



Internationalization of Algerian Higher Education: Efforts and Challenges

Sid Ali Selama^{1*}

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Abstract: Objective: This paper explores the ongoing efforts and persistent challenges associated with the process of internationalizing the Algerian higher education, through an examination of the policies and initiatives adopted by the state and higher education institutions. **Methodology:** Drawing on established models of internationalization (Knight, 2004; de Wit, 2001; Hudzik, 2011), a qualitative analysis of official documents, texts, as well as digital platforms was conducted. **Key Findings:** The analysis revealed that five prominent initiatives stand out: the implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction, mobility, international students' recruitment, international collaboration, and digitalization. These initiatives have been critically examined in relation to broader global trends. For example, while EMI is being gradually introduced in technical disciplines, the recruitment of international students remains limited due to systemic constraints. **Conclusions:** These efforts, though significant, remain fragmented and lack the strategic integration necessary for meaningful internationalization. **Recommendations:** The study recommends the development of a comprehensive national policy, the strengthening of institutional capacities, and the alignment of language policies with international engagement goals.

Keywords: challenges, higher education, internationalization, globalization, strategies

تدويل التعليم العالي في الجزائر: الجهود والتحديات

سيد علي سلامة^{1*}

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المخلص: الهدف: تتناول هذه الدراسة الجهود المبذولة والتحديات المستمرة المرتبطة بعملية تدويل التعليم العالي في الجزائر، من خلال استعراض السياسات والمبادرات التي تبنتها الدولة ومؤسسات التعليم العالي. **المنهجية:** استنادًا إلى نماذج في مجال التدويل (Knight, 2004; de Wit, 2001; Hudzik, 2011)، أُجري تحليل نوعي للوثائق الرسمية والنصوص والمنصات الرقمية ذات الصلة. **النتائج:** كشف التحليل عن خمس مبادرات بارزة، هي: اعتماد اللغة الإنجليزية وسيلة للتدريس، وتفعيل برامج التنقل الأكاديمي، واستقطاب الطلبة الدوليين، وتعزيز التعاون الدولي، والرقمنة. وقد فُحصت هذه الجهود في ضوء الاتجاهات العالمية الأوسع؛ فعلى سبيل المثال، يُدرّس باللغة الإنجليزية تدريجيًا في التخصصات التقنية، في حين يظل استقطاب الطلبة الدوليين محدودًا بسبب قيود هيكلية. **أهم النتائج:** تخلص الدراسة إلى أن هذه الجهود، على أهميتها، ما تزال مجزأة وتفتقر إلى التكامل الاستراتيجي اللازم لتحقيق تدويل فعال. **التوصيات:** توصي الدراسة بضرورة وضع سياسة وطنية شاملة، وتعزيز القدرات المؤسسية، ومواءمة السياسات اللغوية مع أهداف الانفتاح والتفاعل الدولي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحديات، التعليم العالي، التدويل، العولمة، الاستراتيجيات

¹Department of Preparatory Training, National Higher School of Advanced Technologies, Algiers, Algeria.

* Corresponding author: sidali.selama@ensta.edu.dz,
orcid: [0000-0002-9528-9841](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9528-9841)

¹قسم التكوين التحضيرية، المدرسة الوطنية العليا للتكنولوجيات المتقدمة، الجزائر، الجزائر.

* الباحث المراسل: sidali.selama@ensta.edu.dz

Introduction

In recent years, the internationalization of higher education (IoHE) has been a major priority for stakeholders in Algeria. A significant step towards internationalizing the Algerian tertiary education system was the adoption of the LMD (Licence–Master–Doctorate) system in 2004 which aligned Algeria’s tertiary education structure with international standards inspired by the Bologna Process, facilitating comparability of degrees, academic mobility, and potential mutual recognition of qualifications (World Education News & Reviews, 2006).

The LMD system introduced a new teaching and learning philosophy (Guendouzi & Ameziane, 2011). It represents the first structural step toward the global integration of Algerian higher education (HE), laying the groundwork for more recent internationalization initiatives.

In 2025 an official statement was issued by the minister at the launch of a digital platform designed to support international students seeking to study in Algeria (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2025). According to the minister, the initiative aligns with Presidential Decree No. 25-83 (2025), and reflects the government’s 2024–2029 strategy to modernize Algerian university and strengthen international academic collaboration. This move marks a significant step toward positioning Algerian universities within a broader global framework and underscores the importance of quality, openness, and inclusivity in the country’s higher education agenda.

IoHE as it can be understood from the minister’s statement, serves not only to raise institutional visibility, but also to enhance the quality of learning and graduate preparedness.

