

Who benefits from foreign universities in the Arab Gulf States?

Stephen Wilkins

University of Bath, UK

The Arab Gulf States are the largest hosts of international branch campuses globally. By increasing higher education capacity in the Arab Gulf States by over 30,000 places, foreign institutions have, through various forms of transnational provision, increased significantly the accessibility of higher education to young people living in these countries. However, critics of transnational higher education have suggested that it can be seen as the new neo-colonialism which benefits the providers much more than the receivers. This study aims to identify the stakeholders that might benefit from transnational higher education in the Arab Gulf States, and to examine the extent to which those stakeholders are actually benefiting from it. It was found that transnational higher education is playing a large role in the economic, cultural and social development of the Arab Gulf States.

Introduction

During the last decade, transnational higher education provision increased dramatically right around the globe. In fact, by 2010, more international students were taking UK higher education programmes outside of the UK than in it (Universities UK 2010). The term 'transnational education' refers to educational programmes in which learners are located in a country other than the one in which the awarding institution is based (McBurnie & Ziguras 2007, p. 21). Transnational programmes are delivered in one of three ways: distance education, partner-supported delivery or a branch campus. This article, however, is concerned only with branch campuses located in the Arab Gulf States, hereafter referred to as the Gulf States.

An international branch campus may be defined as an educational facility that has its own premises (which normally include teaching rooms, a library and a refectory, and sometimes also recreational facilities

and student accommodation) where students receive face-to-face instruction in a country different to that of its parent institution. The branch operates under the name of the parent institution and offers qualifications bearing the name of the parent institution. It usually offers courses in more than one field of study, has permanent administrative staff and usually permanent academic staff too (ACE 2009).

International branch campuses can be owned solely by a foreign university or jointly between a foreign university and a local partner. Ownership structures of international branch campuses vary considerably, and they can be quite complex. For example, whilst the intellectual property of degree courses taught at Murdoch University International Study Centre Dubai remain with Murdoch University in Perth (Australia), ownership of the physical assets in Dubai reside with its academic infrastructure provider, Global Institute Middle East Limited, which also employs the academic staff. Middlesex University Dubai was also established

as a joint venture, between Middlesex University UK and an entity called Middlesex Associates in Dubai.

The situation where teaching is provided by a local partner (usually operating under their own name) and not the institution that is awarding the qualifications is usually regarded as partner-supported delivery rather than a branch campus operation (McBurnie & Zigu-ras 2007, p. 27). Foreign-backed universities that have been established as, or developed into, independent institutions, such as the British University in Dubai, are also not usually regarded as international branch campuses (Verbik & Merkle 2006, p. 4).

The Gulf States have been the largest recipients of transnational higher education globally, whilst Australia, the UK and USA have been the largest providers. However, amongst the Gulf States, different forms of transnational provision dominate in different countries. For example, the Sultanate of Oman has no international branch campuses, but does have private higher education institutions (higher education institutions) that have foreign partners, whilst Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have many branch campuses. In fact, the UAE hosts over 40 international branch campuses, which represents almost a quarter of all international branch campuses worldwide (Becker 2009, p. 7).

The possible benefits that international branch campuses might deliver to students, to host countries, and to the institutions owning them, have been suggested in the literature (Hatakenaka 2004; Knight 2006; Verbik & Merkle 2006; Olds 2007; Fox 2008; Becker 2009; Maringe 2009; Naidoo 2010), but as yet there has been little published empirical evidence to support the suggested benefits. This study aims to identify the stakeholders that might benefit from transnational higher education in the Gulf States, particularly in the UAE and Qatar, and to examine the extent to which those stakeholders are actually benefiting from it.

Transnational higher education in the Arab Gulf States

Saudi Arabia

Amongst the Gulf States, only Oman and Saudi Arabia have no international branch campuses (Becker 2009), but it is only in Saudi Arabia that face-to-face transnational higher education is not available. However, there is evidence that Saudi Arabia's leading universities are moving towards a policy of increased international collaboration (Onsman 2010). This is most evident at

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), established in 2009. It has entered into collaborative ventures with 27 universities globally and created five international academic excellence alliances (Corbyn 2009).

The benefits for foreign universities can be huge. For example, in return for advising on equipment requirements and staff selection, providing master's syllabuses in materials science and chemical engineering, and participating in collaborative research, Imperial College London will receive US\$25 million over five years (Corbyn 2009). It seems, therefore, that international collaboration might result in a win-win-win situation for KAUST, its foreign partners and for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. KAUST will benefit from international expertise and will become a partner in cutting-edge research, the foreign partners will also benefit from the research undertaken as well as from the funding received, and, as a nation, Saudi Arabia will move closer to achieving its objective of becoming a knowledge-based economy.

Bahrain and Kuwait

There are only a handful of transnational higher education providers in Bahrain and Kuwait. New York Institute of Technology established a campus in Bahrain in 2003, and in 2009/10 it had over 1,200 students on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In 2006, the Economic Development Board in Bahrain announced that it would develop, with a Kuwaiti investment company as its partner, a 'higher education city' in Bahrain, where international branch campuses would be established. It is not yet known when this planned hub for transnational providers will open.

