverse educational backgrounds and cultural contexts.

Petrenko (2025) examined mechanisms for comparing and harmonizing qualifications in the context of European integration and demonstrated that harmonization success depends on HR capacity to map qualifications from different systems, align learning outcomes across institutions and countries, and train faculty in competency-based assessment that is comparable across borders. Inamdar and Paul (2026) found that implementing international quality assured frameworks – such as UNESCO's Global Convention – requires dedicated HR capacity to understand diverse educational systems, assess equivalencies fairly and consistently, and train admissions and registration staff in new procedures and criteria.

The predictive mechanism is regulatory competency where SIHRM practices build institutional capacity to navigate complex regional and global quality assurance frameworks, which in turn enhances the recognition and portability of African credentials. Institutions with stronger HR capacity in this area are better positioned to participate in international quality assurance conferences, attract international students, and facilitate graduate mobility.

7. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Summary

This study examined the extent to which SIHRM practices predict internationalization outcomes in African HEIs. A systematic review of 70 studies, guided by RBV, the Transnational Model, and Institutional Theory, identified five SIHRM practices (strategic recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, talent retention, cross-cultural development) that predict four internationalization outcomes (staff and students' mobility, strategic partnerships and collaboration in research and innovations, curriculum internationalization and quality assurance harmonization).

7.2 Conclusions

Based on the synthesis of findings, this study draws five conclusions.

First, SIHRM practices are significant predictors of internationalization in African HEIs. Institutions investing in strategic recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, talent retention, and cross-cultural development achieve higher levels of mobility, sustainable partnerships and collaboration, internationalized curricula, and academic quality assurance harmonization.

Second, the underdevelopment of SIHRM practices in most African HEIs represents a critical gap between aspiration and capability. Performance management systems rarely reward international engagement. Training and development budgets prioritize basic skills over cross-cultural competences. Talent retention strategies fail to address brain drain, brain circulation and brain gain.

Third, virtual mobility offers a viable, inclusive pathway for resource-constrained African HEIs. Supported by HR policies including digital facilitation training and development as well as recognition of virtual teaching and virtual exchange can achieve intercultural outcomes comparable to physical mobility at lower cost.

Fourth, integrating indigenous and cross-cultural knowledge into curriculum internationalization is essential. HR practices that value cherished indigenous knowledge and integrate it well with best cross-cultural knowledge produces more authentic internationalized curricula supporting decolonization alongside internationalization.

Fifth, the predictive power of SIHRM practices depends on institutional capacity to implement them. Formal adoption of HR practices does not guarantee effective implementation without dedicated resources, trained and developed personnel, and leadership commitment.

7.3 Recommendations

The study proposes the need to accelerate policy harmonization under Agenda 2063 and CESA; establish bilateral labor agreements with knowledge exchange provisions;

The government to increase public funding for higher education to 1% of GDP and increase investment in digital infrastructure.

HEIs to conduct diagnostic assessments of current SIHRM capacity; establish international recruitment and selection pipelines including diaspora databases; invest in faculty development for cross-cultural communication and digital pedagogy; reform performance management to weight international activities; develop talent retention strategies beyond salary; embed cross-cultural development throughout the institution; prioritize virtual exchange programs where resources are constrained.

Empirically test the predictive model using quantitative methods; conduct comparative case studies of successfully and unsuccessfully internationalized HEIs; extend geographical scope to Francophone, Lusophone, and North African HEIs; conduct longitudinal studies to establish causality; investigate gender dimensions of SIHRM and internationalization of HEIs.

7.4 Contributions

This study integrates RBV, the Transnational Model, and Institutional Theory into a coherent framework tailored to African Higher Education Institutions. It synthesizes 70 studies into a comprehensive evidence base, identifies five SIHRM practices and four internationalization outcomes, and offers actionable recommendations. The emphasis on virtual mobility as an accessible pathway for resource-constrained institutions provides practical strategic guidance.

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