In a globalized economy, engagement with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds is essential, and international experience plays a central role in equipping students to navigate such complexity. The true value of internationalization lies in its capacity to promote knowledge acquisition and skill development, particularly in fostering intercultural competence. It also nurtures new ways of thinking by encouraging students to approach global issues from multiple perspectives, transcending national borders. This challenge is both cognitive, involving the development of an understanding of complexity and interdependence (Fanghanel & Cousin, 2012), and identity-based, as students begin to see themselves as global citizens.

As of 2025, the country’s HE landscape comprises 111 public institutions including 53 universities, 13 university centers, and 20 national higher schools. In addition, a growing number of private institutions have recently been authorized, though they remain limited in scale compared to the public sector. This expansion reflects the government’s ongoing efforts to modernize and internationalize the sector while meeting the increasing domestic demand for higher education.

These efforts have already begun to yield tangible results in the global recognition of Algerian higher education institutions. For instance, Ferhat Abbas Sétif University-1 ranked first nationally in the URAP 2024–2025 ranking (Ferhat Abbas Sétif University 1, 2025), and Algeria increased its representation in the *Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings* from 13 to 23 universities in 2024¹ (2025).

¹ https://www.dgrsdt.dz/en/blog/world-university-rankings_2024/66?utm

Against this backdrop, the present paper examines five key dimensions of Algeria's HE internationalization: the adoption of EMI, academic mobility, international student recruitment, institutional collaboration, and digitalization. It also identifies persistent challenges that may hinder the realization of these goals.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the main strategies of internationalization in Algerian HE?
- How are these strategies implemented and perceived in Algerian universities?
- What challenges and opportunities do Algerian HE institutions face in their internationalization efforts?
- To what extent do these practices align with internationalization models?

Literature Review

IoHE is a multifaceted concept that has evolved significantly over the past three decades. It has received dedicated scholarly attention and has therefore been defined by many researchers. To mention some, Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 290) regard it as “activities range from traditional study-abroad programs, allowing students to learn about other cultures, to providing access to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demand,” suggesting that internationalization is not only about sending students to be educated abroad, it also includes bringing education to students in countries where domestic capacity is lacking.

Knight (2003, p. 2) offers a process-oriented definition, stating that “Internationalization, at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education”. Through such a conceptualization, Knight broadens the scope of higher education internationalization beyond individual programs or student mobility and emphasizes that it is a deliberate and systemic process embedded across multiple levels of governance and institutional missions.

By regarding it as “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.” De Wit, et al. (2015, p. 29) gave another conceptualization which highlights its broader purposes: institutional improvement and societal progress.

Recent critical scholarship has proposed broader definitions that address postcolonial realities. That is, the way colonial language legacies, identity, local agency, and power asymmetries shape internationalization beyond just mobility or rankings (Bamberger & Morris, 2024). These perspectives may help us understand Algeria's challenges by acknowledging not only economic or academic rationales, but also historical, socio-linguistic, and identity-based factors.

These definitions lead the discussion toward the ongoing debate around whether internationalization is primarily driven by academic values; such as improving research quality, or by economic imperatives, including revenue generation through international student recruitment, global rankings, and competitive positioning in the knowledge economy. Other factors – such as sociocultural and political - have also been highlighted in literature.

Method

Study Design: This study adopts a qualitative research design with elements of descriptive analysis. This approach was chosen because internationalization is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be fully captured through numbers alone. Instead, qualitative methods allow for an in-depth understanding of institutional practices, policy orientations, and stakeholders' perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Sources of data: Data was collected from the following sources:

- Policy documents and reports: National HE strategies, MHESR publications, and international cooperation agreements available on official websites. These documents provide insight into the

government's vision and priorities for internationalization.

- Institutional data: University websites and project descriptions, which illustrate concrete initiatives and outcomes.
- Secondary literature: Articles, books, and reports on IoHE in Algeria, the MENA region, and the global context. These help situate Algeria's case within broader comparative perspectives.

Data Collection Tool: Documentary analysis was the primary tool of data collection. Official documents were systematically reviewed to identify references to internationalization drivers (e.g., mobility, EMI), strategies (e.g., partnerships, digital platforms), and challenges (e.g., language barriers, funding, uneven participation). To supplement this, relevant literature was gathered from academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. Additional institutional documents were accessed directly from Algerian university portals and the MHESR website.