Box Hill Institute, based in Melbourne, Australia, has had a campus in Kuwait since 2007, where a range of foundation and diploma programmes are offered only to women. It is still common in the Gulf States for men and women to be educated separately, although most of the international branch campuses deliver teaching to mixed sex classes. The Kuwait Maastricht Business School was established in 2003, supported by the Maastricht School of Management (The Netherlands). Since then, it has had over 1,000 students, and it plans to move to a newly constructed campus in 2012. In 2007, the University of Bangor (Wales, UK) signed a partnership agreement with the newly established British University of Kuwait, but the new institution has yet to admit its first students.

Oman

In the Sultanate of Oman, a Royal Decree was issued in 1996 to promote the development of private higher education institutions. The government offers plots of land for the construction of new campuses, loans with subsidised interest rates, grants for acquiring learning resources, and it pays the tuition fees of national students from families receiving social welfare. The government's incentives have enabled private higher education institutions to increase access to higher education as well as improving the quality of their provision (Al Lamki 2002, p. 79). By 2009, 24 private higher education institutions had been established, with enrolments totalling over 33,500, which represented 27 per cent of the total number of students in higher education in the country (Al Shmeli 2009, p. 4). Of these institutions, five are universities.

Most of the private higher education institutions in Oman are joint enterprises owned by Omani citizens, or the Omani government, and foreign higher education institutions, mostly from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US (Donn & Al Manthri 2010, p. 111). They focus on providing programmes that are required by the labour market, such as business, computer sciences, engineering and health sciences, which therefore contribute to the country's economic development as well as reducing youth unemployment. Programmes are generally delivered in English, and almost 80 per cent of students require additional English language tuition in their foundation year of study (Donn & Al Manthri, p. 113). It might be argued that it is not really necessary or appropriate for most programmes to be taught in English, rather than Arabic, the native language. For example, Wilkins (2002, p. 150) observed that in vocational training, the greatest barrier to learning and understanding for most Omanis was their weak ability to comprehend and communicate in English.

Qatar

In Qatar, the Qatar Foundation was established in 1995 as a not-for-profit organisation with the threefold mission of promoting education, scientific research and community development. Qatar Foundation's flagship project is Education City, a 1,000-hectare campus just outside the country's capital, Doha, which is home

to a number of education and research institutions. In order to satisfy Qatar's urgent need for graduates in subjects such as medicine and engineering, it was decided by the Qatar Foundation that it would be more efficient to bring a world-class higher education institution directly to Qatar rather than establishing institutes from scratch.

Qatar Foundation's original aim was to recruit one foreign higher education institution that was regarded as 'top 10' in a number of priority disciplines. It had considered the University of Virginia, but then concluded that there was no suitable higher education institution that was best at everything (Witte 2010a, p. 18). The result was that the Qatar Foundation decided instead to recruit a number of universities, each to specialise in a different discipline. At the start of 2010, six US-based universities had a branch campus at Education City, which included Weill-Cornell Medical School, Texas A&M University, to provide a range of engineering programmes, and Carnegie Mellon University, to provide programmes in business and computer science.

In July 2010, the Qatar Foundation recruited the French business school HEC Paris to Education City, where it will offer MBA programmes, executive and short certificate programmes, corporate-specific training, as well as engaging in business-related research. Then, in October 2010, University College London announced that it will also establish a campus at Education City, to conduct research and deliver programmes in archaeology, conservation and museum studies (Gill 2010).

United Arab Emirates

The first foreign university to be accredited by the UAE Ministry of Higher Education was the University of Wollongong (Australia), which has been operating in Dubai since 1993. At the start of 2010, the University of Wollongong in Dubai had over 3,500 students enrolled on a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Private higher education institutions in the UAE are required to be licensed by the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), and then to have each of their programmes individually accredited. In October 2010, the CAA had 66 licensed private institutions, offering 479 (active) programmes (CAA 2010).

Most of the private higher education institutions in Oman are joint enterprises owned by Omani citizens, or the Omani government, and foreign higher education institutions, mostly from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US

However, there are several free zones across the UAE, where CAA accreditation is not mandatory.

The largest free zone is Dubai International Academic City (DIAC), which is home to over thirty institutions including the University of Wollongong, Murdoch University (Australia), and Heriot-Watt University and Middlesex University (UK). At DIAC, foreign higher education institutions enjoy 100 per cent foreign ownership, no taxes and 100 per cent repatriation of profits. Although higher education institutions in the free zones might escape the requirements of the CAA, each individual emirate has its own licensing and accreditation requirements and its own quality assurance procedures. In the emirate of Dubai, the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) and its University Quality Assurance International Board (UQAIB) regulate foreign higher education institutions.

