

## Internationalizing “at home” – COIL for navigating and exploring collaborative learning

  **Carlos Eduardo Pizzolatto**

Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (PUC-CAMPINAS), Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil  
[carlos.pizzolatto@puc-campinas.edu.br](mailto:carlos.pizzolatto@puc-campinas.edu.br)

  **Fernanda de Oliveira Soares Taxa**

Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (PUC-CAMPINAS), Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil  
[taxafernanda@gmail.com](mailto:taxafernanda@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The objective of this study was to identify and analyze the perceptions of COIL Project (Collaborative Online International Learning) participants at PUC-Campinas regarding the project's operation and the meanings they attribute to it. A mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) analysis of an online questionnaire revealed that participants clearly understand the COIL Project's dynamics and operation, as well as the benefits obtained and meanings attributed to the experience. The participants' ability to overcome the difficulties they encountered is notable, legitimizing internationalization "at home" as a guiding factor for future intercultural experiences at this university.

**Keywords:** Internationalization of Higher Education; COIL - Collaborative Online International Learning; Brazil.

### Internacionalizar “em casa” – COIL para navegar e desbravar aprendizagens colaborativas

**Resumo:** O presente estudo teve como objetivo identificar e analisar as percepções dos participantes do Projeto COIL – (*Collaborative Online International Learning*) na PUC-Campinas quanto ao seu funcionamento e os sentidos que lhe são atribuídos. Aplicou-se um questionário on-line cuja análise com método misto ( quanti-quali) nos apontou que os participantes apresentam clareza quanto à dinâmica e o funcionamento do Projeto COIL, assim como quanto ao aproveitamento obtido e o(s) sentidos atribuídos à experiência. Destaca-se a superação das dificuldades encontradas e manifestadas pelos próprios participantes envolvidos, legitimando a internacionalização “em casa” como fator norteador para próximas experiências interculturais nesta universidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Internacionalização da Educação Superior; COIL - *Collaborative Online International Learning*; Brasil.

**Internacionalizar “en casa” – COIL para navegar y explorar aprendizajes colaborativos**

**Resumen:** El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo identificar y analizar las percepciones de los participantes del Proyecto COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) en la PUC-Campinas en cuanto a su funcionamiento y los significados que se le atribuyen. Se aplicó un cuestionario en línea cuyo análisis con método mixto (cuantitativo-cualitativo) nos indicó que los participantes tienen claridad sobre la dinámica y el funcionamiento del Proyecto COIL, así como sobre el aprovechamiento obtenido y los significados atribuidos a la experiencia. Cabe destacar la superación de las dificultades encontradas y manifestadas por los propios participantes involucrados, lo que legitima la internacionalización "en casa" como factor orientador para futuras experiencias interculturales en esta universidad.

**Palabras clave:** Internacionalización de la Educación Superior; COIL - Collaborative Online International Learning; Brasil.

Received on: 2024-07-03

Accepted on: 2024-12-11

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Internationalization programs are essential for preparing academic communities and institutions for a globalized world. These programs foster intercultural understanding, innovation, and global collaboration. There are countless reasons for university internationalization, which has evolved over the decades based on historical contexts. One crucial element of internationalization is globalization itself, which reflects the current moment and challenges us to develop diverse formats to bridge the gap between local and global spaces and deliver education.

The construction of cultural identities through education has long been a global challenge and an opportunity to build a multicultural society that embraces ethics and diversity. This topic has gained momentum since the early 1990s when the focus shifted to the new roles of schools and teacher training in this context. Critique of entrenched roles of schools and teachers in an archaic model of education, as well as the urgent need to address local and global violence and aggression, imply a change of direction and the promotion of understanding with those who are different.

Gadotti (2000, p. 41, translated by us) emphasized at the time that "the school must be local as a starting point but international and intercultural as a point of arrival [...]". Curricular changes that include themes such as human rights, peace, environmental education, and racial discrimination require the development of programs and innovative projects with methodologies that convert ethnocultural contributions into educational content. We must reeducate our perspective on interculturality.

According to the aforementioned author, articulating cultural diversity with educational itineraries must be our pressing challenge so that education fulfills one of its fundamental roles: directing toward equity. This, therefore, is one of the meanings attributed to our Internationalization Project in the university environment, specifically that of COIL - Collaborative Online International Learning, at the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (PUC-Campinas).