Validity and Reliability of the Tool: Document analysis was chosen for three main reasons. First, much of the knowledge about internationalization in Algeria is embedded in policy frameworks, ministerial strategies, and institutional agreements rather than in direct survey or interview data. Analyzing these documents therefore provides the most reliable picture of official efforts and orientations. Second, documentary analysis is particularly suited for emerging research areas where primary data is still limited or hard to access (Bowen, 2009). Third, qualitative analysis allows the researcher to interpret meanings, intentions, and trends, linking them to broader international debates.

Thematic Analysis: The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, documents were carefully read to identify recurring themes which were then categorized under five broad dimensions:

EMI, mobility, International student recruitment, international collaboration, and digitalization. Within each dimension, challenges and opportunities were noted. Finally, Algeria's efforts were compared with internationalization models described in the literature (De Wit, 2020; Hudzik, 2011; Knight, 2004).

To conduct the thematic analysis, the researcher followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model. The process began with familiarization through repeated reading of the documents, followed by initial coding that focused on identifying patterns related to internationalization strategies. Codes were then grouped into broader themes that reflected strategic orientations, challenges, and emerging trends within Algerian HE.

To ensure reliability, coding decisions were guided by both theoretical frameworks and inductive interpretation of the data. Themes were cross-checked across different document types to confirm consistency and representativeness. In addition, a peer debriefing process, as recommended by Nowell (2017), was conducted with two colleagues familiar with internationalization research to validate theme boundaries and interpretations. This combination of theoretical grounding and peer validation enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings (Bowen, 2009).

Findings

The analysis reveals a set of strategies that stakeholders are adopting. These strategies reflect a combination of national priorities, resource constraints, and global trends. They encompass efforts such as fostering international collaboration through bilateral and multilateral agreements, attracting international students, implementing EMI, expanding digital infrastructures, and

supporting the mobility of teachers, researchers, and students.

Implementing English Medium of Instruction

Algeria's linguistic landscape is multilingual, shaped by its colonial history and post-independence language policies. Arabic remains the official language, while Tamazight was recognized as a national language in 2002. French continues to occupy a strong position in higher education. Within this complex linguistic ecology, the introduction of EMI represents both an opportunity and a challenge. It reflects the government's ambition to align with global academic trends, while simultaneously navigating tensions between linguistic nationalism and international openness. The transition thus involves not only pedagogical adjustments but also a symbolic reconfiguration of language hierarchies in Algerian HE.

EMI has emerged as a significant catalyst in IoHE (Macaro, 2018). It is increasingly adopted by universities seeking to align with global academic standards and enhance their international visibility. Dearden (2014) believes that the rise of EMI reflects a shift towards the globalization of knowledge production and dissemination, where English functions as the lingua franca of academia. As such, the adoption of EMI is often linked with broader national strategies to improve competitiveness in the global knowledge economy.

Scholars have emphasized the role of EMI in advancing institutional prestige and fostering international collaboration. According to Wächter and Maiworm (2014), European universities which offer degree programs in English have experienced a significant increase in international student enrollments. De Wit et al. (2015) further emphasize that EMI is more than a linguistic shift; it is a strategic move that aligns HE institutions with the norms and expectations of international academic environments.

EMI plays a transformative role in internal academic culture. It requires curriculum

reform, pedagogical innovation, and faculty development, all of which are essential for sustainable internationalization (Valcke & Wilkinson, 2017). In implementing EMI, universities often invest in language training and intercultural communication, thereby creating a more globally-oriented academic environment for both students and staff.

However, scholars caution that EMI must be implemented thoughtfully, as its success depends on institutional readiness, faculty proficiency, and student support mechanisms (Macaro, 2018). HE authorities in Algeria have taken proactive steps to support teachers in adapting to this shift. Various forms of teacher training have been offered to equip instructors with the linguistic and pedagogical skills. One notable initiative is the yearly academic mobility program offered by MHESR, which allows teachers to undertake short-term visits abroad. In recent years, the ministry has taken a decision² giving priority to applicants who plan to visit universities in English-speaking countries, with the aim of improving their English proficiency.

Other training opportunities have been delivered through multiple modes, including face-to-face workshops, intensive language courses, and online programs aimed at enhancing both English proficiency and content delivery strategies. In some cases, teachers have even pursued a full Bachelor's degree in English. These initiatives reflect an activity-based approach to internationalization, aligning with Knight's (2004) framework, where internationalization occurs through specific academic initiatives rather than systemic reform.