Private higher education institutions in the UAE are owned by local individuals, organisations or governments (of individual emirates), or by foreign higher education institutions. For example, the ruler of Sharjah established the American University of Sharjah in 1997 as a private not-for-profit institution, and the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry owns the University of Dubai, which was also established in 1997 as Dubai Polytechnic. More recently, the Abu Dhabi government has funded the establishment of two international branch campuses: Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, which started operations in 2006, and New York University Abu Dhabi, which admitted its first students in September 2010. Whilst international branch campuses in Dubai recruit the vast majority of their students from the local expatriate communities (with the Indian, Pakistani and Iranian communities being among the largest), New York University Abu Dhabi recruited its students globally, in order to obtain the highest-calibre students who satisfied its stringent entry requirements (Foderaro 2010).

The beneficiaries of foreign universities in the Arab Gulf States

Economic and human development

The discovery and production of oil and gas since the 1960s enabled the Gulf States to achieve rapid economic development and to provide generous levels of social welfare for their citizens. They are currently among the world's wealthiest countries. All six Arab Gulf countries rely on imports and foreign labour to meet domestic demand (Donn & Al Manthri 2010,

p. 34). With oil and gas resources due to become depleted over the next two decades, the development of knowledge economies, less reliant on the oil and gas industries, has become a key economic objective of governments across the Gulf region.

At the turn of the century, Saudi Arabia and the UAE had the most diversified economies, but they still over-relied on expatriate labour (Wilkins 2001, p. 155). For example, in the UAE, expatriates accounted for nearly 90 per cent of the labour force, and participation of UAE nationals in the labour force was only 54 per cent, and across the entire Gulf region youth unemployment was a problem (Wilkins 2001). As a result, the Gulf States have embarked upon programmes of labour market nationalisation, known as 'Emiratisation' in the UAE, and 'Omanisation' in Oman.

Increased participation in higher education has been regarded as one of the major catalysts to achieve labour market nationalisation and increased diversity in economies. Between 1994 and 2008, there was a threefold expansion of the number of students in higher education in the Gulf countries (Donn & Al Manthri 2010, p. 99), and private sector institutions provided much of this increase. All of the Gulf States have encouraged the establishment of private sector higher education institutions as this policy has relieved them of some of the costs of expanding capacity. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, it is also foreign higher education institutions that have enabled the Gulf States to increase capacity and participation in higher education, whether through the provision of branch campuses, joint ventures, collaboration, the provision of accredited programmes, or the provision of support for independent higher education institutions, such as the British University in Dubai.

The provision of programmes by foreign universities that match the demands of private sector business and industry has enabled countries such as Bahrain, Oman and the UAE to achieve labour force nationalisation targets in some sectors, such as commercial banking, and to make substantial progress in others, such as insurance, human resource management, tourism and hospitality (Mashood *et al.* 2009). Although all of the nationalisation programmes involve targets or quotas, some focus on industries and others on positions/levels in organisations.

As the Gulf States have always had insufficient higher education capacity, several thousand students have each year enrolled at universities overseas. Most have gone to the US, UK, Australia or to other Arab

countries outside the Gulf region. However, since international branch campuses have been established in the Gulf States, more nationals have decided to study at home. For example, approximately one-third of UAE national undergraduate students studying in the UAE are enrolled at a private institution rather than at one of the three federal institutions, and in the emirate of Dubai, the number at private institutions actually exceeds the number at federal institutions (Ahmed 2010a). In December 2009, 13.4 per cent of the students at the University of Wollongong in Dubai were UAE nationals. As more students have decided to study at international branch campuses rather than going overseas, the massive currency outflows associated with overseas study have been reduced.

When Gulf nationals choose to study at international branch campuses in their home countries, national governments benefit in that they do not have to bear the cost of those students' education, as they do not usually pay the tuition fees or any of the associated costs of study. The governments do, however, assist students from poor families. For example, at Education City in Qatar, the Qatar Foundation offers need-based loans and merit-based scholarships. Students who decide to undertake higher education in their home countries are less likely to consider emigration, and therefore the 'brain drain' of Gulf nationals is reduced, and local economies can benefit from the knowledge and skills acquired by these students.

Whereas Education City is focusing on meeting the needs of its local population (Witte 2010b), some of the other higher education hubs, such as DIAC, the Academic City in Dubai, have much bigger ambitions. DIAC was established as a regional hub, with the intention that it would cater for 40,000 students recruited from a large area that includes the Middle East, South Asia and Africa (Bardsley 2008). To date, the majority of students at DIAC have come from local expatriate families. For example, Murdoch University Dubai recruits only five per cent of its students from outside the UAE, but as branch campuses grow and their reputations improve, it is expected that more students will be recruited from overseas.

When foreign students come to the UAE to undertake higher education they also demand other goods and services, which provides a boost to the national economy. Foreign universities that set up in free zones such as DIAC provide revenue to the governments and organisations that own them in the form of rents. Rents at DIAC, on a square-foot basis, are twice as high

as rents in other popular city locations, such as on the Sheikh Zayed Road.

