

Motivations and Challenges for Implementing Joint Degree Programs in Mongolian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT Since the 1990s, Mongolian higher education has expanded significantly through privatisation, marketisation, and massification, alongside national efforts to meet international standards. Although joint degree programs are often highlighted as part of internationalisation strategies in institutional strategic plans, their implementation remains limited in Mongolian universities. This study examines the motivations and challenges of implementing such programs using quantitative data from 88 respondents at Mongolian universities. Compared with results from the Council of Graduate Schools, motivations related to recruiting international students, faculty interest, and administrative support for internationalisation are relatively lower in Mongolian universities. Using 22 questionnaire items, the study assessed challenges through standard deviation, linear regression, and Cronbach's alpha. Regression analysis indicated that ensuring program sustainability is the most influential factor in student recruitment for joint degree programs. Correlation analysis revealed positive relationships among teaching methodologies, resolving grading and evaluation differences, and maintaining program quality assurance and standards.

INTRODUCTION

Mongolia, a landlocked country in East Asia, covers an area of 15,64,116 square kilometres and is home to 3.5 million people, making it the most sparsely populated sovereign state. In the 2024-2025 academic year, 65 universities were registered in Mongolia, with a total of 1,50,282 students enrolled in tertiary education (MES 2024). Due to the rapid expansion of higher education, providing quality education has become a priority for the Mongolian government to meet international standards and enhance national competitiveness at the regional level. Mongolian universities have made substantial efforts to initiate various internationalisation activities, including joint degree programs. Joint degree pro-

grams foster international partnerships, curriculum innovation, faculty exchange, and wider access to research networks. These collaborative efforts enable universities to enhance their global visibility and prestige while expanding educational opportunities for students. Students benefit international credentials, multilingual skills, and international experiences (Leung 2025). In addition to enhanced employability and global competences, joint degree programs support personal growth and intercultural learning for students (Diem et al. 2023). Despite potential benefits, the recent literature identifies major challenges affecting both institutions and students. These key challenges include language proficiency and communication barriers, cultural and pedagogical differences, regulatory barriers, financial issues, and administrative constraints (Leung 2025; Chan 2021; Miao and Yang 2024). However, the implementation of these programs remains limited in Mongolian higher education. This study, therefore, aims to examine the motivations and challenges

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associated with initiating and implementing such collaborative efforts in Mongolian higher education.

The foundation of higher education in Mongolia dates back to 1942 with the establishment of the National University of Mongolia, modelled on the general Russian university structures. The early development of Mongolian higher education can be understood through the processes of integration and differentiation. During the integration process, the National University of Mongolia expanded to include faculties in the humanities as well as the natural and social sciences. At the same time, the Mongolian higher education system underwent a differentiation process. Based on the faculties of the National University of Mongolia, the State University of Education was established in 1951, the former State University of Agriculture in 1958, and the State University of Medicine Science in 1961 (Dembereldorj 2020). By the early 1990s, Mongolia had eight national universities, 46 technical colleges, and vocational schools. The government fully regulates the higher education sector, including university structures, finances, degree programs, enrollment, and the labour market (Orolmaa 2022).

In the early 1990s, Mongolia transitioned to a free-market economy and a democratic society. Like other post-Soviet nations, Mongolian universities faced challenges from the privatisation, marketisation, and massification of higher education. Initially, government funding for higher education was discontinued. In response, private universities were legalised, and tuition fees were introduced for both private and public institutions. As a result of privatisation, the number of Mongolian universities peaked at 184 in 2004. However, as part of ongoing national efforts to enhance the quality of higher education and meet international standards, the number of universities gradually decreased to 99 in 2012 and 88 in 2021. The expansion of Mongolian higher education, driven by the legalisation of private universities, also led to significant growth in enrollment. This pattern was observed not only in transitional countries but also in other regions (Regdel 2007). In the early 1990s, only 1.7 percent of Mongolia's population was enrolled in universities (Orolmaa 2022). By the mid-1990s, the country had entered the age of massification of higher education, with intake rates

for the relevant age cohort reaching 25.0 percent in 1995 and 76.0 percent in 2005 (Regdel 2007).

