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Internationalization and Universities from the Perspective of South-South Cooperation: A Literature Review

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Abstract: This paper aims to conduct a literature review based on an integrative approach, focusing on South-South cooperation in higher education. The main objective is to verify the concept of South-South cooperation in higher education by examining scientific articles on the subject that have already been published. Specifically, we sought to ascertain historical information and the main characteristics present in the analyzed texts. Methodologically, the research is based on a literature review using elements of integrative reviews and content analysis techniques. For analysis, elements of historical-dialectical materialism were also used. The main theoretical contribution of this work shares the contributions of the investigated articles and carries characteristics of the decolonial perspective and elements of phenomenological investigation. The main categories of analysis are horizontal, supportive, multicultural, and liberating internationalization. As a result, it can be said that initially, there is a relative scarcity of works on the subject, indicating a certain marginality in addressing the issue. Specifically, regarding the analyses carried out, it can be affirmed that there is a conceptual approximation in the understanding of South-South internationalization in the analyzed corpus.

Keywords: internationalization; higher education; South-South cooperation; concept

In general, the central theme is the internationalization of higher education, which is a key topic in the debate about universities, whether from the perspective presented in this text or from the perspective of vertical cooperation, which is hegemonic in nature. Indeed, in their current form, universities and higher education are characterized by internationalization.

Here, we assume that hegemonic perspectives based on horizontal relations — essentially a subordination of the Global South to the Global North, or the Periphery to the Center, particularly within the capitalist system — are detrimental to developing countries, which are poorer and more peripheral within the world system. Thus, based on academic literature, we aim to develop a conceptual synthesis of South-South internationalization of higher education.

The text will highlight the characteristics of this type of internationalization and the main conceptual characteristics. It will also indicate essential categories of analysis for studying the issue. However, this implies that the text will contain a significant number of citations since we aim to give voice to the analyzed works.

Since we will address the topic with a methodological approach similar to an integrative review, it is necessary to highlight some methodological issues, as the research strategy itself is a theoretical corpus by nature. It is important to note

that, to obtain the reported results, an integrative review was not used as the sole methodological source but as a combined strategy. Nevertheless, due to its unique features, we will emphasize a specific aspect to explain the outlines of the research strategy.

1 Methods

Overall, we will present a conceptual exposition based on a literature review. The integrative review will be our main reference, as it "provides the synthesis of knowledge and incorporates the applicability of significant study results into practice" (Souza, Silva, & Carvalho 2010)^[1]. This methodology is widely used in health fields, including in the cited text. The text is significant for its use of the strategy, and its phase structure is replicated in most studies, as will be done in this text. However, it should be noted that a considerable number of studies have already focused on the field of education. One example is the study by Rodrigues, Sachinski, & Martins)^[2], which will also serve as a model in the presented text.

Regarding the phases identified by Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, it is important to note that the first three phases will be discussed in the introduction. Initially, the first phase, "Formulation of the Research Question," may be confused with the research topic



itself. "What is the concept of South-South internationalization that comprises thematic academic production?" The second phase involves searching for or sampling literature. This work was carried out on Google Scholar between May 10 and 15 using the following descriptors: "South-South" in the "All Words" field and "University," "Higher Education," and "Internationalization" in the "At Least One of the Words" field. The search was conducted in two languages: Portuguese, and English. The descriptors were used only in the titles of the works. While this research may seem limited, it is consistent with the platform used since the occurrences listed in Google Scholar are substantial. For instance, a search with these same descriptors anywhere in the text yields approximately 22,000 results in Portuguese and over

60,000 results in English. With the applied filter, only 99 results remained in Portuguese. This device was chosen due to the absence of significant results with the same descriptors in more consolidated and specific databases, such as Scielo, Latindex, or DOAJ, even without the restriction in the title of the work. The author also refined the search to include only scientific articles, excluding theses, dissertations, books, chapters, and publications from events. As for the time frame, it was left open to capture all occurrences and areas of knowledge.

The third phase of the methodology consists of the data collection itself. Based on the model developed by Rodrigues, Sachinski, & Martins), the data collection for this research can be summarized in the adapted Table 1.

