

Handbook of Research on Developments and Future Trends in Transnational Higher Education

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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

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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

IBCs are then presented, which aim at suggesting some possible improvements that could have a positive impact on sustaining student recruitment.

The first section of this chapter describes the development of IBCs in Malaysia, including the justification of establishing branch campuses in the country. Section two discusses the challenges that IBCs face when operating in Malaysia and provide insights issues such as accreditation, different standards and requirements from the feeder and host countries and the competition between various IBCs in the country which adds on to the complexities of running IBCs in Malaysia. The final section presents the strategic alignment of IBCs in Malaysia and its implications between the host university and the branch campus located in Malaysia.

DEVELOPMENT OF IBCS IN MALAYSIA

This section focuses on the development of IBCs in Malaysia, and highlights the history and establishment of IBCs, followed by the rationale for setting up the IBCs in light of the education climate in Malaysia at that time.

In the Malaysian context, the developments of IBCs were triggered by two major factors: potential contribution to economic growth and the government's decision to widen its citizens' access to quality education. In Malaysia, IBCs have emerged as significant providers of education as a result of the internationalisation, commodification of higher education, and potential economic growth of both the host country and university's home country (Escriva-Beltran, Nunoz-de-Prat & Villo, 2019). There were nine IBCs in Malaysia as of 2017 (List of IPTS, 2017) and the numbers have grown quite rapidly. As of 31 December 2021, the total number of IBCs established in Malaysia were ten, with a new IBCs set up between 2018 and 2021 (List of IPTS, 2021). This indicates the popularity of IBCs in Malaysia as branch campuses of many well-known universities from the United Kingdom such as The University of Nottingham, Herriot-Watt University, Newcastle University, the University of Southampton and the University of Reading located in Johor Bahru were established. Three Australian IBCs were also established, which are Curtin University Malaysia, Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak, and Monash University. The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland and University College Dublin Malaysia Campus (RSCI & UCD) and Xiamen University from China were also established within a short period of time, which demonstrates the potential and attraction of establishing IBCs in Malaysia (Rashad, Majid and Subramaniam, 2020).

It is important to note that the education system in Australia and United Kingdom is quite similar. However, while the education system in United Kingdom is highly focussed on exams, Australia has a balance between coursework, assignments and exam in evaluating student performance (Mahoney, 2021). In terms of the grading system, the United Kingdom uses the honours system (First class to Third class honours) while Australia uses grading system ranging from high distinction (HD) to fail (F) (AECC Global, 2021). In comparison, the education system in China is more rigid; students are assessed based on a points system where they sit for exams and tests every semester (Smith, 2020). Conversely, the education system in Australia is based on credit system, thus, giving flexibility to students to decide what to study and total amount of time a student needs to study per semester. The differences of these IBCs education system translate into different standards, learning styles and teaching principles in Malaysia which will be further discussed in the challenges section below.

Malaysia opened up its shores to IBCs in 2007 (Rashad, Majid & Subramaniam, 2020). Initially, this initiative began in the early 1970s, to provide higher education opportunities for local students, particularly for students who could not obtain places at local public higher education institutions. This was largely due to ethnic admission policies and the lack of places in public higher education institutions to meet the needs of the growing student population at that moment (Yung et al., 2018). At the same time, reforms in higher education in Malaysia led to the idea of positioning the country as regional education hubs in South East Asia. Thus, this led to a host of opportunities to forge partnerships and collaboration between local institutions and foreign universities to offer a “localised” version of an overseas degree to Malaysian students. The government’s approach to education at the time was to widen access to education for local students to ease the pressure and meet the demands of the growing education system, while promoting Malaysia as an attractive study destination in the region (Knight & Morshidi, 2011) that offers high quality, affordable education. As a result, a wide range of transnational education opportunities were offered to students, beginning with twinning programs, franchise programs, study exchange programs and credit transfer programs (Lin, Leung & Waters, 2019) which were tailored to fit the needs of the students. Eventually, the idea of establishing an offshore program locally was explored to offer opportunities for local students to pursue a foreign tertiary education at a fraction of the cost.

