

DIASPORA, XENOPHOBIA AND STUDENT MOBILITY: RETHINKING EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND PLANNING FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Cross-border study has widened access to academic exchange and transnational networks, but movement between countries does not guarantee an inclusive educational experience. Students who are international, mobile or connected to diaspora communities may face racism, xenophobia, unequal treatment and uncertainty about belonging. This conceptual paper examines the links among diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility from the perspective of educational administration and planning. It brings together recent scholarship and selected institutional publications from 2021 to 2026 to consider how policy, resources, public discourse and campus practices shape students' experiences. The central argument is that mobility cannot be managed as a recruitment exercise alone: institutions must plan for students' arrival, learning, welfare,

participation and protection from discrimination. Diaspora networks can support knowledge exchange and adaptation, yet students should not be reduced to sources of revenue or institutional prestige. The paper therefore proposes that responsible internationalization be judged not only by enrolment figures, but also by equitable participation, student belonging, academic progress and institutional accountability.

Keywords: Diaspora; Educational Administration; Inclusive Education; Student Mobility; Xenophobia

Introduction

Higher education now operates across increasingly connected national and regional systems. Students move for study, while institutions compete to attract learners, develop partnerships and circulate knowledge. These movements create opportunities, but they also require planning for costs, accommodation, student support and the conditions students face after graduation. The OECD (2026) identifies financial considerations, housing, study options, employment pathways and family-related policies as factors that can influence international students' destination choices and decisions to remain. OECD indicators also show that international students form a notable share of tertiary enrolment in a number of education systems (OECD, 2024, 2026).

Mobility can broaden students' academic experiences, relationships and access to knowledge. African mobility is especially important because educational movement within the continent complicates the familiar picture of internationalization as mainly a journey from the Global South to the Global North (Schoole & Lee, 2021). Evidence on West African students also points to routes that may involve several countries and stages rather than a single, one-way move (Garvik & Valenta, 2024). These patterns create practical responsibilities for institutions that receive, support and retain mobile learners.

Diaspora adds a further dimension because people may sustain family, cultural, professional and intellectual ties across borders. In higher education, such connections can circulate knowledge and support, but diaspora identities can also be shaped by exclusion and assumptions about who belongs (Bamberger, 2022). Mazzucato (2024) argues for analytical categories that attend to mobility and lived experience instead of treating national origin as a complete explanation of young people's identities. This distinction matters for administrators: students who share a nationality or migration label may have very different needs and resources.

Greater international connectivity does not automatically make institutions more inclusive. Students may encounter racialization, xenophobia, language-based judgement, stereotyping or exclusion in classrooms, accommodation, student services and public debate. Research on students of colour documents how racism is experienced and interpreted in higher education (Koo et al.,

2023; Yao et al., 2023), while more recent work examines institutional power and the emotional consequences of exclusion (Hu et al., 2025). Online discourse can add another layer by representing international students as threats to jobs, culture or security (Beyara & Uğura, 2026). Zheng (2026) further shows why racism needs to be understood through intersecting identities rather than as a uniform experience.

These concerns make educational administration and planning central to the quality of student mobility. Admission rules, orientation, accommodation, counselling, academic advising, curriculum, complaint procedures and resource allocation shape how students experience an institution. The OECD (2026a) identifies housing, financial support and post-study opportunities as relevant to international student attraction and retention. Planning must therefore address the conditions of study and participation, not simply the number of students crossing a border.

Against this background, the paper examines how diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility intersect and what their relationship requires of educational administration and planning. Its focus is the institutional work needed to make participation in a globalized education system fairer and more inclusive. The objectives of the paper are to:

1. Examine the relationship among diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility in contemporary education.
2. Analyse the implications of xenophobia and student mobility for educational administration and planning.
3. Examine administrative and planning strategies for promoting inclusive education for mobile and diaspora-background students. The paper was guided by the following research questions:
 1. What is the relationship among diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility in contemporary education?
 2. What are the implications of xenophobia and student mobility for educational administration and planning?
 3. What administrative and planning strategies can promote inclusive education for mobile and diaspora-background students?