Several studies from different perspectives have discussed internationalization (Oliveira; Freitas, 2017; Souza; Filippo; Casado, 2018; Mattos; Flach; Mello, 2020; Teixeira et al., 2021), particularly emphasizing the relationship between socioeconomic progress and education and generally highlighting them as conflicting phenomena. In line with Pessoni and Pessoni (2021, p. 3, translated by us), when comparing globalization and internationalization, the authors note that the former is driven by the pursuit of economic growth, while the latter "[...] promotes reciprocity between people and ideas based on the recognition and acceptance of cultural differences [...] implies

developing activities across borders [...] related to the dissemination of new paradigms and concepts, which supposedly make educational policies more effective [...]"

Higher education institutions are part of this scenario, and, in addition to teaching, research, and extension activities, they are challenged to address local demands in a global context (Morosini, 2014).

The development of university students and the formation of new technical, professional, and human skills of teachers must consider global awareness and attitudinal changes regarding the ability to act in different environments and spaces: multicultural and pluricultural ones, culminating, for example, in "[...] international academic mobility, proficiency in foreign languages, and intercultural communication (Pessoni; Pessoni, 2021, p. 4, translated by us).

Knight (2003, p. 2, translated by us) defines internationalization as a process of national, sectoral, and institutional scope that incorporates "[...] an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the objectives, functions, or services of higher education". The author (2005) also explains that the reasons for internationalization can be classified into four groups: I. Political - linked mainly to the mutual promotion of peace among nations and the construction of regional and national identities; II. Economic - Focused on economic growth, competitiveness, new labor market demands, and financial incentives and support. A third reason: III. Sociocultural - developing a sense of community and citizenship, intercultural understanding, and the ability to form a cultural identity; and IV. Academic Reasons - addressing the international dimension of teaching and research, achieving international standards and status, and improving the academic quality of the educational institution.

Considering the reasons for internationalization presented in the literature, as well as our project's unique experience, this study aimed to identify and analyze the perceptions of COIL Project participants at PUC-Campinas, a community and Catholic university in a city of São Paulo, Brazil.

## 2 INTERNATIONALIZATION AT PUC-CAMPINAS

Planning and organizational structure are areas that have gradually shaped the institutionalization of international programs at universities around the world. At the Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas (PUC-Campinas), for example, internationalization is one of the strategic pillars defined in the Institutional Development Plan (PDI 2021-2025), and the Department of External Relations (DRE) is responsible for the university's involvement in national and international affairs, assisting the Pro-Rectorates of Undergraduate Studies, Research and

Postgraduate Studies, and Extension in qualifying teaching, research, and extension activities.

Among its various attributions, the DRE is responsible for: a. establishing national and international cooperation for the university; b. fostering the exchange of information and knowledge; c. establishing partnerships around the world, enabling internationalization at various levels and Exchange Programs, including COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning).

COIL is a State University of New York (SUNY) initiative that promotes international collaborative learning through online environments. The COIL methodology connects students and universities from different parts of the world to collaborate on projects and courses using digital technologies to overcome geographical barriers. Some key points of the COIL program are: I. Globalization of the curriculum - by integrating a global perspective into existing curricula, enabling students to develop intercultural and global competencies; II. International Collaboration – allows for collaborative promotion between students and teachers from different countries, facilitating the exchange of ideas and cultures; III. Accessibility – offering accessible international experiences to all students, regardless of their ability to participate in physical mobility programs (Sunny Coil, s/d).

Broadly speaking, it operates through academic partnerships, where professors from different institutions, often from different countries, co-develop and co-teach a course or module, integrating their respective curricular components. Digital technologies also play a role in its functionality, facilitating communication and collaboration between students and professors through online tools and platforms. These tools include videoconferencing, discussion forums, institutional websites, social media posts, and other collaborative learning platforms. Students also work on collaborative projects, solve problems together, discuss topics, and exchange knowledge in multicultural teams.

## **2.1 COIL and PUC-Campinas – Building the Identity of an Internationalization Program**

The COIL Project at PUC-Campinas emerged as one of the university's internationalization activities accessible to faculty and students. Even before its implementation in 2022, a mapping exercise was conducted with the academic community to assess language proficiency and interest in international activities. Meetings were held with interested parties, proposals were made for potential projects, and a project tracking form was developed, including guidelines suggested by users and practical implementation methods that minimize bureaucracy.