Table 1 Research Protocol

Type of product analyzed	Number of items included in the study	Definition of descriptors	Databases used
Articles	11 in Portuguese 13 in English 24 total	Sul-Sul 'and' University 'or' Higher Education 'or' Internacionation	Google Academic

Source: Adapted from Rodrigues, Sachinski, & Martins, 2022)

Although this totality was delimited by the described parameters, it was sufficient to generate significant data that composed a conceptual chart. This chart encompasses not only the concept itself but also history and categories of analysis. It provides coherence and approximations that emanate from scientific objectivity, even though the set of studies does not follow a homogeneous methodological or theoretical pattern.

2 Results

In the development of the text, as well as in elements of the final considerations, the remaining phases proposed by Souza, Silva, & Carvalho, will be developed, which are fourth—critical analysis of the studies included; fifth – discussion of the results; sixth – presentation of the integrative review. We draw attention to the impossibility of presenting each phase rigorously, since, as we have already warned, there is a methodological combination that goes beyond integrative review. We will begin with a general overview of the selected articles, based on the criteria already set out in the introduction. We will focus on each language and consider some characteristics of each group of texts. We begin with the set of texts found in Portuguese (Table 2).

The set of texts in Portuguese is the only one that includes contributions from a journal from a single country, Brazil, although there are authors from other countries and discussions on cooperation with other regions, mainly Africa and Latin America. This is the group that makes the greatest contribution to the conceptual chart, as it is traditional in this format to present a theoretical approach before discussing specific cases. It also provides the most information on the history and foundations of South-South cooperation (Table 3).

As the data indicate, there is a greater range of contributions from different analyzed realities and a broader scope in the selected English cases. This phenomenon occurs due to the diversity of contributions. There are publications from seven countries, including international journals, meaning their composition extends beyond the host country. Additionally, there are authors from ten different countries. This set also includes cases originating in Asia. Although English-language

publications are more common for international socialization, the preponderance of English-language publications is not absolute in the case of the articles analyzed here, a characteristic reinforced by the theme under analysis. From a content perspective, analyses of English-language publications are more in-depth for specific cases of different realities. These articles least address the conceptual dimension but more accurately present the dimension of triangular cooperation, which includes South-South cooperation with contributions from central countries.

With the sample demonstration, we emphasize that this is a limiting cut used with the previously described information, which does not cover all academic productions. For example, theses, books, and book chapters dealing with the themes in all the analyzed languages were left out. Despite their limitations, the texts share a focus on South-South internationalization in higher education. It is worth noting that articles that contribute most significantly to the present exposition will still be selected for the conceptual composition, even though the corpus is already quite lean. Thus, based on the content analysis of the set of texts, the following conceptual chart can be created.

3 Discussion

South-South Internationalization: Conceptual Elements: Regardless of the perspective, there is a consensus on the central role of internationalization in higher education debates and practices. In their research on the subject in developing countries, which are considered peripheral, Akkari et al.)^[3]. However, the following discussion is limited to a typology of internationalization. The basic characteristics of South-South internationalization generally result from dissatisfaction with passive and consequently exploitative situations in vertical internationalization. In this model, southern countries seek to acquire standards, knowledge, science, and technology for developing their regions from large centers in the Global North. Colonialism is also indicated as a component of this condition, including not only the constitution of nation-states but also contemporary colonialism in its imperialist form and the

epistemological concept of coloniality of power that “perpetuated intellectual distance and many inequalities between the peoples of the Global South and those in positions of hegemonic power”. (Corte, Morosini, & Felicetti)^[4].

