

Review article

Education as a soft power resource: A systematic review

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ABSTRACT

The role of higher education in the foreign policy of states has been increasing significantly in order to generate soft power. Nevertheless, the literature on the educational aspect of soft power has yet to be systematically reviewed. Therefore, this systematic review is conducted to delineate and analyze the major studies in the field of international higher education which indicates *education as a soft power resource* for a country. To identify the multiple and contrary arguments on the topic, this study reviewed 48 peer-reviewed articles published from 2001 to 2022. The data collected from the reviewed papers are organized into five sub-sections outlined in the results sections. The contradictions in the literature are examined within the sub-sections in order to understand the various perspectives on education as a resource of soft power. Through analyzing the data mentioned in the results section, this study provides a framework of the essential conditions to harness education as a soft power resource. Furthermore, this review also suggests prospects for future research in this area.

1. Introduction

The role of higher education in the foreign policy of states has been considerable increasing the recent years, mainly due to major transformations in the global economy and power play among countries. In today's interconnected world, every country is making efforts to increase its attractiveness and fortify its position globally. However, concomitantly many nations have now realized that deploying outdated hard power coercive measures to maintain national security and achieve foreign policy objectives has a significant risk of negative outcomes and reputational damage. Therefore, considering the huge quantity of scientific works and materials taking place in the post-industrial world that is allegedly constructed on information and knowledge rather than wealth and power, the value of education is explicitly growing as one of the important aspects of soft power of a state. Education's genuine feature of human progress is now transforming into an element of a soft power race among countries in this new competitive yet cooperative international educational structure. In the current world scenario, therefore, the scope and importance of higher education as a soft power has been increasing exponentially in the field of international relations.

The Soft Power Measurement Survey (conducted by Portland) has used education as one of the six sub-indices along with culture, engagement, digital, enterprises, and government to measure country's soft power globally in its Soft Power 30 Report. Education was

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used According to report [1]:

The ability of a country to attract international students, or facilitate exchanges, is a powerful tool of public diplomacy that delivers returns well into the long-term. Even for states carrying a history of bilateral animosity, there is a positive effect on perceptions and ties when people study abroad. Returning international students often become third-party advocates for their host country of study.

For the survey, total 25 countries were selected on the regional basis with 12,500 sample size (500 respondents for each country) to cover all the regions of the world. Therefore, survey scientifically inquires the role of education in building soft power of a country [1]. The inclusion of education in the framework of Soft Power Measurement highlights the importance of higher education in the conduct of international relations. Therefore, this systematic review on education as a resource of soft power is imperative to identify and analyze existing research in this area.

It was decided to conduct this review because the existing literature on the educational aspect of soft power has not yet been systematically collected and reviewed. Available peer-reviewed research studies related to this area are scattered across a range of issues such as scholarship and exchange programmes (6 articles), education as public diplomacy (15 articles), knowledge diplomacy (3 articles), student mobility (11 articles), foreign education policy (34 articles), cultural diplomacy (9 articles), and efforts of a particular countries (26 articles). Because of this scattered knowledge, it is difficult to systematically assess how education is being used as a diplomatic tool by different countries. Therefore, it is required to comprehend all these issues in the broad domain of “education as a soft power resource”. Furthermore, available research studies have pointed to the use of higher education in the foreign policy of states, but it is still ambiguous that what are the necessary conditions required for a country to use education as a soft power resource. To fill these research gaps, this study will delineate and analyze the major studies in the field of education and international relations which indicates *education as a soft power resource* for a country. For this purpose, literature related to education and soft power published between 2001 and 2022, along with Nye’s work on soft power (1990–2021), was selected to review for this study. The detailed selection process is mentioned in the method section.

After systematically reviewing the data within the selected literature, the authors have divided and organized the data in the following sub-sections of results section: (i) Internationalization of higher education; (ii) Utilization of reputed institutions and quality of education; (iii) Strategies for promoting cross-border student mobility; (iv) Associated foreign policy goals with educational programmes; (v) Student[s] experiences in host countries. The contradictions in the literature are examined within the sub-sections outlined in the results section in order to understand the various perspectives on education as a resource of soft power. Through analyzing the data mentioned within the sub-sections, this study provides a framework of the essential conditions required for a country for harnessing education as a soft power resource. Furthermore, this review draws attention to various omissions within the literature and also offers recommendations for further research in this area. In this way, this study is helpful for foreign policy makers, administrators, and researchers as it aims to provides: (i) an overview through systematically organizing and reviewing the available literature on this topic, (ii) a framework of essential conditions to harness education as soft power resource, (iii) and prospects for future research.

1.1. About this study

This review is guided by the following research questions: (RQ 1) What existing research informs about the higher education as a resource of soft power? (RQ 2) What are the essential conditions required for a country to build soft power through higher education?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Consent vs coercion: conceptualizing soft power

The concept of soft power was first developed by American Political Scientist Joseph Nye has now become a part and parcel of literature on international politics. Joseph Nye’s dissatisfaction towards the realism pattern of international relations led him to develop this theory [2]. According to him, realism emphasizes on the hard power too much, whereas nowadays, culture, sense of values, and foreign policies have become more important in dealing the international relations [3,4]. Theory of soft power is the analysis and product of the foreign policies of USA to counter USSR’s influence during the Cold War. Nye defined soft power as the “ability of the state to affect others to obtain the outcomes which one wants through consent rather than coercion” [2]. Likewise, Wilson [5] has also defined the soft power as a “capacity to persuade others to do what one wants.” Many other scholars [6], who had studied soft power in the post-9/11, have argued that soft power is an outcome of behavioural influence. According to Nye, unlike hard power that can be defined as the ability to use the carrots and sticks of military and economic might in order to make others follow the ones will, soft power comes from attraction [7,8,9]. He pointed out, “both hard and soft powers are important, but attraction is much cheaper than coercion and an asset that needs to be nourished” [7].

Nye (2004) refers to the importance of education as a source to build soft power. According to him, education can strengthen soft power and enable individuals to comprehend the nature of power better [10,11]. Even though Nye included education under the “cultural” category of soft power sources; but recently, education, especially higher education, has come into its own as a stand-alone and potent soft power attribute in his study [12]. After Nye, many other researchers (cited below) have further conducted research focusing on the higher education aspect of soft power. According to Altbach & Peterson [13], “higher education has always been served as an international force, influencing intellectual and scientific developments and spreading ideas worldwide. Soft power relies on the

strength of ideas and culture to sway friendship and attitude of the individuals rather than by using physical force [14,15]. Many scholars such as Wojciuka et al. [16], believe that education is currently a universal value and it is crucial for building the soft power of a nation. By using education as soft power, a nation can strengthen its political legitimacy [17] and can also build future potentiality of a country by addressing future generations [12,14]. Nye [18] further pointed out that students who studied in other nations are expected to be effective transmitters of the language and culture of their host countries, hence, can be considered as carriers of public diplomacy. He illustrated that the US Department of State’s Fulbright Program has always been a combination of soft power generated by the government and the people, with its main objective being to promote mutual understanding between people and nations through education [14,19,20]. Hence, higher education can be considered as an ideal vehicle of soft power as it develops essential soft power that can navigate the current world in an interconnected global community.

3. Method

To answer the questions mentioned above, the study was conducted following the systematic review procedure described by Petticrew and Roberts [21], in which literature was searched using predetermined procedure, studies were chosen using predefined criteria, and the data were extracted and synthesized. This method was carefully chosen to explore how peer-reviewed literature illustrates the role of higher education as a soft power tool in foreign policy of a country to achieve its geopolitical interests. For reporting the selection process, the five-step selection process using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines for reporting systematic review is used (Fig. 1). In addition, NVivo software was used to organize and analyze data available within the literature which is discussed as the sub-sections of the results section.