Despite this encouragement, a major challenge lies in the unequal distribution support mechanisms across Algerian HE institutions. While some universities have established intensive English language teaching centers or language resource units, others often lack such infrastructure. For instance, teachers practicing in institutions of

² <https://www.univ-alger3.dz/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/345-1.pdf>

Oran benefit from the presence of the American Corner (Douar, 2024), which offers resources, cultural exchange opportunities, and professional development activities. The same goes for Algiers where similar bodies are offering several English courses. However, such facilities are absent in many other regions, resulting in disparities in teachers' access to high-quality language training.

In addition, many studies reported persisting challenge regarding EMI implementation: teachers and students opposition. While EMI implementation is intended to enhance internationalization and global competitiveness, it has not always been positively received at the institutional level.

Both teachers and students often feel overwhelmed by the sudden shift to English, particularly in scientific and technical disciplines where content is already cognitively demanding. Ghouali and Bouabdallah (2024) highlighted a significant mismatch between policy expectations and classroom realities, emphasizing that both students and instructors frequently struggle with English proficiency and content delivery. These findings point to the need for a more gradual, inclusive, and well-supported EMI implementation strategy that addresses the concerns of both faculty and learners.

Mobility

Mobility is recognized as one of the most significant drivers of IoHE. By studying abroad students gain exposure to new cultural, social, and academic environments, which enhances their intercultural competence, language skills, and global employability (De Wit & Altbach, 2022). At the same time, the host institutions benefit from the diversity of perspectives that international students bring, while sending institutions gain graduates equipped with global outlooks. Mobility at the student level thus operates as a catalyst for international engagement, improving both the academic and social dimensions of higher education.

Mobility of teachers and researchers facilitates the transfer of expertise,

pedagogical innovations, and research practices across borders (Knight, 2015). Academic staff mobility allows educators to participate in exchange programs, sabbaticals, and joint teaching assignments, where they are exposed to different educational systems and can adopt best practices upon their return. Researcher mobility, often fostered through international fellowships and collaborative projects, helps build networks that result in joint publications, grant applications, and long-term academic partnerships. In this way, faculty mobility contributes to institutional capacity-building while reinforcing the global integration of HE systems.

In Algeria, students', teachers', and researchers' mobility has been promoted as part of a broader IoHE strategy. At the student level, mobility programs are encouraged through bilateral agreements with partner countries, particularly in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, allowing Algerian students to pursue partial or full degrees abroad. For teachers and researchers, MHESR has emphasized professional development schemes, including scholarships and fellowships abroad, to help faculty acquire updated pedagogical practices and research expertise (Dib et al., 2019).

Beyond scholarships, Algeria has also invested in research mobility to encourage joint projects with foreign universities and research centers. Academic staff is provided opportunities to attend international conferences, workshops, and training sessions aimed at building scientific and pedagogical capacity. Such initiatives help integrate Algerian researchers into global knowledge networks. These measures are not only meant to raise the visibility of Algerian universities on the global stage but also to ensure that returning scholars contribute to strengthening institutional practices and enriching academic programs within Algeria. Student and teacher mobility initiatives also reflect activity-oriented internationalization, as they primarily depend on bilateral agreements and scholarship programs rather than being

embedded within a national strategy. This aligns with de Wit's (2001) early characterization of internationalization in developing contexts, where mobility serves as the most visible yet fragmented element of international engagement.

Despite these efforts, fostering mobility in Algeria encounters multiple constraints. Limited financial resources remain a major constraint, as scholarships and travel grants often do not cover the high costs associated with international mobility, particularly in Europe and North America. Linguistic barriers (the dominance of French in Algerian higher education versus the global dominance of English) seem to further restrict the ability of students and faculty to fully engage in international exchanges. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles, visa restrictions, and insufficient institutional support mechanisms can make it difficult for both outgoing and incoming mobility participants. These structural constraints limit Algeria's capacity to scale up mobility programs and reduce the full benefits that international exchange could bring to its higher education system.

International collaboration

Related literature indicates that international collaboration stands as a cornerstone of IoHE. It encompasses partnerships between institutions, joint research projects, academic exchange programs, and co-developed curricula, all of which contribute to enhancing the global visibility and academic quality of universities. According to Knight (2004), internationalization is not solely about student mobility but also about integrating an international dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of institutions. In this context, collaboration with foreign universities and organizations becomes essential to developing institutional capacity, promoting knowledge exchange, and benchmarking educational practices.

One important element of collaboration is the international partnership which plays a pivotal role in advancing research and innovation among universities. Collaborative

research initiatives allow institutions to pool resources, share expertise, and tackle complex global challenges that may be beyond the scope of a single institution. Marginson and van der Wende (2007) argue that such collaboration is vital in the context of knowledge-based economies, where scientific advancement increasingly depends on transnational networks. Furthermore, international research projects often attract greater funding opportunities and improve publication output, thereby raising the international profile of participating institutions (Teichler, 2009). For universities in developing countries, such partnerships also serve as a mechanism for research capacity building and technology transfer.