Table 2 Articles in Google Scholar on South–South internationalization. (Portuguese)

Article Title	Authors	Journal (vol., no., year)
Brazilian foreign policy, South–South cooperation, and higher education: the case of the undergraduate exchange program	Fernanda Geremias Leal and M ú rio C é sar Barreto Moraes	Educação & Sociedade, vol.39, n.143, 2018.
Public policies and the internationalization of higher education: South–South cooperation on the agenda	Marilene Gabriel Dalla Corte e Fernanda Ziani Mendes	Educação Por Escrito, vol. 9, n. 2, Jul.–Dec. 2018.
UNILAB – University of International Integration of Afro–Brazilian Lusophony: The Challenge of an academic experience from the perspective of South–South cooperation	Nilma Lino Gomes, Aristeu Rosendo Pontes Lima and Tomaz Aroldo da Mota Santos	Novos Olhares Sociais, vol.1 – n.1 – 2018.
South–South cooperation: a view of Brazil–Angola relations in the field of higher education (2010–2020)	Silviana Fernandes Mariz and Melânia Tom ú s Baptista de Sousa	AbeÁfrica: Revista da Associação Brasileira de Estudos Africanos, vol. 4, n.4, 2020.
Brazilian foreign policy, South–South cooperation, and Brazilian higher education	Mar í lia Ribas Machado and Mario Cesar Barreto Moraes	Revista Internacional de Educação Superior, vol. 7, e021042, 2021.
Brazil's international technical educational cooperation with African countries and interculturality: concepts, reflections, and assumptions for South–South Cooperation	K ú tia Val é ria Pereira Gonzaga	Revista Brasileira de P ó s–Graduação, vol. 17, n. 38, 2022.
Internationalization of Higher Education from a South–South Perspective: Emerging Movements and Contexts in Pandemic Times	Marilene Gabriel Dalla Corte, Marilia Costa Morosini and Vera Lucia Felicetti	Revista Internacional de Educação Superior, vol.8, Epub 12, Aug– 2022.
Policies for the internationalization of higher education: contributions to the South–South context	Marcio Watanabe, Andreza Cipriani, Marcia Regina Selpa Heinzle	Linhas Cr í ticas, vol.29, Epub 11, Jul–2023
Weaving ties of cooperation: experience report on roundtable discussions on South–South academic cooperation between Africa and Brazil	Sergio Francisco Tsembane and Danilo Seithi Kato	Revista Brasileira de Educação, Cultura e Linguagem, vol. 10, n. 16, 2024.
Geopolitics of Knowledge, International Solidarity, and South–South Academic Cooperation in BRICS: possibilities, challenges, and horizons	M ú rio Luiz Neves de Azevedo	Jornal de Pol í ticas Educacionais, vol.18, Epub 15–Jan–2025.
South–South cooperation and the role of Latin American universities	Priscila Martins Mendonça, Daniela Schiabel, Josiane de C ú ssia Figueiredo Bastos, Carla da Silva Noronha Matos and Sandra de Souza Alves	Interfaces da Educação, vol. 7 n. 2. 2025.

Source: prepared by the author, based on Souza, Silva, & Carvalho.

However, it should be emphasized that this is not a finished concept. It is neither revolutionary, progressive, nor liberating. It is also a disputed concept within the forces that govern society. For example, an analysis of South-South cooperation processes between Africa and China reveals that the typologies of approaches are based on certain categories. "Central to this SSC discourse is also the notion of partnership. This is a notoriously slippery concept because it conjures ideas of symmetry; yet, all too often, partners may not be financially" (King 10)^[5]. The author warns that partnerships, even between countries in the Global South, can be unequal and not necessarily horizontal or supportive, fueling a kind of "sub-imperialism."

Another issue to be raised is that the concept of South-South cooperation is based on solidarity among those subsumed by the hegemonic system — capitalism and its forms in each historical period — not only from a historical perspective, but also in terms of conception and method. Many contemporary works on the subject depict SSC as horizontal and equitable while emphasizing the need to overcome the mercantilist view of higher education and distance it from neoliberalism (Mendonça, Schiabel, Bastos, Matos, & Alves)^[6]. These characteristics indicate an essential

feature of South-South cooperation, referred to as SSC in the excerpt: its counter-hegemonic dimension. This dimension is a common feature in all attempts at conceptualization in the analyzed articles. It should be noted that there are debates with the same meaning, but which refer to another geographical point, for example: the West, when speaking with greater emphasis on Asia and Africa (Tight)^[7].

This conceptual argument is established through the opposition of types of internationalization, which highlights the potential for solidarity-based cooperation and mutual development between countries through meaningful cooperation that allows for the exchange of experiences. To summarize the conceptual indications, we selected an excerpt that attempts to express the term conceptually: “In some specialized literature on higher education, SSC is synonymous with solidarity-based, reciprocal cooperation on equal terms(Aupetit 160)^[8].”