3.1. Selection process

The online database Google Scholar, Web of Science, and Scopus were searched to conduct this study because it contains relevant

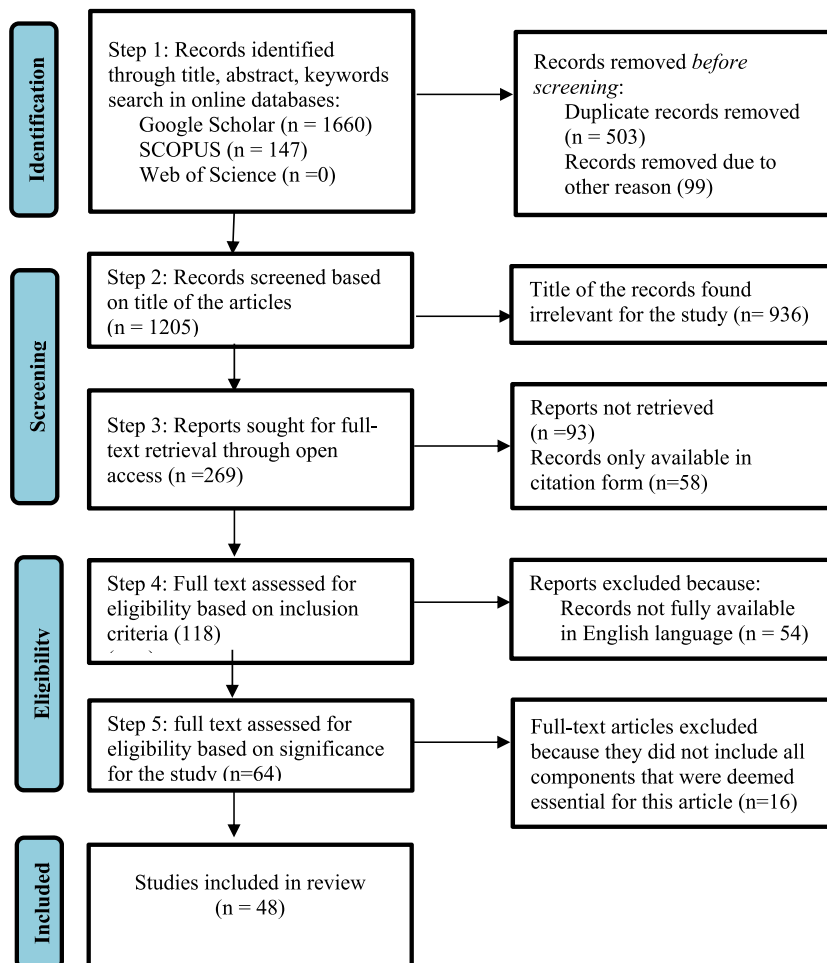


Fig. 1. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram of selection process.

scientific literature on higher education and international relations, and therefore, were most likely to have studies on education and soft power. Keywords were derived from the selected key articles. Subsequently, by trying various other combinations, the final keywords that found most suitable for this study were- “Education” AND “Soft Power” OR “Education as Soft Power” AND “Public Diplomacy” OR “Educational Diplomacy” AND “Student Exchange” OR “Exchange Program” OR “Internationalization of Education”. It provided 1660 search results in google scholar, 147 document results in SCOPUS (See Fig. 1: Step 1). Disappointedly, Web of Science has very limited database for social science research and for our study, there is zero search result. The search was limited to the peer-reviewed articles, which were strictly focused on educational aspect of soft power. The books and dissertation/thesis were excluded because most of the books are not available in open access. In addition, dissertations/thesis found in the database are of master’s level, which does not fit in the criteria of selection. However, important writings (both books and articles) of Joseph Nye on the concept of soft power are included as it is the conceptual framework of the paper.

Initially, Nye had introduced the concept of soft power in 1990’s and continued refining it thereafter. Other relevant research works on this concept was published within the timeframe of 2001–2022. After removing duplicates and invalidated articles, the search yielded result of 1205 articles. Secondly, articles were screened on the basis of their titles (Step 2). The number of articles based on titles that found pertinent to the content of the study is 269. Third, the results were refined by searching the full-text availability of the articles in the pdf format (Step 3). There were many articles in the google scholar which were only mentioned in citation form and not as full-text. These articles were searched in institutional library also but no results were found. Hence, these records along with articles not openly accessed were excluded during screening process. This narrowed the result to 118. Fourth, during reading the full-text documents, it was found out that some texts are not fully available in English (Step 4). In some articles, only title and abstract were available in English and the remaining content was available in the official language of the particular country. Hence, the authors deliberately excluded such articles. At last, relevant studies were selected by applying the following inclusion criteria from abstract to full text documents, which narrowed the results to 48 articles (step 5). The final inclusion criteria include the articles which are focused on crucial component of study i.e. internationalization of education, public and educational diplomacy, student exchange and fellowship programs, and the educational aspect of soft power. Secondly, the research that inquired abstract conceptual issues or the studies based on empirical investigation through case study method were qualified the inclusion criteria of the study. Thirdly, the descriptive quality indicators of scientific articles were applied to the text of the included articles to ensure the essential components of scientific research. Selected studies were discussed within the research team and finalized through mutual agreement. This process helped in refining the selection and inclusion criteria, which was the most required step for maintaining the scientific quality of our systematic review analysis.

3.2. Extraction process

After selection, each article was read thoroughly to understand its content. In order to provide a description of the metadata such as, the title of the study, year of publication, authors, type of paper, referenced countries, domain, conceptual background, and major argument were extracted (see Table 1 below). The data for the methodology part was extracted from the method section and from the literature review/theoretical framework section of the articles. The data for the analysis section was extracted from the results section of the articles as these sections described how theory put in practice in certain cases. Data related to student’s/participants experience in the host country where they moved to pursue higher education was extracted from the results section of case-centered empirical research articles. Finally, Nye’s work (6) from 1990 to 2021 and other (48) studies from 2001 to 2022 were considered relevant for the study. Nye’s work (6) are discussed in theoretical framework and cited in references while other 48 articles are discussed in Table 1.

3.3. Analysis

Once the relevant literature was shortlisted to 61, each article was evaluated and analyzed. The studies available for the review are divided in two forms. The first group of studies encompasses research tackling the conceptual issue related to the term ‘soft power’ which is also a theoretical framework of this paper. Concept-driven studies focused on the theoretical discussion about the term and its various aspects of execution. Only those concept-based studies that have included the educational dimensions of the soft power are selected to be included in the literature review.

The second group dealt with the empirical investigations using the term as a primary tool of inquiry. These case-centered studies are detached from the conceptual debate in the field and most of them limited it to the Nye’s original theory. These studies can be considered as the testing ground of Nye’s theory in which researchers advanced both positive and negative connotations. Some studies proved through empirical research that theory of soft power can be executed through higher education while some researchers found in some cases that this idea is not yielding the expected results in the actual field [20,22–25]. Hence, this review is not just limited to analyzing the positive views but also outlined the contradictory views to comprehend various perspectives on the topic.

3.4. Methodological Limitations

Limitations of the study are needed to be noted. First, this systematic review only included open access sources. Many sources (includes books and articles) that required to pay a fee in order to obtain access, were deliberately excluded to maintain the uniformity among the studies. Secondly, this article includes only English language sources and excluded the other sources written in other languages. Thirdly, this review included only those sources, which are peer-reviewed in journals. The assumption behind this choice is that research articles found in peer-reviewed journals are viewed as having quality and rigor, also guide further research.

Table 1
48 selected articles for this review.