In addition to research, international collaboration supports academic capacity building and staff development. Faculty mobility schemes, such as academic exchanges and visiting scholar programs, enable teachers and researchers to gain exposure to diverse pedagogical practices and disciplinary developments. According to de Wit et al. (2015), international collaboration is expected to help faculty develop intercultural competence, improve language skills, and adapt innovative teaching methodologies, all of which are crucial in increasingly global classrooms.

The Algerian MHESR maintains formal cooperative frameworks with five major international unions: the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), the Arab League, and the Union for the Mediterranean. In addition, it has developed strategic partnerships with several specialized international organizations, including the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme.³ Moreover, through presidential decrees, the MHESR has signed bilateral cooperation agreements with various

³ <https://www.mesrs.dz/index.php/fr/programmes-de-cooperation-universitaire-et-de-recherche>

countries such as Tunisia, Iran, the United States, and India.⁴

Institutional practices demonstrate alignment with the ministry national policy regarding international cooperation. Several universities have actively participated in international cooperation programs. For example, University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene has long fostered international cooperation across Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. It actively collaborates with institutions such as CNRS and INSERM under the CMEP-TASSILI program⁵. The University of Frères Mentouri Constantine is a member of major international university networks (AUF, UNIMED, TETHYS) and participates in numerous European programs such as Erasmus+, Tempus, and Erasmus-Mundus, fostering academic mobility⁶.

This implies that a growing interest and commitment to international collaboration is demonstrated at both levels ministerial and institutional. It also implies that the internationalization of Algerian HE process is centralized. It is steered primarily by MHESR, which maintains formal cooperation with major international unions. At the institutional level, universities have actively engaged in various bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks. These initiatives reflect a broader pattern observed across developing countries where institutions leverage internationalization to improve institutional quality, foster intercultural exchange, and build research capacity (Hénard et al., 2012; Teferra & Knight, 2008). These efforts suggest initial steps toward comprehensive internationalization, as they involve both teaching and research functions. However, the absence of systematic coordination

mechanisms indicates a gap between policy ambition and practical integration (Hudzik, 2011), which hinders the full realization of such partnerships. For instance, Gherzouli (2025) identified limitations regarding international relations offices, coordination mechanisms, and the effectiveness of prospective partnerships. Gherzouli analyzed the quality assurance reform and revealed a broader governance issue. She emphasizes that without clear institutional frameworks and monitoring systems, international programs often fail to materialize at the local level.

Bensalem and Gaidi (2020) pointed out another limitation relates to financial dependence on state funding. Public HE in Algeria relies heavily on centralized government funding—over 98% according to Bensalem and Gaidi (2020). This financial model limits flexibility in scaling or sustaining international cooperation programs, which often require matching funds, travel grants, and infrastructure investment. Such challenges call for a coherent and strategic response from stakeholders as they constrain universities' ability to effectively participate in and benefit from international collaborations (Ramaswamy et al., 2021).

International Students Recruitment

Attracting international students is widely regarded as a key driver and indicator of IoHE. According to Knight (2004), the presence of international students on campus contributes significantly to the academic, cultural, and economic dimensions of internationalization. International students promote cross-cultural understanding, bring global perspectives into the classroom, and enhance the diversity of campus life, all of which support institutions' broader goals of developing globally competent graduates. Their mobility across borders is also a visible manifestation of the international connectivity of universities and their openness to global engagement.

Moreover, international student recruitment has become strategically embedded in many universities' internationalization policies. De

⁴ <https://www.mesrs.dz/index.php/fr/textes-juridiques/chapitre1/>

⁵ <https://www.usthb.dz/cooperation/international-cooperation>

⁶ <https://www.umc.edu.dz/index.php/fr/2013-01-21-15-27-57/vices-rectorats/relations-externes/98-cooperation>

Wit et al.(2015) argue that student mobility, particularly inbound mobility, represents not just a source of income for host institutions, but also a mechanism for building academic diplomacy, fostering global networks, and strengthening institutional visibility worldwide. Countries with structured policies for hosting international students tend to have stronger international reputations. They attract higher numbers of mobile students and reinforce their position in the global knowledge economy.