The reference is made from a Latin American perspective. We can affirm that the concept applies not only to countries in the Global South but also to other continents, such as Asia and Africa, as evidenced by the analyzed articles. Analysts from different backgrounds agree on the solidarity dimension of

South-South cooperation. This concept is characterized as a basic principle: "However, the most basic principle is that this form of cooperation must be determined by developing countries and manifest solidarity among the peoples and countries of the South..." Solidarity is not just a format; it must also "contribute to national well-being, collective self-reliance, and the attainment of developmental goals" (Wan & Sirat 81)^[9].

Even beyond the perspective of domination present in all critical analyses of the subject, the concept of South-South cooperation refutes the idea of any type of solidarity-based internationalization containing the notion of welfare or "providing" conditions, knowledge, and donations to those in need. "Conceptually, horizontal cooperation, or South-South cooperation (SSC), implies a mutually beneficial relationship between partners rather than a welfare-based link" (Leal & Moraes 344)^[10]. Such concepts are recurrent in the set of sources researched and apply to all the analyzed scientific productions, which are sufficient, as demonstrated, for the conceptual dimension of the phenomenon. In the analyzed articles, reference is also made to regional cooperation, a debate that appears more prominently in one article which, although not included within

the criteria applied for the bibliographic review, nonetheless serves as a relevant reference (Kinight)^[11].

A form of cooperation that includes the South-South dimension is appearing more frequently in English-language texts and needs to be highlighted in this conceptual text. This is known as triangular cooperation, which involves a developed country, or a country from the Global North, collaborating with a solidarity-based internationalization process.

To better understand this concept, we will use one found in the analyzed publications: "The triangular cooperation model involves a southern-driven partnership between two or more middle-income countries supported by a developed country or multilateral organization to implement development cooperation programs" (Heryadi, Darmastuti, & Rachman 11)^[12].

We save this mention for the end of the general conceptual considerations precisely because it straddles the border, as it uses countries from the Global South for its formation. It is possible to classify this modality as South-South cooperation if developed universities do not interfere with the purposes established by institutions and countries in the Global South.

Table 3 Articles in Google Scholar on South–South internationalization (English).

Article Title	Authors	Journal (Country, vol, no, year)
South–South cooperation for sustainable development: lessons and challenges of higher education in latin America after Wche 1998 (Draft)	Luis Eduardo Arag ó n	Paper do NAEA, (Brasil) n.º. 242, 2009.
South–South Cooperation in the Internationalization of African Higher Education: The Case of China	Kenneth King	Alternation (África do Sul). n.º. 9, 2013.
Building a South–South Connection through Higher Education: The Case of Peruvian University Students in Brazil	Camila Daniel	Cahiers de la recherche sur l' é ducation et les savoirs, (França) n.º. 13, 2014.
Internationalization of Higher Education: A Perspective from the Great South	Marilia Costa Morosini, Marilene Gabriel Dalla Corte and Alexandre Guilherme	Creative Education (EUA, Internacional) n.º 8, 2017.
South–South and Triangular Cooperation in the Mexican Higher Education System	Sylvie Didou Aupetit	International Journal of African Higher Education, (África do Sul) vol. 4, n.º 2, 2018.
Internationalisation of the Malaysian Higher Education System Through the Prism of South–South Cooperation	Chang–Da Wan e Morshidi Sirat	International Journal of African Higher Education, (África do Sul) vol. 4, n.º 2, 2018.
Race as a Political Issue in Brazilian South–South Cooperation in Higher Education	Susanne Ress	Comparative Education Review (EUA), Vol. 62, n.º 3 Aug. 2018.
The International Dimension of the Brazilian Higher Education System Through the Prism of South–South Cooperation State intervention, South–South cooperation and structural transformation: the (ignored) case of Brazil–Venezuela cooperation for equity of access to university education, 2003–2016	Jos é Antonio Brum and Marcelo Knobel	International Journal of African Higher Education, (África do Sul) vol. 4, n.º 2, 2018.
A North – South–South partnership in higher education to develop health research capacity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: the challenge of finding a common language	Thomas Muhr Christiane Horwood, Sphindile Mapumulo, Lyn Haskins, Vaughn John, Silondile Luthuli, Thorkild Tylleskär, Paulin Mutombo, Ingunn M. S. Engebretsen, Mala Ali Mapatano, Anne Hatløy, Yiyun Hu and Lijun Fan	Revista Eletrônica de Educação, (Brasil) vol. 13, n.º. 3, 2019. Health Res Policy Sys, (EUA, Internacional) vol. 19, n.º 79, 2021.
Advancing South–South cooperation in education: Indonesian experience with South Africa	Dudy Heryadi, Shanti Darmastuti and Ayu Anastasya Rachman	F1000Research (Inglaterra, Internacional) vol. 11, n.º:982, 2024.
Intercultural sensitivity and attitudes of Chilean university students towards South–South migrants	Luz Mar í a Jeria Madariaga, Bianca Dapelo Pellerano and Paola Ilabaca Baeza	International Journal of Intercultural Relations (Holanda, Internacional), vol.105, 2025.