Since its implementation, PUC-Campinas's COIL project has joined the SUNY COIL network, enabling us to participate in the Partnering Fair, which is organized by the founder of the

methodology and attended by dozens of institutions from various countries that share similar objectives.

Regarding the guiding elements of the COIL Project at PUC-Campinas, it is important to emphasize that our virtual exchange should not be interpreted as merely a list of possibilities for lectures with international guests in a virtual setting, a distance learning course, or open online courses.

The first version, which took place in 2022, involved four faculty members and 175 students, and in 2023, we had 24 faculty members and 493 students participating. During the videoconference social interaction, participants revealed through their testimonies that the integration of multiple curricular components and student engagement were highlights during the first year and a half of implementation. Below, we present data outlining the project's defining features. The project intends to "visit" many other destinations and achieve fruitful results with the entire academic community involved.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The study was anchored in a qualitative approach (Ludke; André, 1986), which is an exploratory approach requiring greater familiarity with the topic under investigation to adapt the measurement instruments to the intended context (Gil, 1991). The data were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, which captures the respective strengths of quantitative and qualitative methods (Coffield et al., 2004). Numerous investigations are based on qualitative research (Zanette, 2017; Tonelli; Zambaldi, 2018), and it has led to discoveries about the processes that aid in the construction of educational practices.

The Google Forms questionnaire used a Likert scale (10 items and a five-point scale: Strongly Disagree - DT, Disagree - D, Neither Agree nor Disagree - NCND, Agree -C, and Strongly Agree - CT. The questionnaire also contained three open-ended questions and four items on gender, course, location, and position. The questionnaires were prepared in Portuguese, Spanish, and English to accommodate the participants' nationalities. They were emailed to all participants from the eight countries involved (Brazil, Portugal, Colombia, Chile, the Philippines, Mexico, the United States, and China), including the pioneering group from the COIL Project implementation in 2022, since administration of the instrument was postponed and not linked immediately to project completion in 2022 and 2023.

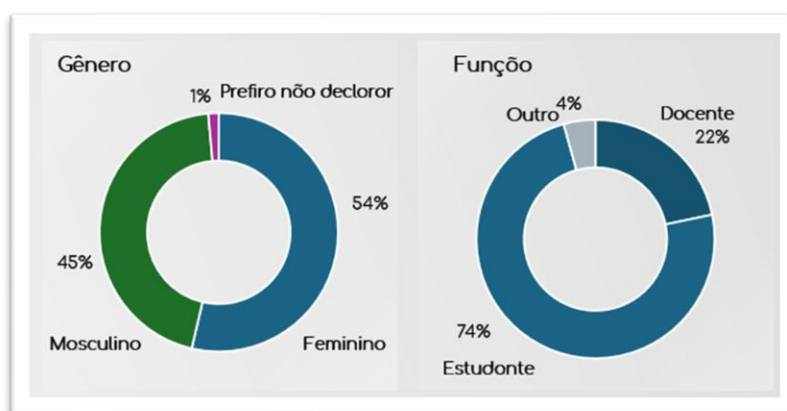


## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 69 respondents, 60 (86.9%) reported participating in the project while in Brazil, 7 (10.1%) were in China, and 1.4% were in Chile and the United States, respectively. The courses and/or curricular components involved were: I. Administration and Economics; II. Philosophy, Literature, and History (Bachelor's or Licentiate Degree); III. Nursing; IV. Biomedicine and Biomedical Engineering; V. Chemical and Electrical Engineering; VI. Pedagogy; and VII. Journalism, Advertising, and International Relations. Unfortunately, there were no responses from participants in Colombia, the Philippines, Mexico, or Portugal.

Figure 1 shows that 54% ( $n = 37$ ) of participants identified as female, 45% ( $n = 31$ ) identified as male, and 1% ( $n = 1$ ) preferred not to say. Regarding the participants' role in the project, 74% ( $n = 51$ ) were students, 22% ( $n = 15$ ) were from the teaching group, and 4% ( $n = 3$ ) were in management positions in the DRE or other university sectors.