Sr. No	Title	Year		Type	Referenced Countries	Domain	Conceptual background	Major Argument
1	Diplomacy and Education: Changing Global Landscape	2014	Patti McGill	Concept Based	US	Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Scholarships, Fellowships	Soft Power	Higher education is an ideal vehicle for soft power.
2	Education as Soft Power: Migration of Students from India to Australia	2020	Jeffin Thomas Mammen, Dinoop K, M S Jayakumar, Girish Kumar	Concept Based	Australia and India	Soft Power, International Student migration, Scholarships	Soft Power	Australia use higher education as the most effective instrument of deeper engagement with Asia.
3	New Tools of Soft Power: Turkey's Education and Science Diplomacy	2021	Yavuz Selim Kiran*, Şuay Nilhan Açikalin	Concept Based	Turkey	Science Diplomacy, Education Diplomacy, Soft Power	Soft Power, Public Diplomacy	Higher education is one of the soft power tools of Turkish foreign policy and to enhance its attractiveness in the middle east and north Africa.
4	Students at the Nexus between the Chinese Diaspora and Internationalization of higher education: The Role of Overseas Students in China's Strategy of Soft Power	2021	Christine Han and Yaobin Tong	Concept Based	China	IHE, Soft Power	IHE	In the case of China, it is the sending country that seeks to benefit from internationalization, and it does this by casting overseas students in the role of ambassadors who promote and defend state narratives.
5	Brazil's "Ciencia sêm Fronteiras" Program and Soft Power	2020	Thomas Froehlich	Concept Based	Brazil, Germany	Soft Power, Exchange Programme	Soft Power	Brazil's exchange programme has come short in living up to its soft power potential as it is focused on developmental model to generate more scientific and technological workforce which will add its hard or economic power.
6	Promotion of University of Warsaw in the Context of Public Diplomacy: An Experience for Ukraine	2020	Olga Bogorodetska	Concept Based	Poland, Ukraine	Public Diplomacy, Internationalizing institutions	Public Diplomacy	The University of Warsaw has built a unique form of promotion represented by a high quality organizational structure of promotional activities and individual faculties play an important role in presenting the University worldwide
7	Us Educational Foreign Policy as A « Soft Power » Factor: Retrospective Aspect	2021	Panfilov Oleksandr Yuriyovych, Savchenko Olga Oleksandrivna	Concept Based	US	Soft Power, Foreign Policy, Geopolitical Goals, Economic Goals	Soft Power	The use of the systematic approach makes it possible to consider education as an element of the entire system used by the USA to advance their interests within the international arena.
8	The Turkish government scholarship program as a soft power tool	2019	Bulent Aras & Zulkarnain Mohammed	Case-Centered Empirical Study	Turkey	foreign policy, scholarship, international education exchange, public diplomacy	Soft power	Through the scholarship system, Turkey has been able to diffuse its image and culture in the sample of countries.
9	Brazil's Diplomacy and Soft Power Attracting US Universities' Efforts in Internationalization through an in-Country Physical Presence	2022	Jane Kelli Aparecido and Daniela Carla Decaro Schettini	Concept Based	Brazil	IHE. Soft Power, Universities, Satellite offices	IHE, Soft Power	US universities are following and paying attention to the political and economic situation of the countries they choose to establish their offices.

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Table 1 (continued)

Sr. No	Title	Year		Type	Referenced Countries	Domain	Conceptual background	Major Argument
10	Higher Education as a Soft Power Tool of State's Foreign Policy	2020	Yana Ostashova	Concept Based	Russia and China	Higher Education, Educational Projects, Soft Power, Foreign Policy, Universities, Student Exchange	Soft Power	Both countries open cultural, scientific, and research centers in the target countries and offer research trips, educational programs, grants and scholarships to the target countries as well as for each other.
11	Student-to-Student Diplomacy: Chinese International Students as a Soft-Power Tool	2017	Ane Bislev	Case Centered Empirical Study. Critical views	China	Soft Power, Educational Diplomacy, Student Exchange, International Student	Soft Power	International students can be used as "little ambassadors" by the sending nation but this effect would also be dependent upon a high degree of interaction between international students and host-country nationals. Confucius Institutes are China's main agents in its augmentation of Soft Power overseas.
12	China's Educational Soft Power through Confucius Institutes: A case Study of South Africa	2021	Johanes Caesario Martin, Rangga Aditya Elias	Concept Based	China, South Africa	Diplomatic and Educational Relations, Cultural Values, Quality and Internationalization of Chinese education, Foreign Policy Goals.	Soft Power	Confucius Institutes are China's main agents in its augmentation of Soft Power overseas.
13	Between 'here-now' and 'there-then': the West and Asia's colonial entanglements in international higher education	2020	Soma Chatterjee & Kathryn Barber	Concept Based	USA, UK, Australia, and Canada	International Higher Education, Critical policy analysis, Colonial entanglement, Asian modernity	IHE	The concept of 'space-time entanglement' is proposed to develop a necessary analysis as well as a critique of the transnationalization of capitalist colonial relations via discourses and practices of contemporary IHE.
14	National Interests and the impact of Student Mobility: The case of Canada and Brazil	2020	W. E. (Ted) Hewitt	Concept Based	Canada and Brazil	Student Mobility, Brazil, Canada, Science without Borders	Student Mobility Trends	Student mobility between the two countries effected by Brazil's Science Without Borders programme provide significant advantage to both countries, not least of which will likely have positive implications for Canadian-Brazilian interaction.
15	Education as a Soft Power Tool: Saudi's Approach as Public Diplomacy	2019	A.N. Alzubaidi, S. Toubasi, M. Hawamdeh	Concept Based	Saudi Arabia	Education, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Saudi, culture, language	Soft Power	Saudi Arabia has many institutes and schools outside its territory that are a form of soft power in spreading Islamic culture around the world.
16	IMAGINE: Canada as a leader in international education. How can Canada benefit from the Australian experience?	2013	Roopa Desai Trilokekar and Zainab Kizilbash	Concept Based	Canada and Australia	International Education, International students	International Education	The two major formative strands of internationalization in Canadian universities are development cooperation and international students.
17	Reconceptualizing 'Internationalization' in Higher Education: The case of Hong Kong	2020	Suyan Pan	Concept Based	Hong Kong	IHE, Geopolitics, Cross- Border Mobility, Internationalizing Universities	IHE	The government's intensive investment in creating world-class universities for national integration coincided with the statist instrumentalism characterizing the PRC's approach to the internationalization of China's higher

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Table 1 (continued)

Sr. No	Title	Year		Type	Referenced Countries	Domain	Conceptual background	Major Argument
18	Soft power as a policy rationale for international education in the UK: A critical analysis	2017	Sylvie Lomer	Concept Based, Critical views	UK	International education, Soft power, International students	Soft Power	education, which employs state-funded projects. Soft Power discourse in education undermines the capacity of educators to establish critical pedagogical relationships of equality, respect and care which for many lie at the heart of international education.
19	China's Educational soft Power through Confucius Institutes: A case Study of South Africa	2021	Johanes Caesario Martin and Rangga Aditya Elias	Concept Based	China and Africa	Soft Power, Education, Confucius Institutes	Soft Power	CLs are Chinese public education institutitons and also China's soft power agents as they teach Chinese languages and cultures not only to South Africa but the world as well.
20	Making Soft Power Work: Theory and Practice in Australia s International Education Policy	2017	Natalie Laifer, Nicholas Kitchen	Concept Based	Australia	Public Diplomacy, Operationalizing Soft Power, International Education Policy, Higher Education	International Education, Soft Power	The design of Australia's international education policy was consciously informed by multiple dimensions of soft power.
21	Russian Soft Power in the Baltic States through the Lens of Research: Traditions, Competition, Confrontation	2019	V. V. Vorotnikov, N. A. Ivanova	Critical Views	Russia, Baltic Countries	Soft Power, Education, Culture	Soft Power	The Baltics consider Russia's use of soft power in terms of hard power, i.e. as a threat to national security.
22	Higher Education as a Bridge between China and Nepal: Mapping Education as Soft Power in Chinese Foreign Policy	2021	Priya Gauttam, Bawa Singh, Vijay K. Chattu	Concept Based	China and Nepal	Public diplomacy, soft power, educational aid, Geopolitics, Foreign Policy	Education in Foreign Policy Discourse	The South Asian zone, especially Nepal, is significant for China, where its educational diplomacy is playing as a "bridge between Sino- Nepal relations."
23	"That'll Teach Them": Investigating the Soft Power Conversion Model through the Case of Russian Higher Education	2022	Anne Crowley Vigneau, Andrey A. Baykov, E. Kalyuzhnova	Case-Centered Empirical Study	Russia	Soft Power Conversion Model, Higher Education, Foreign Policy, World-Class Universities	Soft Power Conversion Model	A survey of foreign students starting their studies and of another finishing their studies in three leading Russian universities reveals that receiving a higher education in Russia may contribute to aligning students' positions with the Russian perspective on international issues.
24	The Phases of International Education and Internationalization throughout History	2021	Osman Gultekin	Concept Based	No Specific Country	International Education, International students, Internationalization, International Student Mobility	IHE	Genuine internationalization processes in higher educational institutions have lost their original meaning and sacrificed to political and economic manipulations of the nation-states.
25	The return of China's soft power in South East Asia: An analysis of the International Branch Campuses established by three Chinese Universities	2018	Lan Hea and Stephen Wilkinsb	Concept Based	China and South East Asia	Higher Education Policy, Soft Power, Transnational Higher Education, International Branch Campuses	Soft Power and Education Export	China is leveraging its existing soft power to assist or promote its education export, and China's soft power is returning to South East Asia.