The transfer to a tuition-fee system did not reduce student enrolment. On the contrary, enrollment increased rapidly (Regdel 2007). To survive in a market economy, Mongolian universities became highly dependent on tuition fees and competed for students to increase their revenues. Scholars have described this phase of higher education reform in Mongolia using terms such as “decentralisation” and “institutional autonomy” (Balgan 2019; Regdel 2007), a “policy borrowing process” (Batsukh 2011), liberalisation and marketisation of higher education (Regdel 2007), “cost-sharing” or the transfer from public goods to private goods, adoption of the American model of higher education, and the introduction of the credit system (Chultemsuren and Munkhbat 2013; Dembereldorj 2020). These major trends also influenced internationalisation efforts in Mongolian higher education.

Current Situation: Internationalisation of Higher Education and Joint Degree Programs in Mongolia

Internationalisation policies in middle- and low-income countries tend to focus on quality assurance and capacity building (Rumbley et al. 2022). Mongolia has followed a similar approach. Between 2003 and 2013, national higher education standards were developed and enforced across 130 professions. The *2019 Country Report on Higher Education* highlighted the evolving process in line with international trends, moving from quantity to quality, from quality to content, and from content improvement to quality assurance. To date, Mongolia has not adopted a comprehensive national internationalisation policy. In 2020, the government introduced the country's long-term development strategy, *Vision-2050*, which emphasises Mongolia's ambition to become a leading Asian nation in terms of social development, economic growth, and quality of life by 2050. As part of this vision, the government aims to enhance access to quality education by reforming the higher education system to meet international standards and by developing national research universities. The Mongolian Law on Higher Education was revised in 2023 and also highlights the importance

of conducting national university rankings in collaboration with internationally recognised ranking organisations and of developing internationally ranked research universities (MES 2023).

In 2023, the Ministry of Education surveyed and ranked 61 independent Mongolian universities in collaboration with Times Higher Education, the international ranking organisation, to determine preliminary national university rankings. Universities were evaluated based on teaching, research, foreign relations, and environmental services. Employers, parents, guardians, teaching staff, students, and alumni participated in the evaluation, providing satisfaction surveys on the quality of teaching, activities, faculty knowledge and skills, and service (MES 2023). The National University of Mongolia led the rankings with 83.5 percent, followed by other major national and private universities, including the Mongolian National University of Medical Sciences, Mongolian National University of Science and Technology, Mongolian National University of Education, and Mongolian National University of Life Sciences (MES 2023). In 2024, the National University of Mongolia achieved an official ranking in the 1501+ band in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

This recent action by the Ministry of Education reflects national policy priorities focused on international standards and quality assurance in higher education. In alignment with these policies, Mongolian universities have established strategic goals aimed at achieving “world-class” and “globally competitive” status. To support this vision, both major national and private universities emphasise gaining regional recognition, enhancing research capacity, advancing technology and innovation, and aligning with international standards (Gundensambuu 2019). At the institutional level, Mongolian universities have more recently begun implementing various internationalisation strategies, including joint degree programs.

There is no official data on joint degree programs implemented in Mongolian universities. In 2023, the Mongolian National Council of Education Accreditation collected data on 91 joint degree programs from 10 Mongolian public and private universities. However, this data does not cover all joint degree programs in Mongolia (MNCEA 2023). Joint degree programs are prom-

inently featured in institutional strategic plans as part of the internationalisation strategies of Mongolian universities. To the researchers’ knowledge, these programs remain understudied, with only a few studies providing statistics and recognising them as a growing trend in Mongolian higher education and as effective internationalisation strategies (Balgan and Otgonbayar 2023; Gundensambuu 2019). Recent studies have focused on comparing global and national internationalisation policies and agenda-setting, including the impact of globalisation on Mongolian higher education (Balgan and Otgonbayar 2023), the institutional homogenisation process toward “world-class university” status in Mongolia (Dembereldorj 2020), national and institutional internationalisation of higher education (Tsenddorj and Doljin 2023), and the internationalisation of English as a medium of instruction in Mongolian universities (Gundensambuu 2019; Otgonbayar 2022). As a result, the knowledge available to policymakers and educators for initiating and implementing joint degree programs remains limited.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine how joint degree programs are implemented as institutional internationalisation strategies in Mongolian universities. This analysis considers the knowledge and experiences of various stakeholders, including university leaders, faculty, administration, and academic staff. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the internationalisation of higher education in Mongolia. The next section discusses the conceptual framework, followed by a description of the data collection and research approach. The results are then presented, and the final section offers concluding remarks and proposes implications for future research.