Given that only two universities in the Gulf States - King Saud University and King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, both based in Saudi Arabia - appear in the Shanghai Jiao Tong ranking of the world's top 500 universities (McGinley 2010), attracting world-class higher education institutions to establish branch campuses can be seen as a strategy to raise the profile and prestige of host countries. The Qatar Foundation has been adamant that institutions at Education City must be 'top 10' in the disciplines they offer. The benefits for host countries of attracting world-class universities to establish branch campuses can extend beyond higher education provision. For example, Abu Dhabi will establish branches of the Guggenheim and Louvre museums to complement the campuses of New York University and Paris-Sorbonne, so that it can develop into a cultural hub in the Middle East as well as a knowledge hub, where cutting edge research will be achieved.

Increased access to higher education and employment

Foreign universities have, through various forms of transnational provision, increased higher education capacity in the Gulf States by over 30,000 places. This has made higher education available to many Gulf nationals who would otherwise not have had access to it, especially among those who would not have been able to study overseas due to lack of financial resources or because of family or work commitments.

A high proportion of foreign institutions in the Gulf States offer part-time study, which allows local students to continue working full-time while they study, whereas the number of hours a student is allowed to work overseas is usually limited. International branch campuses have introduced innovative and flexible modes of delivery. For example, Murdoch University Dubai's MBA programme uses a trimester system, which allows students to spread their work over three study periods a year. Rates of participation in higher education have increased to 32.1 per cent in Bahrain, 30.2 per cent in Saudi Arabia, 25.2 per cent in Oman and 22.9 per cent in the UAE; however, the rates in Kuwait and Qatar are still only 17.6 per cent and 15.9 per cent respectively (World Economic Forum 2009).

The World Bank's gender parity index (GPI) for tertiary enrolment is an indicator of gender equity. By 1970, the number of women in tertiary education

exceeded men in Bahrain and Kuwait, and by 2000, Oman and Saudi Arabia had also reached gender parity in tertiary education (Luomi 2008, p. 50). Not only did the Gulf States achieve gender parity far before the other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, they also have rates of women participation in tertiary education significantly above the global average of 1.08 females for each man.

In 2008, Qatar had the highest GPI in the world, with 6.05 women for each man enrolled, while the UAE was in seventh place with 2.05 women for each man (World Bank 2010). However, these statistics are distorted to some extent by the fact that men in the Gulf States are more likely to go overseas for their higher education. Nevertheless, with more Gulf nationals deciding to undertake higher education in their home countries (Bristol-Rhys 2008, p. 100), the increase in higher education capacity provided by foreign universities has ensured that women continue to have access to higher education.

Many of the largest employers in the Gulf States recognise the value of higher education provided at foreign higher education institutions, and they provide support and assistance to institutions in many different ways, such as offering advice on curriculum design, help with the development of learning resources, and by providing internships for students. When the British University in Dubai was established in 2003, a range of leading organisations including the Emirates Group, Dubai National Gas Company (DUGAS), Dubai Cable Company (DUCAB) and the Emirates Foundation provided funding for the appointment of staff, funding or opportunities for research, and scholarships for students (Lock 2008, p. 130).

Foreign universities in the Gulf States have improved the knowledge and skills of young people entering the labour market. Graduates benefit by quickly achieving secure and well-rewarded positions that offer career advancement. Employers benefit by not having to invest as much time and finance in training and development, and by recruiting graduates who can make a quicker and better contribution in the workplace.

All of the Gulf States have large expatriate populations, and in the UAE, for example, expatriates account for over 80 per cent of the country's population. Expatriates are not usually able to attend federal universities (although Zayed University recently started admitting foreign students), and before private higher education institutions were established, expatriate families living in the Gulf States had to send their children overseas

to obtain a higher education. International branch campuses enable Gulf expatriates to acquire a high quality, internationally recognised degree at lower cost, since the tuition fees at branch campuses are usually lower than at parent campuses, and without the student having to leave their home or family.

About 90 per cent of the students at Murdoch University Dubai consider their domicile to be outside the UAE, and so it is important for them to gain a 'portable' qualification that they can rely on when they eventually leave the Gulf region. Some 28 different nationalities are represented on Murdoch's MBA programme in Dubai, which has approximately 180 students. The multicultural communities found at branch campuses in the Gulf States offer opportunities for working, sharing and networking among expatriates and also expatriates with Gulf nationals. Outside education, it is unusual for Gulf nationals to mix socially or professionally with expatriate communities.

Students prefer international branch campuses

UAE nationals who study at a UAE federal institution do not pay tuition fees, but if they enrol at private higher education institutions then they pay the full tuition fees just like any other student. A director at the UAE Ministry of Higher Education recently reported that many Emirati students preferred to study at private higher education institutions rather than federal institutions (Ahmed 2010a). Motives for wanting to enrol at a private higher education institution include the opportunity to study subjects not offered at federal institutions; the possibility of gaining a more highly respected foreign degree, boosting future employment prospects; and the opportunity to study in a multicultural environment, interacting with students from other cultures.