Source: prepared by the author, based on Souza, Silva, & Carvalho.

As a complementary measure to give substance to this type of cooperation and internationalization, the authors provide important adjectives to understand the phenomenon, which are repeated in the texts: "[...] principles of solidarity, the common good, mutual respect, inclusion, equality, equity, interculturality, and reciprocity, as exemplified by South-South academic cooperation" (Azevedo 5)^[13]. These concepts can be used to highlight and systematize the different dimensions present and their approaches, such as solidarity and inclusion. These dimensions have their intentionality and epistemology and take on new meanings when applied to higher education. However, one element stands out in terms of content and relevance within the actions related to this type of cooperation: issues related to cultural diversity. Scholars address this issue when examining Latin American realities, which can be replicated in other global contexts, such as Oceania. This region has a significant indigenous population that is often excluded from academic training processes. Thus: "It should alert scholars to the complexities and sensitivities of nonwhite (and other minority) struggles that are central to understanding SSC and international development education more broadly" (Ress 412)^[14].

The main argument revolves around the specificity of the category's use. "Multiculturalism and interculturalism appear as new phenomena to curb the uniformity of cultural globalization in favor of freedom of expression and respect for the particularities of each territory" (Gonzaga 12)^[15]. This debate is the most distinctive in terms of internationalization, since, in traditional, vertical approaches that impose science and knowledge on the global south, cultural dimensions are considered non-existent, in favor of a "purism" of scientific knowledge that silences the knowledge contained in traditional communities, which is immanent to the construction of scientific knowledge. This debate is joined by epistemologies constructed on this premise, such as decolonialism, for example, or the so-called epistemologies of the South.

4 Conclusion

In this case, the final considerations will be combined with the traditional format of the research results since it is not possible to fully assume the conditions of the proposed model in the integrative review due to the combination of methodologies. Thus, we can indicate two moments of consideration: elements present in the review and their general impacts. First, although this is a Portuguese-language survey, no work by authors from the Global North was found, although there is a European country with Portuguese as an official language. There are texts by African writers, but they were all published in Brazil. The dates of publication are also noteworthy because they are concentrated from 2018 onwards. Despite the strict delimiting parameters (searching for a word in the title of the article), the collection as a whole is modest and quantitatively low. Regarding the "content" of the cooperation format, it can be said that several categories signal unity in the analyzed and produced content: "Solidarity," since South-South cooperation is synonymous with solidarity. Another category is "horizontality," which indicates a teleological dimension applied to development. "Autonomy" is another category because this modality focuses on opposing heteronomous perspectives arising from colonialism and imperialism. Finally, "cultural diversity" is a third category that includes debates on interculturality, multiculturalism, and linguistic diversity—conditions for South-South integration. It is

worth noting that, albeit in a modest way, the texts analyzed point to the existence of public policies for the sector and the issue, highlighting the need for public investment and state policies to strengthen the prospects for South-South cooperation, given that there have been successful results in this area and the content analyzed points to the positive results of this type of cooperation.

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