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Table 1 (continued)

Sr. No	Title	Year		Type	Referenced Countries	Domain	Conceptual background	Major Argument
26	Diplomacy and Education: A Systematic Review of Literature	2020	Muhammad Mussa Khan, Riaz Ahmad, Lloyd W. Fernald	Concept Based	China	Educational Exchanges, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Foreign Policy	Education as Public Diplomacy and Soft Power	Whether it's a small country or a major player in the international politics, educational exchanges and bursaries play a vital role in promoting its soft image in addition to culture and history to the foreign audience.
27	Erasmus student or EU ambassador? People-to-people contact in the European Neighbourhood policy: the cases of Georgia, Ukraine and Tunisia	2017	Andrea Perilli	Case-Centered Empirical Study	European Union and ENP Countries	Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, Higher Education Exchange Programme	Soft Power and Public Diplomacy	Due to socialization and through people-to-people (P2P) contact, Erasmus participants are most likely to become EU informal ambassadors.
28	The Role of U.S. Elite Military Schools in Promoting Intercultural Understanding and Democratic Governance	2015	Carol Atkinson	Concept Based	US	Education, soft power, exchange, constructivism	Soft Power	Educational exchanges at the U.S. military's war and staff colleges promote intercultural understanding, international security, and help the United States achieve its foreign policy goals.
29	Strategic Communication and the Marketization of Educational Exchange	2015	Hamilton Bean	Concept Based, Critical Views	US	Educational Exchange, Public Diplomacy, Discourse, Marketization	Educational Exchange Discourse	U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs' (ECA) program evaluations are a form of weak propaganda.
30	The Role of International Educational Exchange in Turkish Foreign Policy as a Reconstructed Soft Power Tool	2021	Fatma Aslı Kelkitli	Concept Based, Critical Views	Turkey	Soft Power, Foreign Policy, International Educational Exchange	Soft Power	Turkey's attempt to utilize international educational exchanges for the realization of its foreign policy objectives has recorded meagre levels of success.
31	Empire, emotion, exchange: (dis) orienting encounters of/with post-9/11 US cultural diplomacy	2020	Laura Mills	Concept Based	US	Cultural diplomacy, disorientation, empire, exchange	Cultural Diplomacy	US cultural exchange programmes are not simply exchange but to impose US culture on the students of YES programme in the veil of tolerance and cosmopolitanism.
32	A review of the current state of research on China's international image management	2019	Falk Hartig	Concept Based	China	International Image Management, International Political Communication	Public Diplomacy, Soft Power	Image Management is a crucial aspect of China's engagement with the world, and the related scholarship has already produced high-quality learned analyses.
33	Battlefield of global ranking: How do power rivalries shape soft power index building?	2019	Chang Zhang	Case-Centered Empirical Study	All Countries	Cultural Hegemony, Index Building, Soft Power	Cultural Diplomacy	While the soft power indexes originating from Western organizations largely normalized liberal values and the current international hierarchy, the Chinese national image survey provides a more self-reflective approach to soft power measurement.

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Table 1 (continued)

Sr. No	Title	Year		Type	Referenced Countries	Domain	Conceptual background	Major Argument
34	Ends Changed, Means Retained: Scholarship Programs, Political Influence, and Drifting Goals	2015	Iain Wilson	Concept Based	US and UK	Exchange Programs, Opinion Leader Model, Education Policy, Foreign Policy, Scholarship	Soft Power	Digging deeper into the histories of several scholarship programs which are now being portrayed in this way shows they were actually set up for very different reasons and explanations for why scholarships are being given to foreign citizens have changed over time.
35	Willing interpreters and receivers: American alumni of the Japan exchange and teaching (JET) program	2017	Emily Metzgar	Concept Based	US and Japan	International Exchanges, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy	International Exchanges and Soft Power	The American JET alumni community offers a compelling example of how the creation of “willing interpreters and receivers” (Nye) through an international exchange program can yield benefits for both sponsors and participants.
36	Whither Soft Power? Divisions, Milestones, and Prospects of a Research Programme in the Making	2019	Bakalov	Concept Based	No Specific country	soft power; international relations; theories of power	Soft Power	As the review shows, the nascent research programme benefits both from studies treating soft power as a category of practice and from ones that use it as a category of analysis.
37	The Influence of International Education Experience on Host Country-Related Outcomes: An Analysis of Chinese Students' Relationships with South Korean Universities	2020	Hye Hyun Hong, Suman Lee, and Qianqian Tian	Case-Centered Empirical Study	China (home country) and South Korea (host country)	International Education Experience, Institutions, University–Student Relationship	Soft Power	Results showed a significant positive association between Chinese student perceptions of their relationships with host universities and their attitudes toward South Korea.
38	Higher Education as a Projection of America's Soft Power	2008	Philip G. Altbach, Patti McGill Peterson	Concept Based	US	Soft Power, Higher Education, Diplomacy	Soft Power	Higher education has played in supporting America's ascendant role in international education and in defining America's place in the hierarchy of nations.
39	The Role of U.S. Elite Military Schools in Promoting Intercultural Understanding and Democratic Governance	2015	Carol Atkinson	Concept Based	US	Education, Military, Exchange, Socialization, Constructivism	soft power	Educational exchanges at the U.S. military's war and staff colleges promote intercultural understanding, international security, and help the United States achieve its foreign policy goals.
40	Skilled Migration: The Perspective of Developing Countries	2007	Frederic Docquier, Hillel Rapoport	Concept Based	Developing Countries	Migration, Brain Drain, Economic Development	Student Migration	Skilled migrants continue to affect the economy of their origin country after they have left, be it through remittances, return migration, or participation in business and scientific networks.
41	Crossborder Education: An Analytical Framework for Program and Provider Mobility	2006	Jane Knight	Concept Based	No Specific Country	High Education, International Student, High Education Sector, Student Mobility	Education Exchange	It is only during the last two decades that more emphasis has been placed on the movement of education programs, higher education institutions (HEIs), and new commercial providers across national borders.

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Table 1 (continued)

Sr. No	Title	Year		Type	Referenced Countries	Domain	Conceptual background	Major Argument
42	International Universities: Misunderstandings and Emerging Models?	2015	Jane Knight	Concept Based	No Specific Country	Internationalization, Intercultural, satellite and branch campus	IHE	Internationalization has transformed higher education institutions and systems through satellite campuses.
43	Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory and its Revelation towards Ideological and Political Education	2017	Li Lin, Leng Hongtao	Concept Based	China	Soft Power, Joseph Nye, Ideological and Political Education	Soft Power	Today, culture, policy and sense of value become more and more important in the international relationship.
44	Special issue on University Internationalization – towards Transformative change in Higher Education	2011	Anna Magyar, Anna Magyar	Concept Based	UK	Internationalisation, Higher Education, Universities	IHE	A more critical and holistic approach towards internationalization can have implications for all staff and students in the university, and in all areas of activity.
45	Questing for Internationalization of Universities in Asia: Critical Reflections	2016	Ka Ho Mok	Concept Based, Critical Views	Asia	Internationalization, University; Asia, New Imperialism	Internationalization	Globalization and the evolution of the knowledge-based economy have caused dramatic changes to the character and functions of higher education in most countries around the world.
46	Revising the Soft Power Concept: What are the means and mechanisms of soft power?	2011	Steven B. Rothman	Concept Based	All Countries	soft power, agenda-setting, foreign policy	Soft Power	Reconceptualizing soft power in terms of objects that are controlled and utilized by policy-makers, such as agenda-setting and framing, provides us with more useful analytical variables to understand international relations and to provide policy recommendations.
47	Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power	2008	Ernest J. Wilson	Concept Based	No specific Country	Foreign Policy; Public Diplomacy; Soft Power; Smart Power	Smart Power	Advancing smart power has become a national security imperative, driven both by long-term structural changes in international conditions and by short-term failures of the current administration.
48	Education as a source and tool of soft power in international relations	2015	Anna Wojciuk, Maciej Michalek & Marta Stormowska	Concept Based	China and Finland	Education, soft power, Cultural Values	Soft power	A high quality education sector is one of the important factors that contributes to a country's soft power.

Table 2
Distinctive Phases of International Education and its Internationalization.