In addition, the establishment of IBCs also attracted a large cohort of international students who were attracted by the affordable tuition fees and lifestyle in Malaysia. This deal was seen as a good strategy to boost economic development in the nation. It is clear especially in the early stages, that the Malaysian government plays a major role in the planting of IBCs throughout the country. The National Education Policy was established in 1996 to align with the Seventh Economic Plan of developing more human capital to meet the needs of the Knowledge Economy, or K-Economy as envisioned by Tun Mahathir Mohammed, our then Prime Minister (Arachi, 2006). Due to the government changes in legislation, the government offered the IBCs attractive incentives and tax exemptions when they set up branch campuses on the Malaysian soil. In addition, the government-initiated measures to increase the number of international students in the IBCs by expediting the student visa application process. With all these favourable conditions, Malaysia, gradually but steadily, emerged as one of the prime educational hubs in Asia (Teo, 2005 as cited in Arachi, 2006).

Since it was Malaysia’s intention to position itself as an international higher education hub in the region (Yung et al., 2018), the development of IBCs is viewed as an effective way to achieve economic development. The presence of these IBCs creates a robust education ecosystem and expands the market by creating an international reputation for a state, or a country. Besides attracting local and foreign students, employing international staff also helps accelerate the potential for expansion and growth in each the host states. Schulze and Kleibert (2021) assert that students and staff within the community reap benefits because of the presence of higher education institutions. The establishment of higher education institutions in surrounding area creates demands for goods and services, and increases revenue for the local communities. For example, the government came up with the initiative to create sub-national higher education hubs such as the “EduCity” project located in Iskandar Putri in Johor. This education hub was established to act as a feeder for talents to support the economic activity in Iskandar Malaysia while providing future skilled workers for the various industries in the Johor region. This in turn will drive the socio-economic development within the Johor area (Rashad, Majid & Subramaniam, 2020). It is worth noting that although other IBCs may not be situated in a centralised location such as the ones in Educuity, or were strategically planned in such a manner, the IBCs are established in cities that have the potential for growth and development for the different states hosting these universities.

Transnational Education in Malaysia

In recent years, the number of foreign universities interested in the local education industry has grown, and quite a few of them have set up branch campuses or offshore campuses in Malaysia to fulfil the local students' increased demand for higher education (Sato, 2005). Furthermore, parents are increasingly aware that foreign degrees command a higher "employability value"; thus, the establishments of IBCs in Malaysia are well received. The popularity of IBCs is evidenced by the number of IBCs set up in countries such as Malaysia, China, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Together, these countries host the largest number of IBCs in the last two decades (Pohl, & Lane, 2018).

Another reason for the establishment of IBCs in Malaysia was due to the pressure on the local education system to cope with the growing needs of students participating in higher education across the country. The development of IBCs has gained traction and become prominent in the higher education scene in Malaysia is the impact of the 1997 financial crisis on the country (Akiba, 2008). Due to the local currency depreciation and low purchasing power, many middle-class families were unable to bear the exorbitant financial costs of sending their children abroad for studies. This created a favourable situation for more IBCs to be built in the country to meet the people's demand for overseas degrees and qualifications. However, it is important to note that the 1997 financial crisis was not the sole reason for the changes in the Malaysian higher education scene. In fact, an increase in the number of higher education providers was essential to meet the manpower needs of the country (Arachi, 2006). In short, the economic forces have shaped tertiary education policies in Malaysia, from the time of the British colonial rule to the present. These policies have affected the thinking of the families and students in the way they view the value of education.

To sum up, middle-class Malaysian families place an exponentially increased value on tertiary education, making the Malaysian education system extremely competitive (Arachi, 2006). In addition, the racial quota implemented in the Malaysian national education system has created a scenario of educational and social inequalities (Schulze & Kleibert, 2021; McBurnie & Ziguras 2001). This imbalance of educational opportunity has a significant impact on the growth of the private higher education in the country, thus accelerating the development of more IBCs in Malaysia.

CHALLENGES OF IBCS IN MALAYSIA

This section examines the challenges in the development of IBCs in Malaysia, touching on several aspects. Several issues arise in relation to operational matters which are of concern to the various stakeholders. These issues stem from lack of clarity in characterising the role, purpose and objectives of IBCs between the feeder country and host country (Hill et al., 2014).