Conceptual Framework

In response to globalisation, the internationalisation of higher education has become a mainstream phenomenon in the changing landscape of tertiary education over the past two decades. National governments and universities intentionally emphasise international cooperation and

collaboration to address new challenges in the context of globalisation (Ge 2022). Widespread access to higher education, the global knowledge economy, and the growing significance of university rankings and reputation have had a substantial impact on the internationalisation of higher education (De Wit 2021). The rationales for internationalisation can be categorised at the national and institutional levels. At the national level, these rationales include human resource development, strategic alliances, commercial trade, nation-building, and social development. Institutional rationales include building an international profile and reputation, fostering student and staff development, increasing graduate employability, generating revenue, improving quality, forming strategic alliances, and advancing research and knowledge production (Gundensambuu 2019).

Internationalisation efforts encompass a range of developments, including policy reform, organisational restructuring, and curriculum modifications. A key aspect of this process is curriculum internationalisation, which involves incorporating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as into learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study (Leask 2015: 10). Joint degree programs are a major emerging strategy for curriculum internationalisation in higher education. These collaborative programs benefit individuals, universities, and national and regional education systems. From a faculty and institutional perspective, joint degree programs serve as a natural extension of academic mobility and a global strategy for strengthening partnerships abroad, increasing student mobility, developing globally competent learners, and advancing campus internationalisation strategies. From a student perspective, joint degree programs broaden their minds and multilingual and intercultural skills for global labour markets. Joint degree programs also foster social mobility by promoting self-resilience, personal growth, and global citizenship skills (Chan 2021; Yamutuale 2024).

Despite the opportunities presented by these collaborative efforts, various challenges exist, including concerns related to academic fraud, quality assurance, and accreditation (Helms 2014; Knight 2009). According to Char Leung's systemic re-

view, the limited language proficiency is one of the most commonly mentioned in international joint education programs including academic exchange programs. Furthermore, the management and coordination of these programs have been reported where the common issues include discrepancies in administrative requirements and processes between institutions. The study also highlighted the cultural adjustment and integration, pedagogical differences, and financial issues (Leung 2025).

Compared with short-term mobility and teaching abroad, joint degree programs offer an integrated curriculum with partner universities, providing students with an extended study period abroad and granting double or joint degrees in the relevant fields (Steagall et al. 2021). Europe and the United States have led the internationalisation of higher education and provide numerous best practices. Since the early 1990s, programs such as Socrates and Erasmus Mundus have facilitated long-term, integrated study within Europe. Furthermore, the Bologna Process has unified educational models across Europe, enhancing the comparability and quality of undergraduate and graduate programs (Steagall et al. 2021). These collaborative efforts have expanded to Asian countries. Leading universities in Asia have focused on initiating joint degree programs with European and American institutions, addressing issues such as academic qualifications and accreditations (Yung-Chi Hou et al. 2015), strategies for supporting students in international joint programs (Arshakian and Wang 2017), and comparisons of policies, procedures, and practices across specific countries in developing collaborative academic programs (Chan 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Data for this analysis were collected via an online questionnaire using Google Forms between April and May 2025. The study employed a descriptive survey method. The questionnaire was developed with reference to two international reports, namely, the *Joint Degrees*, *Dual Degrees*, and *International Research Collabo-*

rations: A Report on the CGS Graduate International Collaborations Project by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS 2010) and the *Mapping International Joint and Double Degrees: U.S. Program Profiles and Perspectives* by the American Council on Education and the Centre of Internationalisation and Global Engagement (Helms 2014), both of which provide comprehensive analyses of international joint and dual degree programs.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts, that is, respondent demographics, institutional motivations, and institutional challenges. A total of 88 responses from Mongolian universities were collected. The respondents were affiliated with the National University of Mongolia, the Mongolian National University of Science and Technology, the Mongolian National University of Education, the Mongolian National University of Life Sciences, the Mongolian National Defence University, the Railway University, Mandakh University, Citi University, the University of the Humanities, the Mongolian Labour and Social Relations Institute, and the University of Internal Affairs.

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in Table 1, including key details such as affiliation, teaching experience, academic field, and university type.