**Figure 1** – Frequencies regarding gender and function of participants (COIL)\*.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

As described in the study methodology, the instrument consisted of Likert-type scale items ( $n=10$ ), open-ended questions ( $n=3$ ), and identification items ( $n=4$ ), except for the participant's name. First, we present the results obtained from the scale items, which were grouped since descriptive analysis allowed us to categorize them as follows: I. responses consistent with the "dynamics and functioning" of the COIL project from the participants' perspective and assessment; II. responses that implied "use and meanings attributed to the COIL project." The third and final grouping includes

\* Once it is a figure, it was not possible to be translated.

those related to "Difficulties and future projections attributed by the participants."

In Figure 2 (analytical dashboard), the graphs corresponding to the results of questions 5 (denoting the understanding of how the internationalization project works "at home"), 7 (revealing the understanding of the dynamics of the activities and the exchange of knowledge with the group(s) worked on), and 8 (Sufficient time to carry out the project) preliminarily indicate that the two points on the scale "Agree and Totally Agree" obtained the highest percentages when compared to the other three possible points on the scale.

When we analyze the three scale items that allowed us to categorize "Dynamics and Functioning," we observe that the dynamics established in the first two project versions and the operation itself were accepted by 76% to 82% of participants when analyzing the scale points: levels of agreement and total agreement. The SUNY COIL Network highlights its emblematic vision for the internationalization process, such as connection, engagement, and collaboration as a triadic insignia; and by partnering with the Network, the data indicate that we are on the right track since curricular globalization, international collaboration, and accessibility were recognized as guiding elements in the project's dynamics and operation.

**Figure 2** – Frequencies regarding the dynamics and functioning of COIL/PUC-Campinas<sup>†</sup>.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

<sup>†</sup> Once it is a figure, it was not possible to be translated.



In Figure 3 (analytical dashboard ), graphs 9, 10, 11, and 12 present the results of the scale questions regarding: a. Question 9 - Use and experience with students and faculty; b. Question 10 - Clear perception that the institutions participating in the project promoted dialogue and the appreciation of peace, considering different identities – national and regional; c. Question 11 - Perception that COIL met the basic/undergraduate training needs regarding the demands of the job market; d. Question 12 - Expression of the feeling that COIL promoted a sense of community, intercultural understanding, and the formation of a national cultural identity as an Internationalization Project. And, in question 14, an assessment of the scope of the international dimension in teaching and research, broadening the participants' academic horizons.

**Figure 3** – Dashboard containing the frequencies regarding the use and the directions indicated by the participants of the COIL Project<sup>‡</sup>.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

Our analysis of the second categorization, which was based on the grouping of scale items regarding "Use and Meanings Attributed to the COIL Project," shows that the percentages of agreement and total agreement for items 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14 are 68%, 81%, 79%, 78%, and 64%, respectively. These percentages suggest that, despite the project being very recent and unprecedented for the university, participants reported benefiting from and enjoying the experience with their peers. Participants clearly perceived the institutions' methodology for dialogue, appreciation of different cultural identities, sense of community, and perception that COIL met basic undergraduate training

<sup>‡</sup> Once it is a figure, it was not possible to be translated.

requirements compared to the demands of the job market, which currently require differentiated initial university education formats. Furthermore, the COIL Internationalization Project was evaluated in terms of its international dimension in teaching and research, which, as assessed by the participants, expanded their academic horizons.

Oliveira and Freitas (2017), when discussing in their study the gains achieved and the construction of a new symbolic capital by students and teachers through the experience with international mobility, highlight the promotion of different skills; reverberating in symbolic capital, implying a difference both personally and professionally for those involved. In this sense, the authors anchored in Freitas (2008) emphasize that mobility as symbolic capital can be understood as

[...] a learning experience and an exercise in openness to constant change, encompassing the individual's capacity, willingness, and desire to change and interact with differences in culture, profession, and knowledge. Those who possess this skill set are open to new experiences and expanding the limits of their knowledge, personal experiences, and cultural certainties. Therefore, it is a set of dispositions and competencies that fosters interaction with others and differences and allows one to embrace otherness in their personal and professional life (Oliveira; Freitas, 2017, s/n, translated by us).