Among the issues discussed in this section include; issues related to quality assurance (accreditation and different standards set by the government), strict requirements in government policy, stiff competition from other IBCs and challenges faced by students and staff in the delivery of the curriculum.

According to Barnett (2000 as cited in Bengsten, 2017), higher education has become super complex because universities are no longer restricted to the delivery of knowledge and education, but are now involved in managing *institutional context, professional and societal arenas and also the personal life-worlds of students and teachers* (Bengsten, 2017, p.68). Hill and Thabet (2018, p. 243) supports this view as they explain, *IBCs, at face value, appear to give the home university more control over academic quality than a licensing agreement, but the financial investment may be significant and many IBCs face a similar tension between the academic goals of the university and the more overtly commercial objectives*

of its JV partner. Altbach and Knight (2007) believe it will be difficult to reconcile the two objectives, as international higher education is now seen as a commodity, made available to those who can afford it, rather than as a tool for public good and access. Consequently, managing and running IBCs are getting increasingly challenging due to the numerous regulatory, cultural and normative practices of a host country (Neri & Wilkins, 2019; Shams & Huisman, 2016; Hill & Thabet, 2018).

In addition, managers and administrators are often placed in the difficult situation of having to serve *two masters* (Dobos, 2011 as cited Cai & Hall, 2016). The managers are required to maintain the quality and standard of the main campus, to safeguard the “brand” name and reputation while simultaneously needing to adapt and adhere to the conflicting local regulations. To complicate matters, they also have to adhere to instructions from the local authorities and university partners.

This section explores the complex challenges of the IBCs when operating in a fast-paced and changing environment. To remain relevant in the Malaysian education scene, the IBCs must respond very quickly to the changes in the education planning policies, research profile, student enrolment and curriculum. These issues are further examined in the following sub-sections below:

Challenges from Quality Assurance (Accreditation and Standards)

The first challenge involves ensuring that the IBCs comply with quality assurance requirements in order to operate in the country. The Malaysian government’s liberalisation and internationalisation policies were instrumental in the setting up of the nine IBCs. Nevertheless, the host country puts pressure on the IBCs to change their operation and character similar to those of the local higher education providers. Compliance to strict quality assurance includes issues such as accreditation and the challenge of meeting various standards of quality assurance from the Malaysian regulatory bodies and other regulatory bodies that govern the feeder institution. To meet accreditation purposes, IBCs are often faced with the tension of reconciling between the policies set by the Malaysian government and the regulations set by the higher education accreditation body in the feeder country. This is clearly seen in the quality assurance framework imposed on the IBCs (Shams & Huisman, 2014). For instance, the IBCs have to conform to two sets of standards for both teaching and research-based activities. As far as teaching quality is concerned, the IBCs are subjected to accreditation agencies from the host country as well as the home campus. As an example, the Australian IBCs set up in Malaysia has to comply with two different accreditation bodies (Marimuthu, 2008), the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) as well as the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency; meanwhile, the IBCs from the UK are subjected to MQA and the UK Quality Assurance Agency. These agencies are established to accredit programmes offered by the higher education institutions, and to monitor and regulate the standard of higher education institutions in their respective countries. As posited by Shams and Huisman (2014), the IBCs face “dual institutional pressure” to comply with the different requirements set by the respective individual agencies.

In addition, the IBCs based in Malaysia are subjected to the Malaysian Research Assessment (MyRA) research standard, a comprehensive system developed to assess the research capacity and performance of all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia. Since 2014, all higher education institutions in Malaysia, including IBCs, are mandated to participate in annual assessment exercise by MyRA (What is MyRA?, 2015). MyRA is an instrument used to determine the university ranking based on the institution’s research profile and activities. This instrument is also a measurement method used to determine if an institution should be awarded the SETARA ratings by the MoHE. For example, Australian IBCs are subjected to different rating systems; for example, the School of Business has to comply with the

Australian Business Deans Council rating system. According to Marimuthu (2008), most of the PHEIs start off as teaching universities and conduct very little research or publish academic based journals; hence, this creates a problem for institutions to move into a research-based system, while having to comply with the various research standards imposed on the IBCs.