Literature Review

Diaspora and Education

In this paper, diaspora refers to social and professional connections that link people with communities and places across national boundaries. In education, these connections may involve students, academics, alumni and wider knowledge networks. Bamberger (2022) shows that higher education discourse can celebrate diaspora as human capital while overlooking the marginalization and identity questions that accompany diaspora experience. Both dimensions matter when institutions design internationalization policies.

For planning purposes, diaspora-background students should not be treated as a single, uniform group. Citizenship, migration history, language, finances and prior educational experience can differ substantially among students who are placed under the same label. Mazzucato's (2024) mobility-based perspective is useful because it directs attention to lived trajectories rather than relying on national origin as a proxy for identity. An institution can then plan around actual barriers and support needs instead of assumed cultural characteristics.

Xenophobia and Educational Inclusion

Xenophobia is used here to mean hostility, suspicion or exclusion directed at people perceived as foreign or outside a dominant community. In education, it can overlap with racism, nationalism, linguistic prejudice and cultural stereotyping. It may appear in personal interactions, institutional routines or wider public and digital narratives; consequently, it cannot be addressed through individual resilience alone.

Studies of international students of colour describe racism in interpersonal encounters and in the structures through which higher education is organized (Koo et al., 2023; Yao et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2025). Beyara and Uğura (2026) identify social-media narratives that frame international students through xenophobic assumptions, including portrayals of them as economic, cultural or security threats. Zheng (2026) adds an intersectional account of how Asian international students make sense of racism. Taken together, this literature suggests that exclusion is produced in different settings and requires responses at more than one institutional level.

For educational administrators, the implication is that students should not be left to manage discrimination individually. Institutions require clear policies, reporting channels, staff preparation, communication procedures and welfare structures that protect students and support meaningful participation.

Student Mobility

Student mobility refers to movement across institutional, regional or national boundaries for educational purposes. International student mobility is now a major component of global higher education. The 2026 OECD report shows that mobility decisions are affected by tuition and living costs, financial support, study opportunities, housing, employment pathways and family-related policies (OECD, 2026a).

African student mobility is not a single pattern. Schoole and Lee (2021) describe movement within the continent, while Garvik and Valenta (2024) show that West African students' migration routes may span several countries and stages. In Nigeria, Olaniyan (2025) draws attention to the way geography, identity and institutional barriers affect access to universities. These perspectives caution against treating mobility as a simple decision by an individual student; it is also shaped by the opportunities and constraints surrounding that decision.

These studies indicate that student mobility is inseparable from educational planning. Institutions must anticipate not only enrolment but also accommodation, student services, academic transition, belonging, retention and completion.

Diaspora, Xenophobia and Student Mobility: An Integrated Perspective

Diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility are connected, but they do not affect every student in the same way. Mobility may open access to education and new networks; diaspora ties may provide information and social support; and xenophobia may restrict participation by undermining safety, belonging or fair treatment. The value of mobility therefore depends partly on whether institutions recognize these relationships and respond to them in practice.

Mobile students should not be represented only as people who need protection. Bai and Wang (2024) examine how international students draw on cultural capital to respond to language and academic-culture shocks, while Kim (2025) considers agency in the face of systemic racism. Their work points to students' capacity to interpret circumstances, build relationships and act on their own behalf. Inclusive administration should make room for that agency rather than assuming that support means making decisions for students.

Recognizing student agency does not, however, transfer responsibility for discrimination onto those who experience it. Ramia (2021) examines institutional and governmental responses to racial discrimination and violence against international students, and Hu et al. (2025) show how institutional discourse and power relations shape racialized students' emotional experiences. Together, these studies support a dual approach: enable students to participate and advocate for themselves while requiring institutions to identify and address structural barriers.

Methodology

This paper uses a conceptual, literature-based approach and reports no original fieldwork or primary dataset. It draws on scholarly publications and selected institutional reports published from 2021 to 2026 that address diaspora and internationalization, student mobility, racism and xenophobia, belonging, migration and institutional responses. The literature was considered for its relevance to the paper's three linked concepts and to the practical responsibilities of educational administration and planning. The analysis is interpretive rather than statistical: it compares recurring arguments and uses them to develop an institution-focused account of inclusive mobility. Because the paper does not collect data from human participants, it does not claim empirical findings about a particular institution or student population.