Table 1: Demographics of respondents

Characteristics	Number of respondents (n = 88)	Percentage Affiliation
University leadership	9	10.2
Faculty member	62	70.5
Administrative staff	6	6.8
Academic and student service staff	11	12.5
<i>Teaching/Work Experience</i>		
1–5 years	15	17
6–10 years	14	15.9
11–15 years	21	23.9
More than 15 years	38	43.2
<i>Academic/Research Field</i>		
Education	40	45.5
Natural sciences, engineering	7	8
Social sciences	18	20.5
Humanities	5	5.7
Business administration	12	13.6
Others	6	6.8
<i>University Type</i>		
Public	63	71.6
Private	25	28.4

The questionnaire was designed to gather insights from key stakeholders, including faculty members, university administrators, and institutional leaders, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the underlying dynamics within Mongolian universities. Table 2 shows the modified questionnaire items used to explore motivations for developing joint degree programs. As a developing country, the motivations of Mongolian universities were compared with those in a developed country with established joint degree programs, as reported by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS 2010).

Table 2: Motivations in setting up Joint Degree Programs at Mongolian Universities

M1	Attracting international students
M2	Faculty interest
M3	Administrative interest in internationalisation of the institution
M4	Strengthening academic research quality
M5	Increasing prestige
M6	Increasing revenue
M7	Employer/industry demand
M8	Other
M9	Providing international experience for students
M10	International relations/outreach

Twenty-two questions were used to identify challenges in establishing joint degree programs in Mongolian universities (Table 3). Each ques-

Table 3: Challenges in setting up Joint Degree Programs at Mongolian Universities

Q1	Ensuring program sustainability
Q2	Recruiting students
Q3	Negotiating a memorandum of understanding
Q4	Securing adequate financing
Q5	Resolving differences in academic calendars
Q6	Deciding fee structure
Q7	Mentoring and advising
Q8	Resolving cultural diversity
Q9	Resolving differences in degree requirements
Q10	Getting the program accredited
Q11	Getting administrative support from your institution
Q12	Getting support from faculty
Q13	Getting support from a partner university
Q14	Designing joint curriculum
Q15	Resolving language issues
Q16	Determining duration of degrees in each country
Q17	Resolving dormitory issues
Q18	Resolving student health insurance issues
Q19	Agreeing on credit transfer recognition
Q20	Teaching methodologies
Q21	Resolving grading/evaluation differences
Q22	Program quality assurance and standards

tion was rated on a 4-point Likert scale, where 1 = Not challenging at all, 2 = Less challenging, 3 = Somewhat challenging, and 4 = Very challenging.

Approach

The following approach was used for this study (Fig. 1). To identify the motivations of Mongolian universities, the researchers first compared them with universities in the United States. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability and consistency of all questionnaire items (Table 4). Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the linear relationships among the variables of resolving student health insurance, agreeing on credit transfer recognition, teaching methodologies, resolving grading and evaluation differences, and program quality assurance and standards. Regression analysis was then employed to identify the factors influencing student recruitment.

Analysis

In this study, the motivations for establishing joint degree programs in Mongolian universities were compared with those reported for international institutions with established joint and dual degree programs in the Council of Graduate Schools report (Table 5). The results indicate that motivation levels (M1-M10) are generally low in the Mongolian context. Among these factors, attracting international students emerges as the most important motivation for establishing joint degree programs. A notable difference is observed between Mongolian universities and institutions with experience in joint degree programs, wherein only 25.0 percent of Mongolian universities emphasise recruiting and attracting students, compared with 86.0 percent of the universities reported by the Council of Graduate Schools.