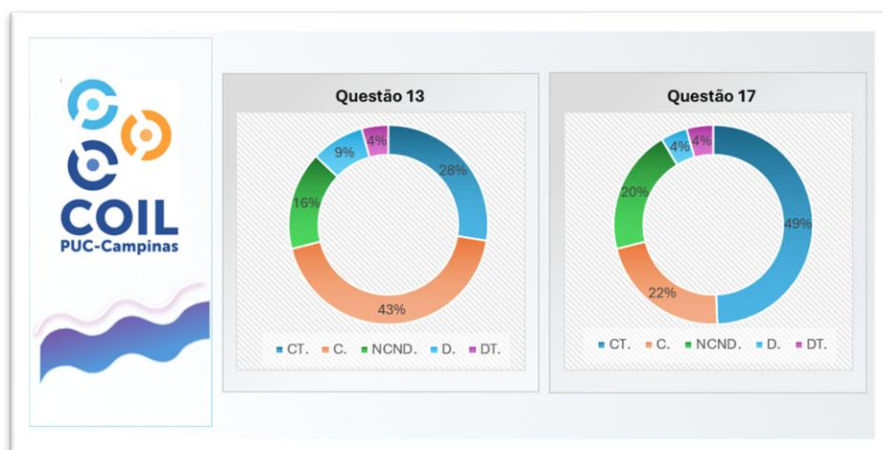
Although the aforementioned study examined teachers and students who relocated to different countries, the results seem to align with some of our findings. Our participants' responses on the scale of agreement and/or complete agreement in the above-analyzed items (Figure 3) indicate that many meanings relate to interacting with cultural differences, gaining knowledge, and, above all, being open to new possibilities and skills.

Figure 4 (analytical dashboard) presents the results obtained from questions 13 (overcoming difficulties encountered) and 17 (intention to participate in other versions of the COIL project).

**Figure 4** – Dashboard containing the frequencies regarding the assessment of difficulties overcome and new participation in COIL<sup>§</sup>.

---

<sup>§</sup> Once it is a figure, it was not possible to be translated.



Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

When analyzed considering the points of agreement and total agreement, the data in items 13 and 17 show that they obtained 71% for both items, which indicates that many participants positively evaluated overcoming the difficulties and adhering to participating in the COIL Project again.

However, it is important to highlight that, when we analyze items 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 17, the point on the scale “I neither agree nor disagree” showed a percentage variation between 12% and 21%, drawing our attention to the fact that, perhaps, this neutrality in the evaluation was related to issues such as schedules and low fluency in the language of the partner country, as shown by the results obtained in the open questions, present in Chart 1, especially question number 15, which will be presented below.

In addition to the scale questions, the form included three open-ended questions: question 6 asked participants to write five words describing what they learned from the project; question 15 asked participants to list three challenges they overcame during the COIL Project in order of relevance; question 16 asked participants to list up to five words representing their experience during the project. The results presented in Chart 1 were generated using a visual word representation program (Wordcloud, n.d.), a viewer that highlights the most frequently appearing words in participants' responses.

**Chart 1** – Word clouds of open questions about the evaluation of the COIL/PUC-Campinas Project\*\*.

\*\* Once it is a figure, it was not possible to be translated.



perspective, including exposure to different cultures, ideas, and methodologies among the faculty and students involved. We also cite the benefits of intercultural competencies, as the development of skills for effective work and communication in multicultural contexts was necessary for our project and unprecedented at this university. Improved teaching and research also provide another benefit to the project, as the collaborative actions mobilized internationally have tended to spark pedagogical innovations and, consequently, advances in research topics for this institution.

Regarding institutional benefits, we highlight networking, where the creation of global networks among students, between students and faculty, and among faculty opens up new possibilities for career opportunities and professional collaboration. We emphasize that the COIL Project significantly impacted personal development as most participants reported overcoming difficulties, including language barriers, demonstrating adaptability, and gaining self-confidence in their linguistic abilities through contact with participants of different nationalities. Additionally, we note attitudinal changes regarding tolerance and understanding, demonstrating learning about peace and cooperative relationships.

As a hallmark of this project, we emphasize our commitment to a collaborative and diverse path that opens up possibilities for other destinations to internationalize "at home" while enhancing learning everywhere.

## 6 REFERENCES

COFFIELD, F *et al.* **Learning styles and Pedagogy in post-16 learning**. A systematic and critical review. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre, 2004.