Taken together, the literature presents student mobility as a process shaped by transnational networks, institutional structures and unequal access to resources. Research on diaspora and internationalization highlights the importance of mobility-based identities and cross-border connections (Bamberger, 2022; Sehoole & Lee, 2021; Mulvey, 2021; Mazzucato, 2024; Garvik & Valenta, 2024). Studies of international student mobility examine its trajectories, academic consequences and changing patterns (Sidhu et al., 2021; Zimmermann et al., 2021; López-Duarte et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2023; Hernández-Torrano et al., 2024; Granja & Visentin, 2024; Woo & Wang, 2024; Olaniyan, 2025; Schäfer, 2026). A related body of research documents racism, discrimination, exclusion and the strategies students use to respond to these conditions (Ramia, 2021; Liu et al., 2022; Koo et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2023; Yao et al., 2023; Lee & Li, 2023; Lan et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2025; Ortiga, 2026; Zheng, 2026; He, 2026; Beyara & Ugura, 2026). Other studies draw attention to student agency, intercultural learning and the different experiences of students across social identities and educational contexts (Bai & Wang, 2024; Campbell et al., 2024; Kim, 2025; Koskimaki & Tyhali, 2026). Research on pandemic disruption, precarity and institutional responses further demonstrates that mobility is affected by wider social and economic conditions (Roshid & Seraj, 2023; Wang & Liu, 2024; Mihut et al., 2025; Rajan & Bailey, 2025). Policy publications complement this scholarship by addressing education-system trends, migration conditions and institutional responsibilities (OECD, 2024a, 2024b, 2026a, 2026b; UNESCO, 2023, 2024).

The analysis uses educational administration and planning as its organizing perspective. It asks not only how mobility and exclusion are described in the literature, but also which institutional decisions—policy, staffing, student services, resource allocation and accountability—can either intensify or reduce the barriers students face.

Discussion

Implications for Educational Administration

Educational administrators shape many of the everyday arrangements through which students encounter a university. Their decisions affect access to information, the quality of student support, how complaints are handled and whether inclusion is treated as a shared responsibility or left to individual departments.

First, admission and enrolment procedures should be transparent, accessible and non-discriminatory. Internationalization should not be reduced to recruitment numbers.

Second, orientation should be comprehensive. Students need information about academic expectations, institutional procedures, student rights, welfare services, accommodation, communication channels and procedures for reporting discrimination.

Third, student-support systems should be adequately resourced. The OECD (2026a) identifies housing, financial support and employment opportunities as significant factors in international student attraction and retention. These factors therefore belong within institutional planning.

Fourth, institutions should establish accessible anti-discrimination and complaint mechanisms. Students should know where and how to report xenophobia or racism and should have confidence that complaints will receive fair attention.

Fifth, administrators should invest in staff development. Academic and non-academic personnel need intercultural competence and practical preparation for managing diverse student populations.

Sixth, institutions should create opportunities for meaningful interaction among domestic, international and diaspora-background students. Inclusion is strengthened when students learn with and from one another rather than being separated into parallel communities.

Seventh, educational managers should use student feedback and institutional evidence to monitor belonging, retention, participation and support needs. Inclusion should therefore be part of institutional quality assurance.

Implications for Educational Planning

Educational planning should begin with reliable information about student mobility. Institutions should monitor admissions, enrolment, retention, completion, housing needs, academic support, student complaints and participation in student services.

Resource planning should follow the needs created by mobility rather than lag behind recruitment. An increase in mobile students can create additional demand for orientation, accommodation guidance, counselling, academic advising, language support and intercultural programmes. Institutions should estimate these needs in advance and review provision using student feedback and participation data.

Policy changes also affect planning. The OECD (2026a) shows that countries continue to adjust policies affecting international students, including conditions connected with study, work and post-study pathways. Institutions therefore need flexible planning mechanisms capable of responding to policy changes while protecting educational continuity and student welfare.

Curriculum planning also matters. International and diaspora-background students bring experiences that can enrich classrooms. Curriculum experts can incorporate global perspectives, comparative cases, migration issues and intercultural learning where appropriate. Such integration should be substantive rather than tokenistic.

Finally, educational planning should include risk management for xenophobia and discrimination. Institutions should plan preventive education, reporting mechanisms, communication strategies and staff responses before incidents occur.