In addition, the ability to attract international students reflects the academic quality and global competitiveness of a university. Institutions that successfully appeal to international audiences often have internationally oriented curricula, multilingual programs, active exchange agreements, and robust support systems. These elements, in turn, feed into the institution's international rankings and global partnerships. As Marginson (2006) notes, "the global student market both reflects and reshapes the hierarchy of higher education institutions worldwide." Therefore, the flow of international students is both a product and a catalyst of deeper institutional internationalization.

Although Algeria continues to host hundreds of international students, primarily from Sub-Saharan African countries under bilateral cooperation agreements, its higher education system remains far from meeting global standards in terms of foreign student ratios. Most of these students come on government scholarships, but their mobility is tightly controlled to prevent long-term immigration (Idris, 2024). In 2012, only 0.7% of the Algerian student population consisted of international students, far below the 2% of Algerian students studying abroad in France (Labdelaoui, 2019).

In response, the MHESR has introduced initiatives to attract more international students. As of late 2023, Algeria hosts over 7,800 international students from 62 countries. These students are drawn by Algeria's public HE system, free of tuition fees, with programs

offered in French, Arabic, and increasingly English. The government's efforts align with recommendations from scholars such as de Wit, Minaeva, and Wang (2022), who argue that enhanced student services, multilingual program offerings, and streamlined branding strategies are crucial for non-Anglophone countries to improve their global competitiveness in international education.

One of these initiatives, according to Sawahel (2023), is the "Study in Algeria" label which was launched in 2022 by MHESR. It is awarded annually to universities that excel in reception services, English-language support, accommodation, and administrative efficiency. Nearly 75% of institutions and their student residences obtained the label in its inaugural year, signaling institutional commitment to global engagement and student-centered reforms. Another initiative is *Study in Algeria* platform launched by the ministry in 2023. The platform serves as a centralized portal designed to promote Algerian universities abroad and provide international students with essential information regarding study programs, admission procedures, visa requirements, and student life in Algeria (MHESR). Efforts to attract international students through the *Study in Algeria* platform correspond to Knight's (2004) notion of internationalization "at home" and "abroad." However, without robust language and support policies, such recruitment remains an activity rather than an integrated dimension of institutional internationalization.

Digitalization

Digitalization has emerged as a transformative force in HE, redefining how institutions engage with global audiences and expanding the scope of internationalization. Through digital platforms, universities are now able to offer virtual mobility opportunities, cross-border academic collaboration, and online learning experiences that transcend geographical limitations. According to de Wit and Altbach (2022), digitalization enables a shift from traditional forms of physical mobility to more inclusive and sustainable international engagement,

particularly for students and institutions in the Global South.

Moreover, the use of ICTs facilitates the integration of international dimensions into curricula through virtual exchange programs and collaborative online international learning (COIL) initiatives. Such practices promote global citizenship, intercultural competence, and multilingualism. Knight (2015) points out, these digitally-mediated interactions represent a strategic approach to internationalization at home, ensuring that all students benefit from international experiences.

In addition to learning, digitalization supports the administrative and strategic dimensions of internationalization. Universities utilize digital tools for international student recruitment, partnership management, virtual conferences, and international research collaboration. Digital databases, AI-driven analytics, and online academic networking platforms have made it easier to identify potential partners, share resources, and track global engagement metrics. In this sense, Chang and Gomes (2022) argue that digitalization is redefining higher education by shifting many activities from physical to digital campuses.

Algeria has elevated digitalization to a national strategic priority for HE, embedding it within the Master Plan for Digital Transformation (Schéma Directeur du Numérique de l'Enseignement Supérieur) (MHESR). This initiative outlines key components such as digital infrastructure modernization, administrative e-services, and capacity-building for higher education staff and leadership. By positioning digital tools as foundational to improving international visibility and communication, the plan explicitly supports Algeria's goals for virtual collaboration, academic mobility, and global engagement within universities.

The COVID-19 pandemic also accelerated digital uptake across Algerian universities, prompting investments in e-learning infrastructure, virtual university pilots, and capacity-building projects (both national and EU-funded). Evaluations of these initiatives (including Erasmus-CBHE projects focused on digital capacities such as DIGITAQ) show that while digital tools expanded opportunities

for remote teaching, virtual exchange and institutional cooperation, persistent challenges remain, which constrain the full potential of digital internationalization unless addressed systematically.