Time Period	Theme	Major Characteristic	Lingua Franca	Knowledge Center
5th- 1st century BC	<i>Archaic internationalization</i>	knowledge was carried out by the traveling teacher philosophers of Greece	Greek and Latin	Greece and Rome
8th to 12th century	<i>Islamic world internationalization</i>	Hellenistic intellectual legacy and oriental knowledge from the East	Arabic	Baghdad
13th and 14th centuries	<i>Medieval ages internationalization'</i>	Establishment of first Christian University in Europe	Latin	Europe
18th-19th century	<i>Colonial internationalization'</i>	Education was used for the exploitation of people and land of the colonies by colonizers	French, German, English	Europe- France, Germany, Britain
After WW-I (first half of the 20th century)	<i>Traditional internationalization'</i>	Individual, unorganized and, low-level student mobility due to severe political turbulence	English, French, German,	Europe, USA, Canada, and Australia
After WW-II 1945-1980s	<i>International Diplomatization of Education (North-South)</i>	First use of education as a diplomatic tool to achieve foreign policy goals, scholarships and exchange programmes offered to overseas students for the promotion of education, mobility from South to North,	English	Europe and US
1990s-2000	<i>Commercialization of international education</i>	Privatization, corporatization, Commodification, marketization of education,	English	Europe and US
2000s-2010	<i>intense industrialization of education'</i>	Bologna Process, global rise of private universities, off-shore campuses, increased cross-border activity and student mobility, immigration/visa reforms	English	Europe and US
2010s- till present	<i>Complex competitive internationalization</i>	Influence of rankings in education, quality assurance, organized education hubs, regionalization of education, soft power competition, knowledge diplomacy	English	Europe and US

4. Results

The review of literature related to the educational dimension of soft power are categorized under five major sub-sections which is obtained through coding in the Nvivo. These categories are based on its occurrence in the literature. The most common codes are converted into sub-sections which is further divided into subsequent categories within each section that adds validity to it. Each sub-section demonstrates the primary and dominant outcomes of the reviewed studies which are as follows.

4.1. Internationalization of higher education

The concept of internationalization of higher education (IHE) has been mentioned and analyzed by various researchers with regards to their studies on education and international relations. On the basis of literature obtained from reviewed studies, this section highlights: definition of the concept, historical background, various viewpoints on analysis, and driving forces behind internationalization of higher education.

4.1.1. Definitions

Knight (as cited in Ref. [26]) defined internationalization of higher education (IHE) as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purposes, functions, or delivery of tertiary education.” As a first international organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1974)¹ defined international education as “the standardized national education for mutual international understanding, cooperation, and peace”. Vestal and Leestma (as cited in Ref. [26]) defined the term “international education” as: “a) study of the education of other peoples in other countries, b) educational exchanges and study abroad, c) technical assistance to educational development in other countries, d) international cooperation in educational development through international organizations, e) comparative and cross-cultural studies in a variety of subjects and disciplines, f) intercultural education.”

4.1.2. Evolution of IHE

Since the recorded history, the most salient feature of IHE has been the mobility of international students, be it academic flows from Greece, Athens, Egypt, mediaeval Europe, or 20th-century North America [27]. Gultekin [26] has chronologically described the distinctive phases of IHE which are highlighted in Table 1. The internationalization of education began in ancient Greece where knowledge spread with the travels of teacher philosophers during the 5th–1st centuries BC. Pythagoras has been the first wandering international scholar in the world around 5th and 4th century BC [28]. Later, the intellectual center was shifted to the Muslim world as they learned and engaged with the Hellenistic intellectual legacy and oriental knowledge from the East, particularly from China and India, while Europe was experiencing a “Dark Age” [26]. However, with the establishment of first Christian University in Europe

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization UNESCO. (1974). Revision of the 1974 Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace.

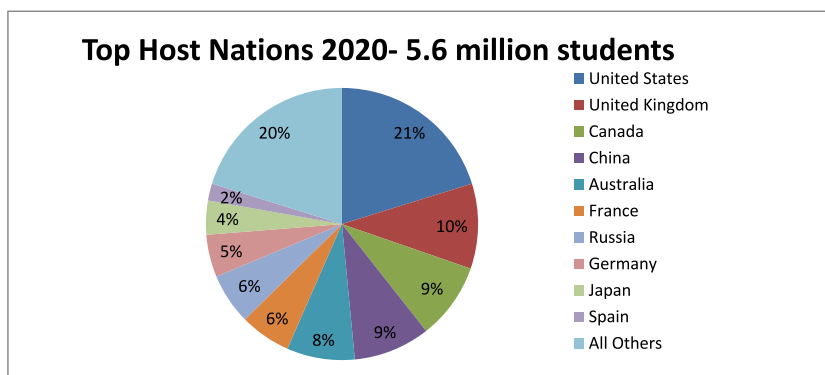


Fig. 2. Top host destination countries for students in 2020.

Source: Global Mobility Trends (Project Atlas, 2020) [70]

during the 13th and 14th centuries, Europe again became the major receiver of foreign students [26]. Towards the 19th century, education system was travelled through colonialism where many colonial countries built their education system based on their colonizers, for instance, India and other Asian, African, Caribbean and North American countries build their higher education models based on the British system. During the same period in Europe, the two major university models were emerged from France and Germany and the current higher education system of US is heavily influenced by the German Education Model.

The use of international educational exchange as an instrument of foreign policy and diplomacy tool started in the post-WW II. Developed countries used education to intervene in the domestic affairs of the developing countries. It was the period of '*international diplomatization of education*'. Later, with the introduction of neoliberal paradigm in 1980's, education became instrument of not only to achieve political goals but economic interests as well [29]. During 2000s, '*intense industrialization of education*' took place with skyrocketed student mobility, immigration/visa reforms, and global rise of private universities. Particularly 2010s onward, there has been a new complex competitive world where many countries make significant investments in their national universities in an effort to elevate them to "world-class" status [26]. The purpose of these efforts are to attract more overseas students and gaining more political and economic advantages (Table 2).

4.1.3. Viewpoints on analysis

The concept of IHE was analyzed by various academicians in their own settings. According to Francois [30], there are three perspectives to analyze international education: philosophical, pedagogical, and comparative. Mok [31], identified three different views on internationalization of higher education. Firstly, the "internationalist" view which glorifies the ancient version of internationalization of higher education which is based on dissemination of knowledge. Secondly, a "translocalist" view that supports the nationalistic view of the IHE by prioritizing own national educational systems over the other nations. Thirdly, he explained "globalist" view that believes in the idea that national education should encourage intercultural understanding and cooperation between international institutions. Besides, Pan [32] expounded four theoretical lenses on IHE which are commonly used in the context of European and American higher education since the late 1990s: neoliberalism, soft power, global citizenship, and internationalization at home. The main feature of these theories are marketization of universities and education for revenue generation, enhance host countries reputation, development of cross-cultural awareness, and employable capacities among international students in accordance with global job markets respectively [33,34]. Moreover, Magyar & Robinson-Pant [35] stated that IHE aims to adopt pedagogical approach in university curricula to emphasize the importance of experiential learning for intercultural understanding and international co-operation respectively. On the contrary, Wihlborg & Robson [36] argued that these discourses explain the system of western countries only. All the cross-country references are given in the context of US and Europe. Therefore, IHE must be re-conceptualized to replicate the structure, system, and functions of the developing countries as well.

In the contemporary times, Knight [37] divided IHE into three generations. The first generation-the '*classic model*', comprises of collaborative activities at home and abroad through international partnerships and exchange of international student and staff, the second generation called the '*satellite model*', denotes establishment of satellite offices, branch campuses, research centers, and management offices abroad. The third generation advances the second-generation model through '*co-founding international university*' in another country with international partnership [37]. Aparecido & Schettini [38] in their research on Brazil's education system found that universities are monitoring and taking note of the political and economic environments of the nations they choose to open their offices in, particularly, in regards to components seen as externalizations of soft power. Similarly, Saudi Arabia has also established many institutes and schools in other countries as a form of soft power in order to spread Islamic culture around the world [39].

4.1.4. Drivers of IHE

The end of the Cold War has resulted in the weakening of political confrontation and accelerated the process of world integration. The increasing interdependency among world economies and advancement of digital technology has reduced the political tensions

Table 3
List of Major International Scholarships Programmes cited in reviewed studies.