Inclusive Education in a Globalized World

Inclusive education involves more than formal access. It requires meaningful participation, equitable opportunities, belonging and protection from discrimination. UNESCO's education monitoring work places equity and inclusion within the wider goal of ensuring that education systems serve diverse learners (UNESCO, 2023, 2024).

For mobile students, inclusion may be affected by language, cultural adjustment, financial pressure, unfamiliar institutional systems, social isolation and discrimination. Wang and Liu (2024) synthesized evidence showing that international students have faced academic, financial, social and discrimination-related challenges.

Inclusive administration therefore needs multiple levels of intervention. Institutionally, policies should guarantee fair access and protection from discrimination. In teaching, educators should recognize diverse linguistic and cultural experiences. In student services, counselling and advising should be responsive to different backgrounds. At leadership level, resource decisions should demonstrate that inclusion is a core institutional responsibility.

A diverse enrolment profile does not by itself demonstrate inclusion. An institution may recruit students from many countries while some groups continue to face barriers to participation or

belonging. Evaluation should therefore consider students' experiences, access to services, academic progress and retention alongside enrolment totals.

Challenges

One challenge is unequal access to international mobility. Financial resources, scholarships, visa policies, geopolitical conditions and institutional capacity shape who can move and where.

A second challenge is commercialization. When international students are treated principally as revenue sources, recruitment can grow faster than support systems. Roshid and Seraj (2023) highlight concerns about institutional responses to international student mobility during the COVID-19 period.

A third challenge is geopolitical tension. Lee and Li (2023) discuss neo-racism and neo-nationalism in international academic environments, while Lan et al. (2024) show how geopolitical relations can become entangled with racialization.

A fourth challenge is digital discourse. Beyara and Uğura (2026) demonstrate how social-media narratives can frame immigrant students negatively and contribute to marginalization.

A fifth challenge is inadequate institutional evidence. Planning requires information about student experiences, but such information must be collected ethically and used responsibly.

Administrative and Planning Strategies

1. Develop institution-wide student-mobility policies linking internationalization with inclusion, welfare and anti-discrimination.
2. Strengthen pre-arrival and arrival support covering academic expectations, accommodation, welfare, finances and institutional procedures.
3. Establish clear and accessible anti-xenophobia and anti-racism reporting systems.
4. Provide professional development in intercultural competence, inclusive administration and conflict resolution.
5. Create reciprocal mentoring and peer-support programmes linking domestic and mobile students.
6. Use ethically collected institutional data to identify disparities in retention, participation, academic progress and student experience.

7. Integrate relevant global, intercultural and migration perspectives into curriculum planning.
8. Include student housing, counselling, academic advising and welfare services in mobility-related resource planning.
9. Build partnerships with student associations, diaspora networks, community organizations and relevant public agencies.
10. Evaluate internationalization using indicators of belonging, academic success, participation and equity in addition to recruitment and enrolment numbers.

Discussion

The literature points to a more demanding understanding of student mobility than counting how many learners arrive from abroad. Students' experiences are shaped by migration and education policy, available resources, social identities, institutional practices and whether they feel able to participate without discrimination. Mobility outcomes are therefore partly produced by the receiving institution, not solely by students' prior characteristics or individual choices.

The African context makes this argument particularly relevant. Intra-African mobility challenges the idea that internationalization is mainly a North–South process (Schoole & Lee, 2021). Nigeria is connected to regional student movement, overseas study and extensive diaspora networks. Institutions working in this context need plans that recognize both the opportunities created by cross-border connections and the unequal conditions under which students pursue them.

Diaspora connections can support the circulation of knowledge, relationships and professional experience, but treating diaspora only as a source of human capital obscures the possibility of exclusion (Bamberger, 2022). Educational managers should value students' transnational knowledge without assuming that diaspora-background students share the same identity, resources or institutional needs.

The evidence on racialization and discrimination reinforces the importance of institutional climate (Koo et al., 2023; Hu et al., 2025; Zheng, 2026). Anti-xenophobia work cannot depend solely on students becoming more resilient or learning to navigate hostile environments. Institutions must make reporting safe, respond consistently and examine whether their own practices create unequal outcomes.

The 2026 OECD evidence adds a planning dimension by showing that attraction and retention are affected by costs, housing, financial support and employment pathways (OECD, 2026a). This

means that educational planning must connect mobility with the practical conditions under which students live and learn.