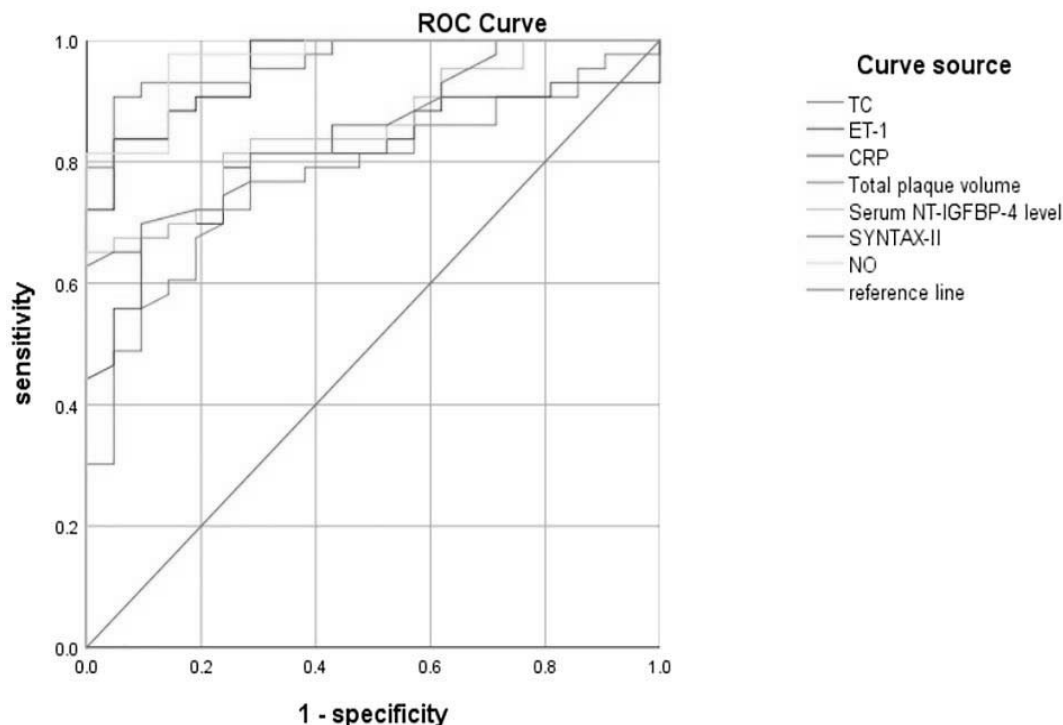


Fig.1. Schema for studying joint degree programs in Mongolian Universities

Table 4: Analysis of Arithmetic Means

S.No.	Questionnaire	Average	Standard deviation (SD)	VAR
1	Ensuring program sustainability	2.45	0.60	0.36
2	Recruiting students	2.15	0.58	0.34
3	Negotiating a memorandum of understanding	1.61	0.74	0.54
4	Securing adequate financing	2.60	0.72	0.52
5	Resolving differences in academic calendars	2.20	0.59	0.35
6	Deciding fee structure	2.35	0.76	0.58
7	Mentoring and advising	1.90	0.93	0.87
8	Resolving cultural diversity	2.10	0.71	0.51
9	Resolving differences in degree requirements	2.55	0.64	0.41
10	Getting the program accredited	2.70	0.60	0.36
11	Getting administrative support from your institution	2.35	0.65	0.43
12	Getting support from faculty	2.05	0.67	0.45
13	Getting support from partner institution	2.05	0.68	0.47
14	Designing joint curriculum	2.10	0.74	0.55
15	Resolving language issues	2.38	0.71	0.50
16	Determining duration of degrees in each country	2.20	0.71	0.50
17	Resolving dormitory issues	2.25	0.70	0.50
18	Resolving student health insurance issues	2.10	0.70	0.49
19	Agreeing on credit transfer recognition	2.05	0.55	0.31
20	Teaching methodologies	2.33	0.50	0.25
21	Resolving grading/evaluation differences	2.22	0.49	0.24
22	Program quality assurance and standards	2.38	0.48	0.23

Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's alpha was applied to determine the reliability and internal consistency of all questionnaire items. Cronbach's coefficient alpha is commonly used as a measure of data reliability.

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{(k-1)} * \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k s_i^2}{s_t^2} \right) \quad (1)$$

Where,

α = Cronbach's alpha

k = number of items

s_i^2 = variance of each item

s_t^2 = variance of the total scale

Equation (1) was used to calculate Cronbach's alpha for all items. For this study, the alpha coefficients show good reliability. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.94 indicates very good internal consistency among the 22 items (Table 4). The standard deviation values reported in Table 4 are also acceptable for the analysis.

To identify the factors influencing student recruitment, the researchers considered the following variables of resolving cultural diversity, securing adequate financing, obtaining program accreditation, program quality assurance and

standards, ensuring program sustainability, negotiating a memorandum of understanding, gaining faculty support, and resolving language issues. Among these, ensuring program sustainability was found to be the most influential factor (Table 6). Therefore, Mongolian universities aiming to develop joint degree programs should prioritise program sustainability to effectively attract international students.