Nation	Scholarship programmes
US	Fulbright-Nehru Research Fellowships International Military Education and Training (IMET)
UK	The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) British Marshall and Chevening Scholarships schemes Erasmus Mundus programs
Germany	Germany's Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)
France	Eiffel Scholarships
Japan	MEXT Scholarships
Australia	Australian Leadership Awards and Endeavour Awards Asia Bound Grants Program
China	Chinese Government Scholarship Program (China Scholarship Council)

among the countries. The traditional, political and military confrontations converted into a comprehensive national strength challenges showcased through economy, science and technology, and talents in this era of globalization and digitalization [40]. Higher education is also impacted by the elements of globalization and digitalization such as the idea of a knowledge society, the existence of information and communication technology, the growth of market-based economies, trade liberalization, and new governance structures [41]. In the context of China, some authors [42,43] have analyzed that Beijing is appealing to the people of the world for the re-globalization of values and norms shaped by 'Chinese Characteristics'. Hence, globalization and digitalization have been contended as the major driving forces behind IHE policy of states.

4.2. Utilization of reputed institutions and quality of education

To attract foreign students, the primary need of a country is to elevate the prestige of its educational system and institutions. Given the huge number of universities across the world, it is a difficult task for students to choose one. Therefore, while choosing, students use to pay attention to the world ranking of the university, educational and scientific achievements, and the number of the foreign students already studying in the university etc. Therefore, it is observed in the reviewed studies that many countries are making several efforts to mark their universities globally competitive and bringing quality in their education system which are as follows:

Russia. Ostashova [44] analyzed higher education experience of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Previously, the prestige of universities of Soviet Union attracted many students from developing and socialist countries. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the territory of state was contracted which led to the reduction of many universities. Moreover, the country's attention to the higher education was also decreased, resulting in insufficient funding and depletion of educational and scientific capitals. Therefore, the number of foreign students in Russia decreased significantly in the first half of the 2000s. Later, Russia again included education among one of its major national projects and joined Bologna Process. After these efforts, the number of universities in Russia and eventually foreign students began to increase again. Currently, Russia is one of the favorite study destinations among foreign students especially in the field of applied mathematics, physics, and biology. In order to increase country's educational prestige, Russian President Vladimir Putin made various efforts such as launching the national project called "Education" aimed at increasing the "human capital" in Russia in 2005. It also launched "Project 5-100" with the aim of maximizing the competitive positions of a group of leading Russian universities in the global research and education market [44].

China. Similarly, during the opening-up period, China also began to actively promote higher education institutions. Afterwards, the number of universities in China has been rapidly growing. In 1949, there were only 205 universities, which reached to 2914 in 2017 [38]. In addition, China is working on high quality education standards through Projects 211 and 985. The major aim behind these projects is to strengthen around 100 higher education institutions and create elite universities to attract the most endowed students across the world [45].

Poland. Author Bogorodetska [46] has analyzed the public diplomacy efforts of Poland through its University of Warsaw. The university has established an office to organize promotional events and ceremonies to create brand value for itself. The international relations office of the university is responsible to organize international events and create the favorable conditions for the delegates of foreign university. Moreover, introductory meetings are organized for international students to showcase the values such as "being respectful to others" and "that all of us are equal" to disseminate positive image about university. An interesting way of promotion of the University of Warsaw is an initiative called "is our ambassador" designed for its alumni with intent to motivate them helping in attracting more foreign students. Moreover, the faculty members assigned with responsibility to establish foreign contacts, organize international conferences, meetings with foreign professors, and elaborate programs for cooperation with prestigious foreign universities. Students at the university are provided with special facilities such as free legal advice, free assistance to solve problems in the informal and confidential manner etc. [45]. All these initiatives of the university highlight its thrust to become world-class university to attract more foreign students.

Japan. At the state level, Rothman [47] has analyzed Japanese government's endeavours to attract foreign nationals in three ways: (i) bringing foreign nationals as English teachers, (ii) using international educational institutions to teach Japanese language and culture, (iii) and using training institutions to teach Japanese language and culture. Japanese government has also launched several programs such as the Global 30 Program (2009) to internationalize its universities. To attract more foreign students, the curricula of

universities were designed on the basis of international standards [47].

Australia and Hong Kong. In Australia's case, the National Strategy for International Education (NSIE) 2025 was the first national plan for international education launched by the Australian Government in 2016. It lays out a 10-year plan for strengthening Australia's position as a global leader in education, research, and training [23]. The Australian universities rank third following the UK and the US in the quality of education, making it one of the most preferred learning destinations for students. In like manner, Hong Kong (HK) also converged upon the formula of internationalization of its universities to impart excellency in its higher education through international benchmarking in teaching/research administration and assessment [32]. HK universities have also developed students' global competencies through internships, study abroad opportunities, and academic collaboration, mostly by relying on global networks to establish exchange partnerships with Western institutions [32]. Therefore, it can be said that many countries are making many efforts to make themselves attractive destinations for foreign students by fostering quality education and uplifting the status of their universities up to the world-class standards. In contrast of the above studies which highlighted the countries efforts of establishment of reputed institutions and quality of education, Docquier, & Rapoport [48], emphasized that developing countries are not able to establish reputed institutions and provide quality to their education system due to their limited financial resources. Therefore, talented youth of the Global South are migrating to developed countries and contributing in development of the western countries.

4.3. Strategies for promoting cross-border student mobility

In the present globalized world, the trend of student migration from one country to another is steadily growing. According to UNESCO [49], over 6.1 million students chose to pursue their higher education abroad before the COVID-19 outbreak. If the current growth rate continues, Institute of International Education predicted that this figure expected to hit 8 million by 2025 [50]. Mostly, the developed countries are the top destinations for foreign students (See Fig. 2).

The student[s] mobility trend shows that higher education's global integration and systematization should be a priority for countries who wish to compete internationally. Many research studies included in this systematic review have pointed out the role of national governments in fostering international student mobility through offering high-quality educational opportunities to foreign students with an aim to build their soft power. Various countries are providing scholarship and fellowships to foreign students and conducting exchange programs to attract foreign students (Table 3). The country-wise scholarship and exchange programmes extracted from the reviewed studies are as follows:

US. The first attempt to increase international student mobility was made by the US after WW-II. Washington launched the fourth dimension of its foreign policy i.e. cultural aspect through unveiling the Fulbright Act (1946) and the Smith-Mundt Act (1948) [51] [52]. These two documents envisaged the financing of international exchange and scholarship programme by the US government to increase its influence through cross-border student mobility [53]. Apart from students' exchange, the US Government also launched IMET for military exchange between US and other countries [54] and Youth Exchange and Study Programme (YES) for Islamic countries after 9/11 attack [55].

Russia. Likewise, Soviet Union also encouraged student mobility through international educational exchange. During mid-1950s, the former USSR started offering higher education scholarship for the prospective leadership cadre people of newly independent states of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. With the establishment of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in Moscow in 1960, the communist government offered higher education programs to foreign students, especially to those coming from developing countries as an extension of humanitarian aid. Presidents, prime ministers, political party leaders, ambassadors, and intellectuals from many African, Asian and Latin American countries were notably the alumni of this university [47]. Along with exchange programmes, the Russian Government provide scholarships to 15,000 international students on a yearly basis, which includes free tuition, maintenance allowance, and dormitory accommodation which ultimately contributed to movement of students from other parts of world to Russia [56].

UK. Correspondingly, UK also designed an international postgraduate scholarship program called Chevening Scholarship Program (1983) with the support of Foreign and Commonwealth Office and partner organizations [45] [57] [46]. It is facilitating mass level cross-border student[s] mobility even now [45]. In 2009, the EU launched another postgraduate scholarship program called Erasmus Mundus that renamed as the Erasmus + Program in 2014. It offers joint masters and doctorate degree education packages to international students in two or more higher education institutions in the EU [26].

Germany. Similarly, Germany's Academic Exchange Service programme (DAAD) established in 1950 also increasing intra-national student mobility. It has financed around 2.5 million scholarships, with about 1.5 million scholarships for Germans and roughly 1 million for foreigners – making it the largest funding body for academic exchange worldwide [51,52].

Australia. Mammen et al. [12], has examined Australian government initiative of Asia Bound Grants Program where it has allocated 37 million dollars to enable more than 10,000 Australian students to study in Asian countries. It also signed MoUs with various countries such as Malaysia to deepen educational exchange [12].

China. By following the path of the developed countries, China has also facilitated international student mobility by offering scholarship programs to international students since the mid- 1950's. Later, the scholarship programme was restructured and institutionalized with the establishment of a regulatory body called the China Scholarship Council (CSC), under the aegis of the Chinese Ministry of Education in 1997 [58]. The participants of this programme are primarily from African and Asian countries who move to China for educational purposes [39,52].