The practical implication is that internationalization needs coordinated leadership. Admissions, academic departments, student affairs, accommodation, counselling, curriculum planning and quality assurance should work toward shared inclusion goals. Without coordination, recruitment may expand while the support needed for participation and success remains fragmented.

Implications for Educational Management and Policy

Educational management should treat student mobility as a whole-institution responsibility. Senior managers should align admissions, student affairs, academic departments, counselling, accommodation, communication and quality assurance around inclusion.

Policy makers should support transparent mobility pathways and discourage discriminatory institutional practices. They should also recognize the resource implications of increased mobility.

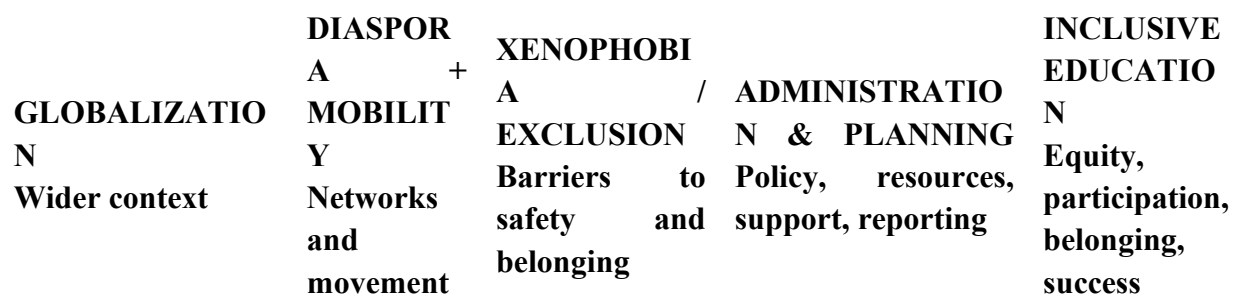
Professional development policies should prepare educational administrators and teachers to respond to cultural diversity, xenophobia, racism and intercultural conflict.

Curriculum policy should support relevant global and intercultural learning, enabling students to develop competencies for diverse societies.

Resource policy should recognize that responsible internationalization requires investment in housing, counselling, academic advising, language support and student engagement.

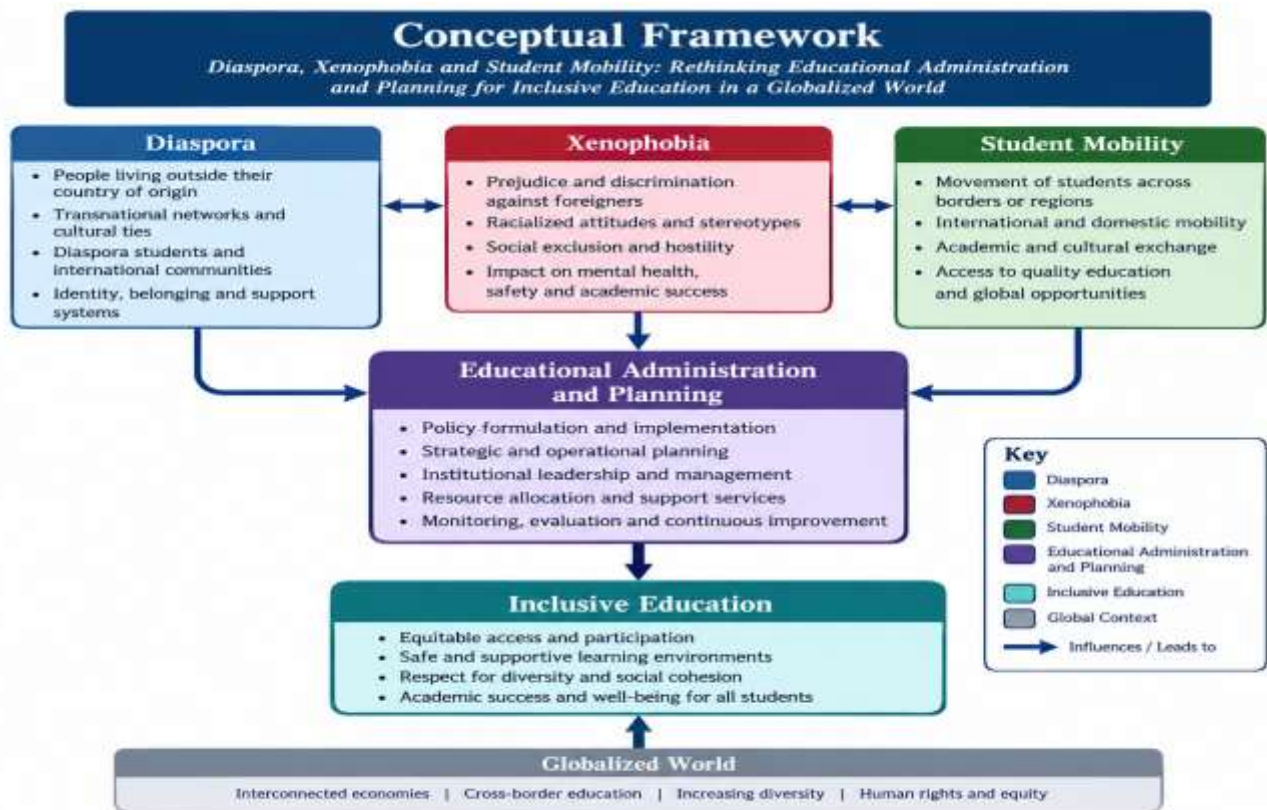
For Nigerian higher education, regional and global mobility can strengthen international engagement, but institutions need planning systems that ensure students from different backgrounds experience equitable access, participation and support.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Linking Diaspora, Xenophobia, Student Mobility, Educational Administration and Planning, and Inclusive Education