FREITAS, M. E. de. O imperativo intercultural na vida e na gestão contemporânea. **Organizações & Sociedade**, v. 15, n. 45, p. 79–89, abr. 2008. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/osoc/a/FLMqqfbxYWVVp59Jz7h6CYq/#>. Accessed on: Apr. 4, 2024.

GADOTII, M. **Perspectivas atuais da educação**. Porto Alegre: Artes Médicas Sul, 2000.

GIL, A. C. Como classificar as pesquisas. In: GIL, A. C. **Como elaborar projetos de pesquisa**. São Paulo: Atlas, 1991. p. 45-62.

KNIGHT, J. Updated internationalization definition. **International Higher Education**, Boston, v. 33, p. 2-3, 2003. Available at: <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/view/7391>. Accessed on: May 1, 2024.

KNIGHT, J. Un modelo de internacionalización: respuesta a nuevas realidades y retos. **Educación superior en América Latina: La dimensión internacional**. Bogotá: Banco Mundial/Mayo, p. 1-38,



2005. Available at: <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/978-9-5897-6478-7#page=28>. Accessed on: Mar. 22, 2020.

LUDKĚ, M.; ANDRÉ, M. E. A. D. **Pesquisa em educação: abordagens qualitativas**. São Paulo: EPU, 1986.

MATTOS, L. K. de; FLACH, L.; MELLO, P. de. Políticas educacionais de bolsas para o ensino superior, internacionalização e avaliação da pós-graduação brasileira: um estudo com regressão em painel. **Education Policy Analysis Archives**, v. 28, n. 85, 2020. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Pol%C3%ADticas-educacionais-de-bolsas-para-o-ensino-e-da-Mattos-Flach/8d76f4428549f442debf881ae56ee02d8ed6e94>. Accessed on: Jun. 1, 2024.

MOROSINI, M. C. Qualidade da educação superior e contextos emergentes. **Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior**, v. 19, n. 2, p. 385-405, 2014. Available at: [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1414-40772014000200007&script=sci\\_arttext](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1414-40772014000200007&script=sci_arttext). Accessed on: Mar. 22, 2024.

OLIVEIRA, A. L. D.; FREITAS, M. E. D. Relações interculturais na vida universitária: experiências de mobilidade internacional de docentes e discentes. **Revista Brasileira de Educação**, v. 22, n. 70, p. 774-801, jul. 2017. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbedu/a/tFqL6fdZwjPmZfCnBDnYDDv/#>. Accessed on: Mar. 8, 2024.

PESSONI, R. B.; PESSONI, A. Internacionalização do ensino superior e a mobilidade acadêmica. **Educação, [S. l.]**, v. 46, n. 1, p. e87/ 1-32, 2021. Available at: <https://periodicos.ufsm.br/reeducacao/article/view/43070>. Accessed on: Apr. 23, 2024.

SOUZA, C. D. DE; DE FILIPPO, D.; CASADO, E. S. Crescimento da atividade científica nas universidades federais brasileiras: análise por áreas temáticas. **Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior (Campinas)**, v. 23, n. 1, p. 126-156, jan.2018. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/aval/a/wgGYDrdHsVXf7WxPynpgCtG/#>. Accessed on: Apr. 7, 2024.

SUNY COIL. **Collaborative online international learning**. Home page. Available at: <https://coil.suny.edu/>. Accessed on: Mar. 25, 2024.

TEIXEIRA, L. I. L. *et al.* Internacionalizar para quê? As razões de instituições públicas de ensino superior no Ceará. **Avaliação: Revista da Avaliação da Educação Superior**, Campinas, v. 26, n. 3, p. 800-821, set. 2021. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/aval/a/c4VZkMBQ6H3Kyp333ch6QhJ/#>. Accessed on: May 12, 2024.

TONELLI, M. J.; ZAMBALDI, F. Pesquisas qualitativas, pesquisas quantitativas e além. **Rev. Adm. Empres.**, v. 58, n. 5, p. 449-450, 2018. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rae/a/wMPgQM3zTrsWDfH9ZDGqhGD/#>. Accessed on: Apr. 3, 2024.

ZANETTE, M. S. Pesquisa qualitativa no contexto da Educação no Brasil. **Educar em Revista**, v. 33, n. 65, p.149-166, 2017. Available at: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=155053745010>. Accessed on: Mar. 2, 2024.