

Chapter 20

Transnational Education in Malaysia: Development, Challenges, and Strategic Alignment

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ABSTRACT

Private higher education in Malaysia has undergone radical transformations with the aim of becoming a regional hub for higher education in Southeast Asia, and to transform the country into one that has a fully developed knowledge-based economy. To understand this transformation, the purposes of this chapter are to identify key prospects and challenges of international branch campuses (IBCs) and propose strategic alignment on the operation and administration of the IBCs in Malaysia. In order to identify and understand the challenges IBCs face when operating in Malaysia, this study adopts a review approach that is supported by findings and from academic and grey literature. The results of this review indicate that IBCs are faced with complex challenges and are on unequal footing with other local universities. This chapter uncovers various demanding issues and discusses strategic alignment of IBCs. Limitations and recommendations for future research are also incorporated in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide demand for quality education is growing at an exponential rate, propelled by economic growth of developing countries and the increased globalisation of countries and their economy. The demand for education has also demonstrated a sharp increase in students' participation in higher education, which puts a pressure on local domestic education systems in developing countries. Consequently, the government of these countries decided to address these demands for higher education by investing

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5226-4.ch020

in transnational education, by providing higher education study programs and services that are located in a country different from a host country (Healey, 2015). The growth and development of international branch campuses (IBC) has seen a tremendous rise in the past decade. Since 2000, the number of IBCs has seen a rapid increase, with over 250 IBCs operating around the world, and more institutions opening up in countries such as Indonesia, Morocco and Mexico (Lane et al., 2021). There is also a marked increase in the number of IBCs penetrating the South East Asian market to date. The majority of IBCs are located in Asia, with China overtaking United Arab Emirates as the country with the highest number of IBCs (O' Malley, 2016). At the moment, China holds the record for hosting 32 IBCs, followed by UAE with 31 IBCs in the country. Singapore and Malaysia each has 12 IBCs, and Qatar, 11 IBCs. The aggregate figure makes up approximately 39% of the world's total number of IBCs (O'Malley, 2016).

Wilkins and Rumbley (2018) define IBCs as an education institution owned by an overseas organisation, and students graduate with a degree carrying the main campus' name. Hill and Thabet (2018), however, consider IBC as an international business where the university seeks to expand its enrolment through establishing a market in another country. He (2016, p.8) views IBC in a slightly different light; an IBC is seen as a *“hybrid between a branch campus and franchising”* as the partnership is between foreign and local educational enterprises. The authors concur with Lane and Kinser (2012 as cited in Hill and Thabet, 2018) in that different IBCs operate with different structures, proprietary names and governance; therefore, it would be difficult to establish a single definition to characterise the various types of IBCs and the challenges each faces when establishing these institutions in Malaysia.

The aspiration to transform Asia as an education hub has been one of the main impetuses for the growth of more IBCs in the South East Asian region. Besides improving the quality of education, this move is also seen as a strategy to develop human capital to strengthen the economy and attain economic growth (Yung et al., 2018). Knight (2011) posits that IBCs provide a linkage between research, knowledge and innovation, all essential components to national capacity building. Thus, the setting up of IBCs is seen as a way for potential economic growth by promoting a knowledge economy, particularly for developing countries such as Malaysia. At the present, the biggest education providers for IBCs in Malaysia are the UK with 5 offshore branches, followed by Australia with three offshore branches, and one IBC branch from China and Ireland respectively (Education Malaysia Global Services, n.d.).

The rapid development and establishment of IBCs in Asia signals to the increasingly important role that IBCs play in influencing international academic mobility (Alam et al., 2013). This chapter will provide a better understanding on the development of IBCs, the issues and challenges faced by IBCs in Malaysia and the implications on the stake-holders of the various IBCs in Malaysia. It is imperative to understand the socio-political factors that govern the establishment of IBCs for both the host, and the sending country. Understanding the developments and challenges faced by IBCs, in light of the current expansion and future growth of transnational education in South East Asia has enormous market potential for education. In addition, to date, there is a lack of literature related to the challenges and performances of IBCs in the South East Asian context and building strategic alignments; it is hoped that this chapter will contribute to the body of knowledge on this topic, with particular reference to the Malaysian field of private tertiary education. In the Malaysian higher education sector, there is stiff competition amongst the universities and colleges to recruit and retain both local and international students especially with the current post-pandemic climate around the globe. This chapter draws on the literature pertaining to marketing of higher education both in Malaysia and other countries. Furthermore, the chapter explores the key challenges experienced by the IBCs as they grow over the years. The strategic alignments of

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