Source: Original conceptual framework developed for this paper (2026).

The framework conceptualises globalization as the wider context within which diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility interact. These dynamics create administrative and planning demands concerning policy, institutional leadership, resource allocation, student support, anti-discrimination and monitoring. Effective educational administration and planning are therefore positioned as the mediating mechanism through which institutions can transform mobility and diversity into equitable participation, belonging, academic success and inclusive education.



Source: Author's conceptualization, 2026.

Contribution to Knowledge

The paper's conceptual contribution is to bring diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility into one educational-administration discussion. Rather than treating these topics as separate issues, it shows how transnational connections, exclusion and movement combine to shape the conditions under which students participate in higher education.

A second contribution is an inclusion-based view of internationalization. Recruitment and enrolment remain relevant, but they are incomplete measures of success unless accompanied by attention to belonging, academic progress, participation and protection from discrimination.

The paper also foregrounds African and Nigerian relevance by drawing together research on intra-African mobility, West African migration routes and unequal access to Nigerian higher education. This contextual emphasis helps connect global debates about student mobility with the planning responsibilities of institutions in the region.

Conclusion

Diaspora, xenophobia and student mobility are intertwined in contemporary education, but their interaction does not automatically produce exchange or inclusion. Cross-border study can broaden academic and social opportunities, while discrimination, unequal access and weak support can limit students' ability to benefit from them.

Educational administration and planning can influence these outcomes. Institutions need to connect recruitment with student welfare, academic advising, accommodation, inclusive curriculum, accessible complaint systems and transparent use of resources. These responsibilities should be supported by leadership and reviewed through evidence about student experience and participation.

The paper's central conclusion is that mobility should be assessed as an educational experience, not simply as movement across borders. When institutions plan for different student circumstances, respond to discrimination and provide support that students can actually access, internationalization has a stronger chance of contributing to equitable participation and inclusive education.

Suggestions

1. Educational institutions should develop comprehensive student-mobility policies that integrate inclusion, welfare and anti-xenophobia.
2. Educational administrators should establish accessible mechanisms for reporting and responding to xenophobic and racist incidents.
3. Educational planners should use ethically collected evidence to identify participation and retention gaps.
4. Institutions should strengthen orientation, academic advising, counselling, housing guidance and peer support for mobile students.

5. Curriculum experts should incorporate relevant global and intercultural perspectives into teaching and learning.
6. Governments and institutions should provide professional development in intercultural competence and inclusive practice.
7. Mobility partnerships should include provisions for student welfare, academic continuity and protection from discrimination.
8. Internationalization should be evaluated using equity, belonging, academic progress and participation indicators as well as mobility numbers.

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