On March 28, 2023, the ministry unveiled six additional digital platforms dedicated to human resources management, university accommodations, high school student guidance, initial PhD training, higher education investments, and digital university libraries. Minister Kamel Baddari emphasized that these platforms facilitate students' educational journeys from guidance to professional integration. They foster pedagogical innovation and governance modernization. This expansion illustrates Algeria's concrete commitment to digital transformation in higher education as part of a broader presidential scheme. (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2025)

The growing emphasis on digitalization can be interpreted as a bridge between activity-based and comprehensive internationalization. Digitalization supports the structural integration of global engagement across institutions, aligning with Hudzik's (2011) view that technology is a key driver of comprehensive internationalization when strategically embedded

While Algerian stakeholders have made notable progress in digital transformation, several challenges remain. These include ensuring the interoperability of the platforms now in operation, training staff and students to use them effectively, and maintaining robust cybersecurity measures. Minister Kamel Baddari has emphasized that these platforms are central to pedagogical innovation and governance modernization, yet their success will depend on overcoming technical, logistical, and human-capacity constraints. (Djefafla, 2024)

Implications

Algerian universities are introducing English in technical disciplines to enhance students' access to global knowledge and improve employability; however, EMI introduces language-related cognitive load that can depress comprehension, participation, and assessment performance unless sustained

language and academic-literacy scaffolding is provided (Dearden, 2014; Macaro, 2018). For teachers, EMI frequently entails redesigning syllabi, slides, and assessment in English, rethinking interactional practices, and managing classroom discourse with multilingual cohorts, all of which results in raising workload and requiring professional development in both language and pedagogy (Galloway et al., 2020; Macaro, 2018). There are also issues of linguistic justice and teacher identity: mandates to teach in English can be perceived as privileging English over Arabic/French scientific repertoires, affecting teacher confidence (Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Galloway et al., 2020).

Without sufficient support, students who do not master English risk learning the subject and the language simultaneously, and this can widen achievement gaps (Dafouz & Smit, 2020; Macaro, 2018). Recent empirical research highlights both promise and challenge in EMI implementations in other contexts similar to Algeria. For instance, in Turkish universities, Kamaşak & Sahan (2024) found that students' academic success in EMI courses is significantly associated with their perceived language proficiency and the extent to which they face language-related challenges, suggesting that language readiness is a major bottleneck. Similarly, Hasan, Yesmin & Hossain (2024) in Bangladesh observed that EMI improves students' speaking proficiency and academic performance in English-major departments more than non-English-major ones, but the gains are uneven and reliant on strong institutional support.

Research in the Russian (Volkova & Kolesov, 2022) and Thai (Jiang, 2025) contexts support these findings. These studies highlight the need for universities adopting EMI, in Algeria and beyond, to prioritize intercultural support mechanisms and inclusive practices to help international students integrate academically and socially, thereby fostering a more resilient and adaptive identity during their studies.

Joint research, co-authorship, and mobility initiatives help universities enrich teaching and research practices and accelerate capacity building. They can also internationalize curricula and create "brain circulation"

pathways that return skills to home institutions (Bozeman & Boardman, 2014; De Wit, 2020; Knight, 2015). When framed as long-term, programmatic partnerships, collaborations help universities align with global agendas, open doors to competitive schemes, and strengthen institutional reputation, which is key for attracting students and staff (De Wit, 2020; Knight, 2015).

At the same time, researchers caution that if governance, budgeting, and data ownership are not equitable, partnerships can reproduce disparities such as authorship imbalances, and capacity locked on the partner's side (De Wit, 2020; Hedt-Gauthier et al., 2019). Collaborations may also overload administrators and faculty with reporting while offering little curricular or research renewal at home. External funding can also skew priorities away from local needs (Bozeman & Boardman, 2014; De Wit, 2020).

Studies from Africa are pointing to structural weaknesses in mobility programs that mirror issues in Algeria. Moshtari and Safarpour (2024) show that while there is enthusiasm for mobility, many programs are not sustainable: they depend on external funding, have unequal access across institutions, and often exclude under-resourced universities. In addition, Nabaho, et al. (2025) report that intra-African mobility is increasing, but institutional incentives, recognition of credits, and visa policies are often inconsistent. These findings underscore the need for Algeria to plan mobility in a way that is system-wide and equitable.

Purposeful digital transformation allows universities to expand blended learning, use data more effectively to support student success, and create "virtual mobility" opportunities that complement physical exchange, making international learning more accessible while reducing cost and visa constraints (De Wit, 2020; Means et al., 2013). Well-designed online and hybrid courses can achieve equal or better learning outcomes than traditional formats, particularly when supported by instructional design, teacher training, and E-library systems (Means et al., 2013).