International branch campuses often facilitate an increase in mutual understanding between people from different cultures, and this may enable students to become global citizens. For some Gulf nationals, study at a private institution might have provided their only opportunity to obtain a higher education if they did not gain entry to a federal institution. Most of the foreign higher education institutions that offer undergraduate programmes also offer foundation or bridging programmes, which benefits students who need language or general academic development before embarking on undergraduate study. At Education City, Qatar, an Academic Bridge Programme is offered, which provides students with up to two years of pre-

paratory work to enable them to satisfy the admission requirements of the US-based branch campuses (Witte 2010b). In addition, foreign higher education institutions offer a diverse range of sub-degree level, vocational and professional programmes.

The costs per student on many programmes at Education City are exorbitant, but as the Qatar Foundation is paying all operating expenses, this is not a major problem for the US universities established there (Witte 2010a). Despite being fully funded by the Qatar Foundation, the US universities at Education City are given autonomy in operational decision-making and full control over the curriculum, academic matters and quality. A result of the institutions applying the same entry criteria that they do at home is that most class sizes are very small, which many students find beneficial to their learning. Class sizes at New York University and Paris-Sorbonne in Abu Dhabi are also considerably smaller than those at the home campuses.

Achieving international standards

It may be argued that foreign universities have helped bring the higher education systems of the Gulf States up to international standards, by providing competition for federal institutions and by encouraging Gulf governments to improve their accreditation and quality assurance procedures. All foreign higher education institutions are expected to adhere to the standards of their parent organisations and the policies and regulations applicable in their home countries. In addition, the increasingly large number of HE providers in some of the Gulf States has a positive effect on quality, by forcing institutions to compete by improving their programmes and the employability of their graduates.

All of the Gulf States have bodies responsible for accreditation and quality assurance at private higher education institutions. The standards for institution accreditation cover all of the main activities and functions of an educational institution, and are generally based on foreign models. For example, the standards implemented by the Commission for Academic Accreditation in the UAE are based on a US model. Even in the UAE's free zones, where regulation is often assumed to be lighter, local bodies still strictly enforce quality

requirements. In April 2010, a review of the University Quality Assurance International Board in Dubai led to the withdrawal from the emirate of two institutions – Mahatma Gandhi University and the International Institute for Technology and Management – as their operations did not satisfy the requirements of the regulator (Ahmed 2010b). The regulation provided by quality assurance bodies in the Gulf States offers a degree of protection to students, who increasingly expect high international standards at branch campuses.

Benefits for foreign universities

The importance of embracing the opportunities presented by internationalisation has been recognised by most Western universities, and nearly all institutions refer to their international dimension in mission state-

Critics of Western universities that have established international branch campuses often accuse them of 'selling out' to the highest bidder. The director-general of Paris-Sorbonne admitted after the institution opened its campus in Abu Dhabi that it would probably go to any city where all of its expenses were paid

ments (Kehm and Teichler 2007, p. 262). Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 292) claim that earning money is a key motive for all international projects in the for-profit sector and for some traditional non-profit universities, especially when faced with declining state funding. For example, McBurnie and Pollock (2000, p. 333)

observed that since 1999 it has been a strategic aim of Monash University (Australia) to become more self-reliant and less dependent on state funding. Murdoch University expects to earn a return from its Dubai campus in the form of a royalty. Critics of Western universities that have established international branch campuses often accuse them of 'selling out' to the highest bidder (Krieger 2008; Lewin 2008). The director-general of Paris-Sorbonne admitted after the institution opened its campus in Abu Dhabi that it would probably go to any city where all of its expenses were paid (Krieger 2008).

A survey by Knight (2006) found that the main motivations for internationalisation of traditional non-profit universities are usually to enhance research and knowledge capacity and to increase cultural understanding. These would appear to be among the primary motives of Western universities that have entered into collaborative ventures with KAUST and other universities in Saudi Arabia. New York University considers its campus in Abu Dhabi as being part of its strategy to establish itself as a global higher education brand.

In the US, there is now a greater desire amongst students, parents and employers, for both students and academics to gain increased international experience through study or teaching abroad. The UAE campus of New York University is expected to contribute to increasing the proportion of its US-based students who participate in study-abroad from 42 per cent to over 50 per cent (Krieger 2008). Murdoch University has a 'Discovery Exchange Programme', which allows students at its home campuses in Australia to study for a semester or trimester in Dubai, and Dubai-based students can also spend time in Australia.

By diversifying modes of delivery and establishing international branch campuses, Western higher education institutions might be spreading their risks, so that they are less dependent on particular categories of student, and less at risk of sudden shocks or shifting economic and socio-cultural trends that result in reduced enrolments of international students at home campuses. It is increasingly important for some universities to establish or develop a global brand in order to achieve their growth objectives and to attract international students and research income. In addition to its campuses in Australia and Dubai, Murdoch University currently has a presence in Japan, Malaysia and Singapore.