Correlation analysis was calculated using Pearson's coefficient (Equation 2). Table 7 presents the correlation analysis among questionnaire items related to teaching methodologies for all groups. Correlation coefficients were interpreted as 0-0.29 indicates no correlation, 0.30-0.49 indicates a weak correlation, 0.50-0.79 indicates a moderate correlation, and values greater than 0.90 indicate a strong correlation (Hinkle et al. 2003).

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2} \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2}} \quad (2)$$

Where:

n = sample size

x_i, y_i individual sample points indexed by i

$\bar{x} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n x_i$ $\bar{x}$ = sample mean (and analogously for $\bar{y}$)

Table 5: Comparison of motivations in setting up Joint Degree Programs between universities provided in the Report of the Council of Graduate Schools and Mongolian Universities

S.No.	Questionnaire	Code	Universities reported in the Council of Graduate Schools	Mongolian universities
1	Attract international students	M 1	86.0	25.0
2	Faculty interest	M 2	84.0	10.0
3	Administrative interest in internationalisation of the institution	M 3	81.0	39.0
4	Strengthen academic research quality	M 4	79.0	42.0
5	Increase prestige	M 5	53.0	36.0
6	Increase revenue	M 6	47.0	24.0
7	Employer/industry demand	M 7	35.0	20.0
8	Other	M 8	12.0	1.0
9	Provide international experience for students	M 9	5.0	43.0
10	International relations/outreach	M10	5.0	47.0

The highest correlation was observed between teaching methodologies and resolving grading and evaluation differences. A moderate correlation was found between agreeing on credit transfer recognition and teaching methodologies.

The primary objective of this study was to identify and rank the key factors influencing international student recruitment and to examine the strength and direction of relationships among questionnaire variables, rather than to compare differences across predefined groups. Although differential statistical techniques are useful for identifying group-level differences, the present study did not aim to conduct such comparisons. Instead, it focused on examining the interrelationships among institutional, academic, and administrative factors affecting joint degree program recruitment. The data were collected using Likert-scale questionnaire items, and given the study objectives and data structure, correlation and regression analyses were considered the most appropriate statistical tools. Regression analysis was employed to identify the most influential factors contributing to the successful implementation of joint degree programs in Mongolia, while Pearson's correlation analysis was used to explore the strength of associations among questionnaire items related to teaching methodologies and academic coordination. Future research with larger samples and well-defined groups may incorporate multigroup comparisons to extend these findings.

RESULTS

The analysis of survey data from 88 respondents across Mongolian public and private

universities reveals that while joint degree programs are increasingly recognized as strategic tools for internationalisation, the motivation for their development remains relatively low. Compared to those universities included in the report of the Council of Graduate Schools, Mongolian universities lack strong and focused motivations (below 50%). The highest motivations among Mongolian universities include international relations/outreach (47%) and providing international experiences for students (43%). In contrast, these motivations were among the least emphasised (5% each) by the universities included in the Council of Graduate Schools report. Another important question concerned whether joint degree programs have been implemented as part of institutional internationalisation. In Mongolian universities, administrative interest in the internationalisation of the institution (39%) was lower than interest in international relations and outreach (47%).

Furthermore, among the institutional motivations examined, recruiting international students emerged as the most critical factor. Only 25.0 percent of Mongolian universities emphasised this goal, compared with 86.0 percent of the universities included in the Council of Graduate Schools report, highlighting a notable gap in prioritisation.

To understand the factors influencing student recruitment, the study analysed variables including resolving cultural diversity, securing adequate financing, obtaining program accreditation, ensuring quality assurance and standards, program sustainability, negotiating a mem-

Table 6: Regression for recruiting students

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	0.3319111887	0.3063734	1.0833573	0.2819453	-0.277909	0.941733	-0.277909	0.941733
Resolving cultural diversity	0.017340604	0.0981537	0.1766678	0.8602215	-0.17803	0.2127107	-0.17803	0.2127107
Securing adequate finance	0.085759792	0.0902663	0.9500749	0.3449717	-0.093911	0.2654305	-0.093911	0.2654305
Getting the program accredited	0.140219771	0.083028	1.6888255	0.0951965	-0.025043	0.3054828	-0.025043	0.3054828
Program quality assurance and standards	-0.118111765	0.0998009	-1.183474	0.2401704	-0.31676	0.080537	-0.31676	0.080537
Ensuring program sustainability	0.29771972	0.0810895	3.671494	0.0004367	0.136315	0.4591244	0.136315	0.4591244
Negotiating a memorandum of understanding	0.155781204	0.0919742	1.693748	0.0942527	-0.027289	0.3388514	-0.027289	0.3388514
Getting support from faculty	0.033345095	0.1027529	0.3245172	0.7464042	-0.17118	0.2378697	-0.17118	0.2378697
Resolving language issues	0.164108236	0.0862299	1.9031468	0.0606642	-0.007528	0.3357446	-0.007528	0.3357446