Adding on to accreditation challenges, the IBCs face the pressure of complying with a different set of curricula; the IBCs are required to run additional units besides implementing the existing curriculum from the home campus. One example would be the implementation of general education subjects; studying of these units is compulsory for both International and Malaysian students in order for their degrees to be recognised by the Malaysian government. For instance, Malaysian students are required to enrol in subjects such as Asian and Islamic Civilisation, Ethnic Relations, National Language A (for those who did not obtain credit for Malay Language at Malaysian Certificate of Education level), Human Rights and Team Leadership and Community Service which are additions to the curriculum. Similarly, non-Malaysian students are required to enrol in Malay Language Communication, Malaysian Studies 3, Leadership and Digital Entrepreneurship, Human Rights and Team Leadership and Community Service subjects (General Education Subject, 2014). Some students of the IBCs felt it is pointless to study these units and are in a dilemma over what to do; fortunately, there is way out by transferring the credits to the main campus so that they can complete their final year there without having to complete the general education subjects. Consequently, this would result in the loss of revenues to the IBCs in Malaysia.

Challenges from Local Government

Government policies and regulations have a huge impact on the market dynamics of any industry, including higher education (Wilkins, 2016). It is not an easy job to manage IBCs due to the strict requirements to adhere to certain guidelines and the necessity to liaise with the senior government officials (Lane, 2011). As noted by Healey (2015, p.400), *these officials operate in different cultural context and have different ways of doing business*. Healey (2016) further states that IBCs can only do things with the consent of the host government, such as charging and increasing tuition fees, and setting the scopes of courses to be offered. Besides, student enrolment matters are subjected to strict government control. For instance, in Malaysia, the entry requirements and fees chargeable need to be approved by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) while programme approval must be approved by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) (Dyson, 2013). Thus, two different regulatory bodies are involved in different aspects of the setting up of the university. In addition, the approval process takes a significant amount of waiting time before it is approved by either one of the ministries, further delaying the process. Healey (2017) in his study reports that the lack of autonomy and self-regulatory framework in operating the IBCs in Malaysia can be a source of frustration for the administrators. The tight control over the course fees structures by MoHE has rendered Malaysia less competitive as a regional education hub when compared with China and India. This is evidenced by the large outflow of Malaysian medical students to India (Hill & Razvi, 2015).

Furthermore, IBCs may not have full autonomy over key matters such as curriculum or staffing, and issues such as academic freedom (Wilkins, 2016). Such bureaucracy and inflexibility may not be well received by the home campus and may prevent the new IBCs from starting operations within a reasonable timescale. This is proven in a study carried out by He and Wilkins (2018), and they relate the following incident; the China-based Xiamen University recently established a branch campus in Malaysia. The university management had to adhere strictly to the regulations set by the MoHE with regard to issues

such as entry requirements, and tuition fees; all the matters are subjected to the MoHE's approval. In addition, Xiamen University's courses and all the programmes offered had to be approved by the Malaysia Qualifications Agency (MQA) before they could move forward. Furthermore, the government approval process is very complex and lengthy. For instance, in the case of Newcastle University Medicine Malaysia, a branch campus of Newcastle University in the UK, the organisation had to go through a seven-month long process before they could introduce the Bachelor of Science programme. The programme had gain approval from the MQA before it could be forwarded to MoHE for another round of approval (Dyson, 2013). This caused considerable delay in establishing and offering the program. It could conceivably cause loss of opportunities in student recruitment as well, as the university would lose potential students to other universities while waiting for approval from the ministries. In the long term, as long as the government bureaucracy remains, the student enrolments of the IBCs in Malaysia will suffer (Healey, 2016).

Moreover, the viability of an IBC is affected as the government policies can change anytime (Healey, 2016). More often than not, when there is a change of Education Minister, there would be a change in education policies. For example, in 2017, the then Higher Education Minister, Datuk Seri Mohammed Khalid Nordin announced that a two-year moratorium would be placed on the setting up of new local or foreign universities, as the government felt that there were sufficient higher education institutions to meet the demands of the country. He reported that as of November 2016, there were 37 private universities, 20 university colleges, 7 foreign branch campuses and 414 private colleges in operation ("Two-year moratorium", 2017). However, after the conclusion of the 14th Malaysian General Election held in 2018, the then ruling party, Barisan Nasional, was defeated and the then Prime Minister, Najib was ousted. Najib was replaced by Mahathir Mohamad, and the latter invited a renowned Japanese university to establish a branch campus in Malaysia ("Dr. M wants Japanese universities", 2018). The then Education Minister, Maszlee Malik, approved the setting up of the first Japanese university branch campus in early 2019, The Tsukuba University ("Japanese university branches", 2019).