Professor John Grainger, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University Dubai, explains the institution's success in the UAE:

'We have developed a high tolerance of ambiguity necessary for living and doing business in the UAE. We treat our students with respect... We insist on the highest possible standards of teaching and learning – all our materials are developed by faculty in Perth, and updated with the latest research findings from across the world. Our faculty and administration pay attention to detail, actively participating in quality assurance initiatives.' (Statement given to author).

By offering high quality programmes in subjects demanded by local students at an affordable price, Murdoch University Dubai increased student enrolments by 100 per cent in 2010-11. The institution is now committed to expanding its facilities in Dubai and introducing new courses. Murdoch University Dubai recently launched undergraduate programmes in Information Technology & Business Information Systems and Environmental Management & Sustainable Development, the latter course being highly relevant locally given that the UAE has the highest carbon footprint in the world and consumes more water per

person than any other nation. In January 2011, it introduced a Master programme in Education.

Employee benefits

Academics at international branch campuses often work in modern, purpose-built premises resourced with the best equipment. They can gain new research opportunities and valuable teaching experience, often leading to the development of new curricula and teaching materials for both home and branch campuses, and increased international research collaboration. Although some academics fear that working at branch campuses in the Gulf States may hinder their research and career progression, in some cases foreign universities are prepared to offer earlier promotions, e.g. to professor, as an incentive to encourage high calibre staff to work at their branch campuses.

Working in the Gulf can offer academics excitement and glamour in their lifestyles. The financial packages offered to expatriate academics in the Gulf States can be very attractive, especially as accommodation is usually provided, salaries are tax-free, free medical insurance is provided, and the school fees of dependent children are paid. International branch campuses also provide employment opportunities for Gulf nationals, especially in managerial, administrative and support roles. As more Gulf nationals achieve PhDs, it is likely that the number taking academic positions at branch campuses in the Gulf States will also increase, thus contributing to the achievement of further labour market nationalisation across the region.

Criticisms of foreign universities in the Arab Gulf States

The literature reveals many critics of the international branch campus concept, and authors have examined particular problems and issues associated with the internationalisation of higher education (Altbach 2001; Naidoo 2003; Altbach 2004; Naidoo 2007; Becker 2009; Romani 2009; Altbach 2010; Donn & Al Manthri 2010; Wilkins 2010). Altbach (2001; 2004) and Naidoo (2003; 2007) observe that higher education has become a commodity to be sold for commercial gain. Naidoo (2003, p. 256) argues that the effects of commodification indicate that in the present context, the historic trends of inequity and declining quality in large segments of higher education systems are likely to be exacerbated.

Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 96) suggest that while the products of Western universities may be of the

highest quality in their home countries, they do not necessarily 'travel well' or serve the interests of higher education in the Gulf States. Some institutions may be tempted to deliver at international branch campuses 'off-the-shelf' standardised products with generic content that were developed at their home campuses, and as a result they may be irrelevant or inappropriate in the Gulf region (Naidoo 2007, p. 8). Since commodified systems tend to be lean systems that emphasise cost minimisation, investment in libraries, learning resources and social facilities might fall below international norms (Naidoo 2007).

Altbach (2004, p. 9) suggests Western universities can be seen as the new neocolonists, seeking to dominate not for ideological or political reasons but rather for commercial gain. He argues that the trend of globalisation of higher education is likely to lead to further inequalities, whereby the leading universities in English-speaking countries and in some of the larger European Union countries grow stronger and more dominant, while universities in smaller and developing countries become increasingly marginalised (Altbach 2001). Adopting Altbach's concept of centres and peripheries, Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 155) suggest that the Gulf States are on the periphery, becoming increasingly marginalised, as the 'centres' grow stronger. They further argue that the Gulf States could easily fall into the trap of becoming only consumers of knowledge rather than producers of it (p. 124).

In the UAE, the higher education marketplace has become very competitive and among private sector providers there is currently over capacity. Wilkins (2010) found that several institutions were failing to achieve their student recruitment targets or to break-even. As a result, some institutions have been unable to undertake planned investment and expansion, unable to increase their tuition fees in line with increases in costs and unable to run all planned/advertised programmes/modules.

The quality of regulation of foreign universities varies across the Gulf States, and even within individual countries. For example, after the review of the University Quality Assurance International Board led Mahatma Gandhi University and the International Institute for Technology and Management to withdraw from Dubai, both institutions simply relocated to a free zone in Ras al Khaimah, just 87 kilometres away. It should be noted, however, that foreign universities from Australia, the UK and US, are generally regarded as being of high quality by local quality assurance agencies.

In Qatar, some have questioned the connection of Education City with the rest of Qatari society, suggesting that it is elitist and operates in isolation, and that it is encouraging neglect of the federal Qatar University, where over 90 per cent of nationals receive their tertiary education (Witte 2010b). Despite being wholly funded by the Abu Dhabi government, it is expected that only a small proportion of the students at New York University Abu Dhabi will be UAE nationals (Witte 2010b). If, over time, this does not change, resentment and social unrest amongst nationals might eventually occur, especially if young people do not achieve places at other higher education institutions that they consider to be of high quality.