orandum of understanding, gaining faculty support, and resolving language issues. Regression analysis identified program sustainability as the most influential factor for the successful implementation of joint degree programs in Mongolia ($p = 0.0004367$).

Correlation analysis further showed a strong positive relationship between teaching methodologies and resolving grading and evaluation differences, as well as moderate correlations between teaching methodologies and credit transfer recognition. These findings indicate that Mongolian universities must prioritise both program sustainability and pedagogical strategies to effectively establish joint degree programs. The study also highlighted that while local accreditation of joint degree programs is advancing, international accreditation remains limited. Ensuring both local and international accreditation of these joint degree programs would attract more international students and increase the quality and competitiveness of these programs.

DISCUSSION

This study situates its findings within the shifting discourse on the internationalisation of higher education. Recent studies suggest that the internationalisation of higher education is evolving beyond the student mobility toward developing sustainable institutional partnerships and strategically coordinated academic collaboration (Ma and Montgomery 2021; Haley et al. 2024; De Wit and Wang 2025). Universities worldwide are increasingly prioritising long-term collaborative frameworks, particularly joint and dual degree programmes, as strategic mechanisms to deepen global engagement, strengthen research partnerships, and enhance institutional resilience. Within this framework, joint degree programs are understood as key instruments for curriculum internationalisation, global competence development, and institutional competitiveness. Consistent with this perspective, previous research highlights that successful joint degree programs require university-wide integration of international and intercultural dimensions across teaching, research, governance, and campus culture (Leask 2015; Leung 2025; Yamutuale 2024).

Table 7: Correlation analysis for teaching methodologies

	<i>Resolving student health insurance issues</i>	<i>Agreeing on credit transfer recognition</i>	<i>Teaching methodologies</i>	<i>Resolving grading/evaluation differences</i>	<i>Program quality assurance and standards</i>
Resolving student health insurance issues	1				
Agreeing on credit transfer recognition	0.595912522	1			
Teaching methodologies	0.484584992	0.677947806	1		
Resolving grading/evaluation differences	0.436842881	0.665033307	0.741469631	1	
Program quality assurance and standards	0.435352978	0.671099079	0.574483577	0.617235	1

However, the findings of this study reveal that Mongolian universities largely position joint degree initiatives within the limited domain of international relations and external outreach rather than as comprehensive institutional internationalisation strategies. As Knight (2009) argues, international outreach primarily focuses on partnership management and administrative cooperation, whereas comprehensive internationalisation requires structural transformation in academic practices and institutional priorities. The results therefore indicate that joint degree programs in Mongolian universities remain at an early stage of development stage compared with those in more advanced internationalisation systems. While Although Mongolian universities increasingly embrace global competitiveness agendas aligned with ambitions for world-class or regionally leading status, joint degree programmes remain only marginally integrated into their core institutional strategies. Achieving meaningful internationalisation requires moving beyond symbolic partnerships toward strategically embedded academic collaboration.

Recent comparative studies across Asia and other emerging higher education systems demonstrate that universities frequently adopt internationalisation policies more rapidly than they develop the institutional capacity required to sustain collaborative programs (Hou et al. 2024; Yamutuale 2024). The Mongolian case reflects this broader trend to a significant extent. Joint degree programs appear prominently in institutional strategic documents, yet practical implementation remains constrained. This finding supports the argument that policy adoption alone does not ensure effective internationalisation unless it is supported by robust gover-

nance structures, financial stability, and sustained faculty engagement.

The study also contributes to ongoing debates regarding institutional motivations for the internationalisation of higher education. Prior literature identifies student recruitment, global talent attraction, and mobility expansion as major drivers of joint degree programs (Bilik 2025; Leung 2025; Miao and Yang 2024). In contrast, Mongolian universities demonstrate comparatively weaker and less strategically focused motivations, with international student recruitment receiving limited institutional emphasis. This divergence suggests that internationalisation in Mongolian universities remains in transition, shifting from relationship-based cooperation toward more market- and strategy-driven global engagement models observed in more established higher education systems.