The year 2020 was seen as a tumultuous and volatile time for Malaysian politics with on-going political crisis leading to further changes in the ruling government. This caused the then Prime Minister, Matahir Mohamad to resign. He was later replaced by the new Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin. The political turmoil continued throughout 2020-2021, worsened by the pandemic. This crisis culminated with the resignation of Muhyiddin Yassin and was then replaced by the current Prime Minister of Malaysia in 2021. In line with the changes in the ruling government, the higher education ministers were replaced within a span of less than a year. This has implications on certain policies in higher education in the country with this change in leadership.

Challenges from Student Recruitment and Funding

To add on to the existing challenges mentioned above, there is stiff competition between members of the IBCs group in Malaysia. In addition, the former has to compete against the both private and public universities for student recruitment. IBCs mainly enrol candidates who have failed to gain admission into the public universities, and there is fierce competition amongst most of the private institutions in getting a fair share of the student enrolment. This poses a new threat to the future survival of the IBCs in Malaysia. For instance, in 1999, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology branch in Malaysia was closed down due to huge financial losses ("Malaysia to offer foreign universities", 2004). Adding on to the issue of competition, the condition has worsened amidst the recent pandemic, with most higher education institutions' including IBCs seeing a marked decrease in student enrolment (Sharma, 2020).

Transnational Education in Malaysia

The increased competition among higher education institutions in Malaysia- Public Higher Education Institutions (PUHEs), private higher education institutions and (PHEIs) can be seen in the establishments of various IBCs, PUHEs and PHEIs, and the number of students recruited in each institution. For instance, in the year 2017, there were 10 IBCs, 20 PUHEs and 47 PHEIs in Malaysia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2017). The total students recruited numbered 29,987 in IBCs, 538,555 in PUHEs and 310,036 in PHEIs (Statistics of higher education of Malaysia, 2017). Hence, a singular IBC recruited an average of 2,999 students compared to PUHEs and PHEIs that are able to recruit 26,928 and 6,596 students respectively. Based on the ratio mentioned above, it can be deduced that each PUHE recruited about 9 times more students than an IBC. Similarly, a PHEI enrolled about 2 times more students than an IBC. Consequently, the IBCs are under tremendous pressure to find effective ways of attracting new students, within a highly competitive environment where PUHEs and PHEIs are armed with certain advantages.

Furthermore, the IBCs' existing challenges are compounded by the issues of lack of funding available. To clarify, in Malaysia, public education is highly subsidised by the government. Compared with PUHEs, IBCs received very little financial aid from the government. Based on reports, as much as 90% of the budgets for PUHEs come from the government funds, with the remainder derived from students' tuition fees, which are comparatively very small amounts (Tham & Kam, 2008). For example, according to the 2017 statistics compiled by Lim (2017), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia received a government funding of 396.54 million, Universiti Putra Malaysia 417.81 million, Universiti Sains Malaysia 524.83 million, and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia 472.89 million. These public universities are the premier research institutions in the country, and based on the QS global rankings, are in the top one percent globally (Lim, 2017).

In contrast, the IBCs are expected to be self-funding (Wilkins, 2020) and do not receive funding from the government for its operational costs. For example, based on a report by He and Wilkins (2018), the Xiamen University Malaysia receives its funding from various sources that include bank loans, and contributions from external parties, i.e., the overseas Chinese in South East Asia. It is pertinent to note that the IBCs in Malaysia receive very little external funding from the Malaysian government which occur in the form of scholarships and funding for potential and current students to pursue their studies at the IBCs. For example, IBCs do receive indirect support from the government, such as the National Higher Education Fund Corporation (NHEFC). However, NHEFC loans are only given to students studying in PUHEs, PHEIs and IBCs.