Conclusion

Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 15) argue that higher education in the Gulf States may come to be seen as a baroque arsenal, a valuable economic and political cargo for the sellers/exporters but of little educational value to purchasers/importers. Foreign universities in the Gulf States have, however, added much needed capacity to local higher education systems, and have thus helped significantly increase the participation of young people in higher education.

This study has revealed that higher education in the Gulf States is helping to transform Gulf societies, by increasing labour market nationalisation, reducing youth unemployment, reducing the emigration of highly skilled labour, reducing currency outflows caused by nationals studying overseas, and by contributing to the creation of more highly diversified, knowledge-based economies. Young people are acquiring at international branch campuses the knowledge and skills needed for employment in innovative, knowledge-based organisations.

Donn and Al Manthri (2010, p. 124) also suggest that the Gulf States could fall into the trap of becoming only consumers of knowledge rather than producers of it. However, during the last two to three years, many of the Western-based international branch campuses in the Gulf States have strengthened their research bases by appointing heads of research, by establishing research centres and by introducing doctoral programmes.

It is clear that funding organisations such as the Qatar Foundation and the Abu Dhabi Education Council expect foreign higher education institutions to take the lead in driving their strategies to achieve their

goals of transforming their nations into innovation-based, knowledge producing societies. Foreign higher education institutions that are not directly funded by Gulf governments or organisations are also likely to undertake research, so that they can each develop their reputation and local standing with students, employers and regulatory bodies. It is clear that at the present time mutual benefits are derived from the operation of foreign universities in the Gulf States, with the institutions themselves benefiting as well as a range of local stakeholders.

Dr Warren Fox, Executive Director, Higher Education, at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai describes how he sees higher education developing in the emirate:

'We will continue to grow, but I think we will be levelling off; instead of lots of new institutions, we need to expand the number of programmes in institutions that are already here (currently there are 409 programmes in Dubai). We want to broaden the programmes available over the next five years; this will make the (branch) campuses more sustainable... We will also see more postgraduate and doctoral programmes, too. In 20 years, the landscape will probably look a little different; our campuses will be here, and we expect that they will have expanded.' (Statement given to author).

Stephen Wilkins was formerly Director of Professional Management Programmes at Dubai University College, Dubai, UAE. He is currently a PhD candidate at the International Centre for Higher Education Management, University of Bath, UK.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Professor John Grainger, Pro-Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University International Study Centre Dubai and Dr Warren Fox, Executive Director, Higher Education, at the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), Dubai for providing information used in this article and for participating in interviews conducted by email.

References

- ACE. (2009). *U.S. branch campuses abroad. Issue brief*, September. (2009, American Council on Education, Center for International Initiatives. Retrieved on 15 May. (2010 from http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/ProgramsServices/cii/pubs/ace/crossborder_survey_results.pdf)
- Ahmed, A. (2010a). Emiratis seen to prefer private universities, *Khaleej Times*, April 14. Retrieved on 16 October. (2010 from http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlent.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/April/theuae_April374.xml§ion=theuae)
- Ahmed, A. (2010b). Branch campuses forced to move out of Dubai, *Khaleej Times*, September 21. Retrieved on 14 October 2010 from http://www.khaleejtimes.com/darticlent.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2010/September/theuae_September481.xml§ion=theuae
- Al Lamki, S.M. (2002). Higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: The challenge of access, equity and privatization, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 24(1), pp. 75-86.
- Al Shmeli, S.H. (2009). *Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman: Planning in the context of globalisation*, International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO. Retrieved on 7 July 2010 from: http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Pol_Forum_09/Alshmeli_Oman.pdf
- Altbach, P.G. (2001). Higher Education and the WTO: Globalisation run amok, *International Higher Education*, Spring. (2001. Retrieved on 8 May 2010 from: https://htmlbprod.bc.edu/pls/htmlb/f?p=2290:4:1872596951464925:NO:RP,4:PO_CONTENT_ID:99872)
- Altbach, P.G. (2004). Globalisation and the university: Myths and realities in an unequal world, *Tertiary Education and Management*, 10(1), pp. 3-25.
- Altbach, P.G. (2010). Why branch campuses may be unsustainable, *International Higher Education*, 58, Winter 2010. Retrieved on 13 February 2010 from: https://htmlbprod.bc.edu/pls/htmlb/f?p=2290:4:3461244414942490::NO:RP,4:PO_CONTENT_ID:110101
- Altbach, P.G. & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalisation of higher education: Motivations and realities, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4), pp. 290-305.
- Bardsley, D. (2008). Dubai plans education hub of 40 universities, *The National*, August 14.
- Becker, R.F.J. (2009). *International branch campuses: Markets and strategies*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Bristol-Rhys, J. (2008). The dilemma of gender-separated higher education in the United Arab Emirates, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- CAA. (2010). *Active programs*. Commission for Academic Accreditation. Retrieved on 15 October 2010 from: <https://www.caa.ae/caaweb/DesktopModules/InstPrograms.aspx>
- Corbyn, Z. (2009). Saudi Arabia begins putting minds to challenges of future, *Times Higher Education*, September 24. Retrieved on 10 October 2010 from: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=408293§ioncode=26>
- Donn, G. & Al Manthri, Y. (2010). *Globalisation and higher education in the Arab Gulf States*, Symposium Books, Didcot, UK.
- Foderaro, L.W. (2010). N.Y.U. Abu Dhabi scours globe for top students, *The New York Times*, June 20. Retrieved on 21 June 2010 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/21/nyu.html?src=mv>
- Fox, W.H. (2008). The United Arab Emirates and policy priorities for higher education, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- Hatakenaka, S. (2004). *Internationalism in higher education: A review*, Higher Education Policy Institute, Oxford.