With regard to implementation challenges, the findings of this study align with recent international research identifying regulatory complexity, financial limitations, language barriers, cultural adaptation issues, and curriculum alignment difficulties as persistent obstacles to joint degree development (Chan 2022; Leung 2025). Respondents in this study similarly emphasised program sustainability, funding constraints, and institutional coordination as primary concerns. In particular, limited scholarship availability, insufficient governmental financial support, and fragile funding structures were perceived as major risks to long-term program sustainability. These findings highlight the need to strengthen institutional governance mechanisms and to develop sustainable financial models capable of effectively supporting collaborative international programs.

Pedagogical alignment emerged as another critical challenge. Differences in teaching methodologies, grading practices, and curriculum structures were identified as significant barriers to effective collaboration with international partners. These findings are consistent with existing research demonstrating that academic compatibility—rather than administrative agreement alone—is a key determinant of the long-term success of joint degree programmes (Chan 2022). Addressing these challenges requires systematic faculty development, improved academic support services for students, and clearer institutional frameworks for harmonising curriculum design, learning outcomes, and assessment standards across partner institutions.

Overall, the results suggest that although Mongolian universities actively pursue internationalisation ambitions, the successful implementation of joint degree programs depends on strengthening institutional capacity, ensuring program sustainability, and achieving pedagogical integration. Expanding strategic partnerships, aligning quality assurance systems with international standards, and reinforcing internal support structures may enable universities to transform joint programs from symbolic international activities into sustainable academic collaborations.

These conclusions resonate with recent global policy discussions emphasising sustainable and inclusive internationalisation models that balance global engagement with local institutional capacity development (Jones et al 2021; Jones and Wit 2024). Furthermore, contemporary debates on the internationalisation of higher education increasingly highlight global inequalities in knowledge production and call for more inclusive and geographically diverse perspectives within scholarly discourse (Marginson et al. 2025). Existing literature continues to be disproportionately dominated by European, North American, and selected East Asian contexts. By providing empirical evidence from Mongolia, this study contributes to expanding the geographical scope of internationalisation research. The findings further demonstrate that, in emerging higher education systems, joint degree programs serve not only as mobility initiatives but also as crucial mechanisms of institutional learning, capacity building, and broader systemic transformation in developing countries such as Mongolia.

CONCLUSION

The study examined motivations and challenges to implementing joint degree programs in Mongolian higher education within the framework of internationalisation. Conceptually, the study contributes to the existing body of internationalisation literature by demonstrating that joint degree programs in Mongolian universities are often positioned primarily as a domain of international cooperation activities rather than as broader institutional internationalisation strategies. The study also contributes to the existing knowledge of higher education in Asia, offering a nuanced understanding of internationalisation processes in Mongolia. In alignment with national policy, major Mongolian universities have set ambitious goals to become leading universities in the Asia region or achieve world-class status. Findings suggest that Mongolian universities should strategically align collaborative efforts, including joint degree programs, as internationalisation strategies to increase global competitiveness and international prestige. The study is limited to exploring the factors influencing the successful implementation of joint degree programs. These results should be considered alongside the recent academic research in this area. Future research should investigate policy, institutional, and cultural factors affecting the implementation of joint degree programs in Mongolia, as well as the experiences of students and faculty members participating in these programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance joint degree programs as effective internationalisation strategies in Mongolian higher education, the following actions are recommended. First, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive national database of joint degree programs. This would support institutional planning and facilitate collaboration among Mongolian and international universities. Second, there should be clear definitions and distinctions between joint and dual degree programs, as these programs differ in terms of structure, administrative arrangements, and degree-awarding processes. Third, future joint efforts should prioritise quality assurance mechanisms.

In this way, students can be assured of their enrollment in high-quality, internationally recognised programs, and faculty members can be confident in their contribution to curriculum internationalisation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- ◆ Uyanga Tsenddorj: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing original draft preparation
- ◆ Altangerel Balgan: Formal analysis and investigation, Writing original draft preparation
- ◆ Bulgantamir Sangidkhorloo: Writing, review and editing, Resources, Data collection
- ◆ Narantuya Otgonbayar: Writing, review and editing, Supervision.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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