Turkey, Saudi Arabia, India. Unlike the developed nations, many developing countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and India with limited global ambitions and modest financial resources are also facilitating student mobility through providing fellowship and exchange programmes to the foreign students. For instance, Great Student Exchange Project for students from Azerbaijan and the four

Turkic Central Asian states [47], Mevlana Exchange Program [19,47], and Türkiye Scholarships Program [59] are the major scholarship programme provided by the government of Turkey. Similarly, Alzubaidi et al. [35], has analyzed Saudi Arabia's efforts of international movement of students' through its multi-channel educational strategy. Saudi government combines sending its students to other countries for education simultaneously attracting foreign students to its territory. Authors discussed King Abdullah Scholarship Program (2005) which was introduced to allow and support eligible Saudi students to study in reputed universities of US and King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) scholarship to students who want to study in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in top American universities [60]. Moreover, the Indian Government has also been focusing on increasing inbound student mobility among Asian and African region through its Study in India' Program, which aims to quadruple the current number of inbound students by the year 2023. Also, the major focus of India's new education policy (NEP, 2019) is to attract international students through providing various financial supports, streamlining visa regulations, and signing joint collaborations with other institutions.

Japan, France, Hong Kong, Brazil, Poland, Australia. Similarly, countries like Japan [51,61], France [51], Hong Kong [32], Brazil [52], Poland [46], and Australia [62] are offering various scholarship and exchange programmes to foreign students, thus, facilitating intra-state cross-border student mobility. Arguably, student mobility for educational purpose is one of the many factors contributes to generate soft power of a nation through higher education. As a critique of the current student mobility system, Docquier, & Rapoport [48] argued that it is a major setback to the current international education system that inequality still prevails in education which is a fundamental requirement of human development. The flow of students is from developing countries to developed countries because of the lack of good educational opportunities in developed countries.

4.4. Associated foreign policy goals with educational programmes

In global politics, states are using dynamic education diplomacy to defend and advance their own national interests. It has been observed in the reviewed studies that there are associated foreign policy goals behind the scholarship and educational exchange programs offered by various countries to international students. The country-wise examples are as follows:

France and Britain. France and Great Britain were among the first European countries to deploy elite training programmes in the Middle East and Central Asia as a means of fostering relations between the capital and the colonies [40]. Presently, the associated goals behind Britain's current Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), is to continue marking its presence in the colonized countries; and most importantly, to bring best talent of colonized nations into British higher education system [51]. The recipients of the scholarship include presidents, prime ministers, ministers, members of parliament, party leaders, ambassadors, writers, and journalists of other countries [47].

Germany. Similarly, Germany's motto behind exchange programme through German Academic Exchange Service is to "educate future leaders, who are connected internationally and act in a globally responsible manner" [63]. The same highlights the genuinely political mission of the organization. To implement the strategy, Berlin emphasized the active creation of alumni networks through encouraging them to return to Germany regularly for alumni meetings ([52], p.511).

US. The US's foreign educational policy has always been focused on the "target audience" [64]. US Policymakers assess the scale of educational activities required and identify the influential groups of the society in the field of public or political decision-making on the basis of political situation of the host country. In the 1950s: American programs were focused on educating political elite of the Western Europe to resist Soviet influence; in the 1960s: education programme targeted young people of developing countries and Western Europe to counter the anti-Americanism narrative; from middle 1990s: The American government concentrated its efforts on young democracies i.e. former USSR republics. The aspiration of US government behind these programmes were to introduce American way of life among the state elites such as government officials, legislators, publishers, journalists and reporters in order to demonstrate the functioning of democratic institutions [40]. Hence, the major rationales behind US policy of using education as a soft power tool was to spread political values, to develop informal links which can later be used to affect the political agenda and lobby business interests to create positive image of the US, and marketization of education to generate profit from foreign students. Additionally, after the 9/11 attack, the US launched a special scholarship programme for students of Islamic countries to reorient them according to the US values [55].

Turkey. Likewise, Turkey is also pursuing educational diplomacy to attain foreign policy objectives. Aras & Mohammed [23] found that major aim behind Turkish higher education scholarship programme was to establish a pool of brand ambassadors in order to promote its good image abroad. Authors such as Kelkitli [47] examined the foreign policy objective behind Turkey's Great Student Exchange Project (1992) were to fill the vacuum created in the South Caucasus and Central Asia with the fall of the Soviet Union. Later, Turkey launched another scholarship and exchange programme with an aim to boost friendly ties between Turkey and targeted countries and to win the hearts and minds of foreign public through educational diplomacy ([47], p.55).

Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Alzubaidi et al. [39], has analyzed education as a soft power in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy. Saudi Arabia has established many institutes and schools outside its territory and sending Saudi students to other countries with multiple objectives such as to spread Islamic culture around the world, create opportunities to establish Saudi businesses in other countries, construct the favorable image of Saudi in the eyes of the governments and public, attract people to religious tourism, establish strong foundations for future projects, and to attract international investment to Saudi Arabia [39].

China. China as one of the major powers in the world has also prioritised the IHE for national pride, technological advancement, and economic development [65,66]. To promote national pride, government of China is using educational diplomacy to spread Chinese language, culture and state narratives. Beijing strategically established various Confucius institutes across the world to project its soft power [42,67]. China is obtaining a two-way benefit through education. Usually, it is projected that education work as a soft

power for the host country. Conversely, China is getting benefits being a sender country as well. Through its policy of Internationalization of Higher Education, China has well designed its foreign policy goals and prepared its students as Chinese ambassadors who go overseas for studies [66]. Furthermore, Martin and Elias [68] analyzed the China-Africa educational cooperation framework and concluded that Beijing's main objective behind this partnership is to achieve geo-economic and geopolitical objectives in the region.

Brazil. In like manner, Brazil's objective behind "Ciência sêm Fronteiras" (Science without Borders - CsF) Academic Exchange Program is to "educate and train its people to develop them into much-needed highly skilled work force" ([52] p.505). In addition, Hewitt [69] has analyzed this programme in the context of Brazil- China relations and argued that student mobility between the two countries effected by this programme provide significant advantage to both countries.

Australia. Scholars such as Panfilov & Savchenko [40] have observed, nowadays, the goal of Australia's educational programme is to gain economic benefits from foreign students in return of quality education [23,70].

Canada. In 2011, Canadian Federal Government has formulated international education strategy called IMAGINE: *Education in/au Canada* to boost educational marketing for revenue generation [70]. Hence, it can be projected that the exporting educational services have both political and economic value.

In contrast to the above studies, which highlight the hidden geopolitical and geo-economic agenda behind education programmes, Gultekin [26] put forward a critical perspective, saying, "international education has become a tool to achieve political and economic motives rather than addressing the real tenets of an international university, such as academic collaboration, the global dissemination of information, world peace and understanding, intercultural competency, and global citizenship" ([26] p. 107).

4.5. Student[s] experiences in host countries

To understand how soft power can be built through education, it is required to evaluate the interactions between students and the host country. The experience gained by students through this interaction might affect foreign policy outcomes in the long run. As Nye [10] observed that "culture is transferred [...] through human connections, visits, and exchanges". In view of this objective, many case-centric empirical research has assessed the impact of scholarship and exchange programme of host countries over participating students.

Hong, Lee, & Tian [25] conducted an online survey (2017) with Chinese students who had studied or were currently studying at South Korean universities. The results of the study showed a positive correlation between the student's living experience and the image of the host country. The positive experiences of Chinese students in South Korea made them supporters of the policies of the Korean government and motivated them to buy Korean products. However, a contradiction was also observed by the author in terms of support to the host country's conflictual foreign policy towards their home country. Hence, the author concluded that "It seems that living and studying in South Korea could have made Chinese students feel more sympathetic or at least hold more objective views regarding South Korea and South Korean foreign policy but not at the cost of interests of their home country" [25].

With regards of Europe's fellowship programme, Perilli [71] has examined views of ENP (Eastern Partnership)² countries students' views regarding Erasmus + Program through survey method. In the result, author proved the hypothesis that "Due to socialization through people-to-people (P2P) contact, Erasmus participants are most likely to become EU informal ambassadors and carriers of EU's soft power ([71], p.02).

Anne and Elena (2022) examined Nye's soft power conversion model of higher education in the context of Russian Higher education. Through the case study method, the author tested the preposition that "higher education has been used as a tool to achieve foreign policy goals". The survey was conducted on two groups of foreign students, one who started their studies and another group who were finishing their studies in three top Russian universities. The researchers found that pursuing higher education at Russian universities aligns student[s] positions with the Russian perspective on the international issues discussed at these universities.