- Kehm, B.M. & Teichler, U. (2007). Research on internationalisation in higher education, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4), pp. 260-273.
- Knight, J. (2006). *Internationalization of higher education: New directions, new challenges*. The 2005 IAU global survey report, International Association of Universities, Paris.
- Krieger, Z. (2008). The Emir of NYU', *New York Magazine*, April 13. Retrieved on 1 January 2009 from: <http://nymag.com/news/features/46000/>
- Lewin, T. (2008). U.S. universities rush to set up outposts abroad, *New York Times*, February 10. Retrieved on 14 March 2010 from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/10/education/10global.html>
- Lock, D.J. (2008). International higher education: Ownership and opportunities – A case study of the British University in Dubai, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher Education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- Luomi, M. (2008). Reforming higher education: The GCC highway in the shadow of the World Bank road, in Davidson, C. & Mackenzie Smith, P. (eds), *Higher education in the Gulf States: Shaping economies, politics and culture*, Saqi, London.
- Maringe, F. (2009). Strategies and challenges of internationalisation in HE: An exploratory study of UK universities, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 23(7), pp. 553-563.
- Mashood, N., Verhoeven, H. & Chansarkar, B. (2009). *Emiratisation, Omanisation and Saudisation – Common causes: Common solutions?* Retrieved on 15 October 2010 from: <http://www.wbiconpro.com/17.%20Helen-UAE.pdf>
- McBurnie, G. & Pollock, A. (2000). Opportunity and risk in transnational education – Issues in planning for international campus development: An Australian perspective, *Higher Education in Europe*, 25(3), pp. 333-343.
- McBurnie, G. & Ziguras, C. (2007). *Transnational Education: Issues and trends in offshore higher education*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK.
- McGinley, S. (2010). Four Mideast universities in world's best 500', *Arabian Business*, August 20. Retrieved on 20 September 2010 from <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/four-mideast-universities-in-world-s-best-500-343573.html?parentID=353278>
- Naidoo, R. (2003). Repositioning higher education as a global commodity: Opportunities and challenges for future sociology of education work, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 24(2), pp. 249-259.
- Naidoo, R. (2007). *Higher education as a global commodity: The perils and promises for developing countries*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Naidoo, V. (2010). Transnational higher education: Why it happens and who benefits?, *International Higher Education*, 58, Winter 2010. Retrieved on 15 May 2010 from http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number58/p6_Naidoo.htm
- Olds, K. (2007). Global assemblage: Singapore, foreign universities, and the construction of a global education hub, *World Development*, 35(6), pp. 959-975.
- Onsman, A. (2010). Dismantling the perceived barriers to the implementation of national higher education accreditation guidelines in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(5), pp. 511-519.
- Romani, V. (2009). *The politics of higher education in the Middle East: Problems and prospects*. Middle East Brief, 36, May 2009, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA.
- Universities UK. (2010). Student mobility versus TNE: Not a zero-sum game, *International Focus*: 28/07/10. Retrieved on 10 August 2010 from <http://www.international.ac.uk/resources/International%20Focus%2060.28.07.10.pdf>
- Verbik, L. & Merkle, C. (2006). *The international branch campus – Models and trends*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Wilkins, S. (2001). International briefing 9: Training and development in the United Arab Emirates, *International Journal of Training and Development*, 5(2), pp. 153-165.
- Wilkins, S. (2002). The implementation of NVQs in the Sultanate of Oman, *Education+ Training*, 44(3), pp. 144-152.
- Wilkins, S. (2010). Higher education in the United Arab Emirates: An analysis of the outcomes of significant increases in supply and competition, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(4), pp. 389-400.
- Witte, S. (2010a). *Inside Education City: The persistent demographic & gender imbalance in Qatar*, The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, London.
- Witte, S. (2010b). Gulf State branch campuses: Global student recruitment, *International Higher Education*, 58. Retrieved on 13 February 2010 from http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number58/p5_Witte.htm
- World Bank. (2010). Indicator 3.3: Gender parity index (GPI), gross enrolment ration (GER) for tertiary, *EdStats*, August 2010. Retrieved on 20 October 2010 from http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTEDSTATS/Resources/3232763-1197312825215/GPI_ter.pdf
- World Economic Forum. (2009). *Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009*, WEF, Washington DC.