Digitalization is emerging as a key enabler of internationalization in many Global South settings. In Africa, Jowi (2024) highlights how

joint research partnerships, digital platforms, and online postgraduate programs have accelerated knowledge exchange and mobility despite geographic barriers. In the Middle East, studies of digital transformation in education and government suggest that digital platforms are enhancing access to administrative services, enabling remote learning, and facilitating collaboration even during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic (Tripathi, 2025). For Algeria, this suggests that government-led digital platforms (for student services, governance, etc.) could be powerful levers if matched by strong infrastructure and training.

However, limited connectivity and lack of devices can increase exclusion. Rapid or emergency adoption often leads to basic remote teaching rather than quality online learning. As data collection expands, concerns about privacy, surveillance, and academic integrity also grow (Hodges et al., 2020; Selwyn, 2017; Van Dijk, 2020). Institutions need stronger infrastructure and digital access, professional development for faculty in online pedagogy, clear policies on data governance and AI use. They also need assessment practices that emphasize authentic learning rather than strict proctoring (Hodges et al., 2020; Selwyn, 2017; UNESCO, 2023). Without these, digitalization can increase workload, reduce student engagement, and undermine trust, all of which, according to Selwyn (2017) and UNESCO (2023), may hinder the internationalization process.

In light of the findings, several practical implications emerge for policymakers and university leaders. Beyond general policy directions, there is a need for a structured roadmap to enhance the effectiveness of these internationalization strategies:

- Stakeholder should develop a clear roadmap for EMI adoption at the institutional level, outlining gradual implementation stages, discipline-specific training for faculty, and continuous evaluation of student outcomes.
- Policymakers may consider integrating digitalization strategies into internationalization planning, particularly through the development of online joint courses, virtual exchange programs, and

digital infrastructure that supports global collaboration.

- MHESR and university leadership could introduce institutional incentives, such as grants, workload reduction, or recognition awards, for faculty and departments that engage in international partnerships, joint research, and curriculum co-design.

Together, these measures would move Algerian universities from policy intent toward sustainable, practice-based internationalization.

Conclusion

The current orientations of national policies and academic discourse in Algeria point to the centrality of internationalization within HE institutions. This study has identified important efforts but also there remain several challenges to deal with. Using Knight's (2004) framework, we can see that Algeria has worked on both internationalization abroad and at home. On the one hand, policies that encourage mobility, cooperation agreements with other countries, and the recruitment of international students reflect the outward-looking dimension. On the other hand, initiatives such as digitalization, curriculum development, teacher training, and the creation of platforms for governance modernization show attempts to internationalize within the local context. This already suggests a hybrid approach.

Hudzik's (2011) idea of comprehensive internationalization provides another useful perspective. Algeria's actions are not limited to mobility or partnerships alone, but also include digital transformation and efforts to align teaching and research with international standards. While these steps do not yet represent a fully integrated system, they point to recognition that internationalization should touch many areas of HE rather than remain in isolated projects. This is an important step toward a broader, more inclusive strategy.

At the same time, these efforts remain uneven. Mobility opportunities are still limited, many partnerships suffer from weak coordination, and international student recruitment has not reached global benchmarks. Digital platforms have been launched, but their effectiveness depends on long-term investment and training. These

realities show that while Algeria has adopted the language and tools of internationalization, the actual implementation is slower and more fragmented. This confirms de Wit's (2020) argument that internationalization is not a fixed model but a process shaped by local and global forces.

Comparing Algeria's efforts with international models shows that the country is not only responding to global pressures, but also trying to adapt internationalization to its own national priorities. Improving English proficiency, ensuring quality in HE and linking universities to economic and social development are clear local goals. This means that Algeria's approach is externally connected but internally driven, which explains the hybrid nature of its strategy. The balance between attracting international recognition and serving domestic needs will remain at the heart of its internationalization path.

The case of Algeria shows that IoHE cannot be reduced to a single model. It combines outward strategies such as mobility and partnerships with inward strategies such as teacher development and digitalization. Although challenges remain, these efforts mark a shift toward a more global and interconnected higher education system. Algeria's internationalization process can therefore best be described as hybrid, ongoing, and still consolidating, with the potential to expand if supported by stronger policies, capacity-building, and long-term vision.

Disclosure Statement

- **Conflict of interest:** The author declares that he has no competing financial or non-financial interests, and no relevant or material interests related to the research described in this paper.
- **Thesis Declaration:** The author declares that this manuscript is an original work and is not derived from any master's or doctoral thesis.
- **Ethical approval and consent to participate:** This article does not contain any studies with

human participants or animals performed by any authors.

- **Availability of data and materials:** The datasets used in the current study are derived from the MHESR and universities websites in addition to publicly available academic resources.
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