In context of Turkey, the study conducted by Aras, & Mohammed [23] on the students availing Turkish government scholarship called "Türkiye Bursları" found that 115 of the 195 students surveyed indicated that they had a good experience of studying in Turkey and 65% students agreed to recommend others to study in the country. However, despite positive affirmations of Turkish image and culture, many students expressed dissatisfaction with the language of instruction, which the author suggested for consideration by the policymakers of this programme.

On the contrary to above research studies, some authors [57,72–74] found that education does not contribute to build soft power when there are wide political and cultural differences between countries. For instance, by conducting research on Chinese international students studying in western countries, Bislev [57] analyzed that existing studies do reveal that educational exchange programmes can promote the creation of soft power under certain circumstances, but some of these conditions are problematic to meet in the case of Sino-Western educational partnership. The Author identified that cultural and political differences, preconceived notions of the "other", and the structural barriers in the educational system were the major reasons behind its failure. In addition, he argued that the long-term outcome in terms of acculturation and value change in a couple of years is quite limited for the Chinese students in western settings or for western students in Chinese setting ([57], p.105). The above mentioned studies shows various outcomes of the case-centered empirical research which helps in understanding different perspectives on education as a resource of soft power.

² The ENP countries are the six Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan plus the ten southern Mediterranean countries of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Israel.

5. Discussion

The goals of higher education policy are not only limited to the advancement of the education system for the human development but it has now become an alternative model against the coercive techniques used by the states to expand their influence. In this case, education fits directly into Nye's analogy of soft power through which countries can influence choices of others through consent rather than coercion. Each of the studies selected for this systematic review expounded the different forms such as educational diplomacy, student mobility, public diplomacy, foreign education policy, cultural diplomacy, scholarship and exchange programmes etc., through which higher education is being used by countries to fulfil their vested national interests. In each case, education is depicted as an attractive part of the country.

It is observed from the literature highlighted in the results section, the role of higher education is expanding from domestic to the international arena and has become an indispensable part of the foreign policy of states for conducting international relations. However, the scattered nature of studies in education and international relations areas were obstructing the knowledge on this significant topic. Therefore, this systematic review collected all the relevant data related to higher education and organized it within results section which are derived from the content of the selected studies. Hence, it fulfils first objective of the paper which is to provide an overview through systematically organizing and reviewing the available literature. The subsequent parts of this section outlines remaining two objectives of the study: (i) a framework of essential conditions to harness education as soft power resource; and (ii) prospects for future research.

5.1. Essential Conditions for Harnessing Education as a soft power resource

While analyzing data within results section, it has been observed that there are some essential conditions required to harness education in terms of soft power (See Fig. 3), are listed as follows.

1. A country must meet the basic needs of a modern economy with a decent share of expenditure on the education sector and possess a cultural heritage and attractive political values.
2. A country should formulate a standard policy on national education and integrate it into the international educational and scientific space to attract foreign students. Establishing international partner institutions, facilitating academic and student exchange programmes, providing financial assistance to foreign students should be the primary goals of a country's IHE policy.
3. Reputable institutions providing quality education are important assets for a country to integrate into the international education system. The country should have at least one university with a good international ranking in quality education, organize international and multidisciplinary conferences, and emphasize science and technology, research and innovation, and infrastructure.
4. The country must ensure academic and non-academic facilities for the students. Academic facilities that include internationally integrated curricula, short term and long-term courses, learning capacities or cognitive abilities, inclusive pedagogy, interactions, conducive academic environment, language training, and employment guarantee after course completion should be a priority of the university. While non-academic facilities such as accommodation costs, visa requirements, and exposure to the country's cultural and political values through the organization of exhibitions and festivals should be taken care of by the state machinery.
5. The state should promote Intra-national cross-border students' mobility by sending its people abroad and simultaneously receiving students from other countries. This can be done through providing economic assistance to send and receive students, inculcating exchange programs, joint degree programs between universities and institutes, and signing educational cooperation or MoUs with other countries.
6. Clearly, well-defined foreign policy goals and outcomes are required which can be achieved through education policy. Before executing educational diplomacy with other states, a country must have a clear framework of what it wants to achieve through it. In the case of developing countries, the IHE can bring two-fold advantages. First, it can develop its own education system in terms of science and innovation by collaborating with the world's best universities in Global North. Secondly, it can build its soft power by enhancing South-South education cooperation.

The above-mentioned conditions are the basic requirements for a country to build its soft power. Achievement of these conditions ensure the positive experiences of foreign students in the host country, which ultimately decide the foreign policy outcomes for a nation.

5.2. Prospects for future research

Based on the review and analysis of information and data from various studies, it is observed that higher education is a significant soft power resource for countries. It is an emerging area within the literature of higher education and international relations. Therefore, the research team recommends for further research in this area, especially in the context of developing countries, as majority of the available literature is based on the developed countries. Furthermore, most of the studies shows the South to North mobility trends among students. The South-South educational cooperation and student mobility is still an unexplored area. Moreover, a systematic review study can also be conducted to examine the comprehensive student experiences in other countries by identifying and analysing only empirical research studies in this area. It will assist in understanding the challenges for countries to use education as a soft power resource.

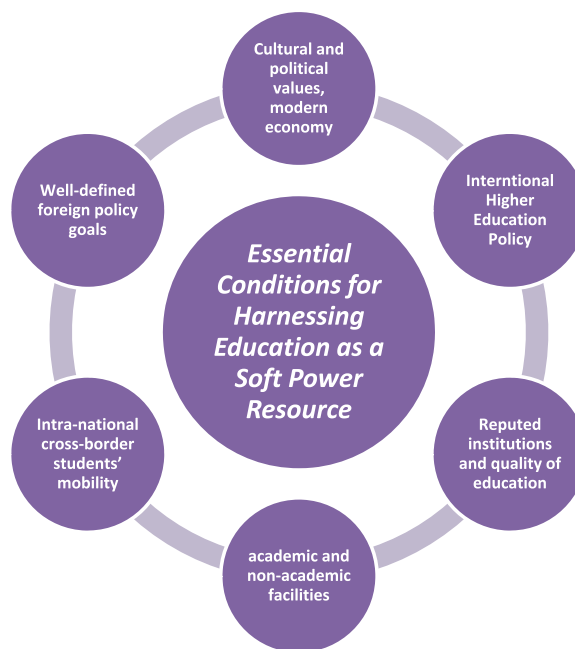


Fig. 3. Essential conditions for harnessing education as a soft power resource.

6. Conclusion

The intricate landscape of international higher education has evolved into a battleground for soft power influence among nation-states. It stands as an integral component of the broader global power dynamics, serving as a means to advance and attain foreign policy goals. This paradigm shift has prompted the need for a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between education and soft power, a void that this study seeks to address. The study's extensive examination culminated in a thorough delineation of key findings, organized into five distinct sub-sections of results. Each of these segments contributes vital insights into the multifaceted relationship between education and soft power. By dissecting these outcomes, this research endeavours to shed light on the nuanced conditions necessary to effectively harness education as a formidable soft power resource.

One of the central revelations pertains to the pivotal role that educational institutions play in projecting a nation's influence. Not only do they serve as conduits for disseminating cultural, ideological, and societal values, but they also facilitate the cultivation of global networks and collaborative ventures. Additionally, the study underscores the significance of educational exchange programs and academic collaborations in bolstering a nation's soft power arsenal. These initiatives not only foster cross-cultural understanding but also establish enduring connections between nations. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach in wielding education as a soft power tool. It emphasizes the need for tailored educational strategies that resonate with target audiences, thereby amplifying their impact. Additionally, the study highlights the role of innovation and technological advancement in enhancing a nation's educational prowess on the global stage. By leveraging cutting-edge educational methodologies and platforms, countries can effectively bolster their soft power capabilities. In summation, this study illuminates the evolving dynamics of international higher education within the realm of soft power. Through these insights, this research endeavours to equip policymakers and stakeholders with the knowledge required to harness education as a potent instrument of soft power in an increasingly competitive global arena.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Priya Gauttam: Conceptualization. **Bawa Singh:** Writing - original draft, Methodology. **Sandeep Singh:** Writing - original draft, Methodology. **Shankar Lal Bika:** Writing - review & editing. **Raghavendra P. Tiwari:** Writing - review & editing, Supervision.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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