Due to the large amount of fundings allocated to the PUHEs, the fees payable for studying at the public universities are undeniably much lower than those of the IBCs. As such, PUHEs are a more attractive educational options for most Malaysians and even some international students. The IBCs in Malaysia have a very limited number of channels to obtain funds, and at the same time, operate in a very competitive environment.

Challenges from Students and Staff (Training, Recruitment and Retention)

One of the most challenging issues faced by IBCs operating in Malaysia is related to the teaching and learning activities experienced by students and the teaching staff working at the respective the universities. IBCs in Malaysia are a host to students and staff members from a diverse range of countries and cultural backgrounds. One of the selling points of the IBCs is the offering of the multinational and multicultural environment as part of the students' learning experience. However, this unique experience brings with it a new set of difficult situations for the IBCs; this diversity of cultures creates tension between the

learners' expectations and those of the institutions. Dealing with the staff and students' expectations can be a messy job; and this topic has been discussed at length in the literature (Dobos, 2011, Shams & Huisman, 2014; Cai & Hall, 2016). Malaysia is a land of high-context cultures but the IBCs that operate in the country are of low context cultures; it can be challenging to bridge the cultural and communication gap in managing the students studying and staff working at the institutions (Healey, 2017).

It has been found that students have difficulties in adapting to the learning approaches used by the lecturers at the university. For example, in a study carried out, Pyvis and Chapman (2007) report some common issues the students face while studying in an offshore campus. These issues are related to the modes of delivery and new learning experiences students face while at university. It was found that the students experience conflicts of identities as they try to get used to a different learning environment. Based on the findings of the study, the following are the typical responses from the participants: unfamiliarity with the new environment, difficulty with transitioning from the high school learning approaches to those practised at the university, the lack of proficiency in English, which is the medium of instruction at the offshore campuses, and finally feeling burdened in coping with the learning demands and workload at the university (Pyvis & Chapman, 2007). Hence, to create a better learning experience for students, it is imperative that these issues be addressed to ensure student retention and satisfaction grows, while maintaining the university's reputation in the education market.

To complicate matters, the employees working with the IBCs face a different set of challenges. The teaching staff are also negatively affected by the students' behaviours and new experiences, as the mixed cultures of the classroom and the learning environment can come as a shock for both the students and staff members. Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman (2012) report that the student-staff interactions and teaching-learning styles vary from country to country and from culture to culture. The differences in the approaches of teaching and learning inadvertently create some degree of tension in the classroom; a good case in point is that the expatriate lecturing staff feel awkward and uneasy in teaching students who have different cultural backgrounds and learning styles (Caruana and Montgomery, 2015). A campus of a diverse racial and cultural range of students and teaching staff members can be a hotbed of frustration, misunderstanding and miscommunication, especially if the expatriate staff members are not briefed about the local practices and traditions. According to Healey (2017), a principal issue with regard to teaching and learning is the students' learning styles and their lack of proficiency in the English language. This matches the experiences related by students in the paragraph above and shows that the staff, as well as students are experiencing issues with the teaching and learning, and student experience in the IBCs.

Neri and Wilkins (2019) urge the administrators to consider the issue of talent management, in terms of recruitment, training and managing academic staff in IBCs. According to the authors, an IBC has two natures-- it operates as an educational institution, and simultaneously, it is in the "business" of education; as such, the IBC is under the same pressure as other business organisations to attract, develop and retain the expatriate staff to work in the host country. Wilkins, Butt and Annabi (2017 as cited in Neri and Wilkins, 2019) claim that there are some issues concerning the staffing of IBCs and they include the following: lack of career progression, tensions between local and expatriate employees, lack of research guidance and opportunities (Cai & Hall, 2016), and these are some of the factors that exacerbate the tensions felt by the expatriate staff. Staff workload is also cited as one of the problems faced by academic staff, as lecturers of the IBCs typically have a heavier teaching workload, with little time left for research.

Salt and Wood (2014) further explain some of the more pressing issues of an IBC, and staff recruitment is one of them. They report that many UK staff members from the home campus refuse to relocate to Malaysia for a long duration. Hence, the university resorts to recruitment from the international pool of

academic staff, many of whom are from other countries, and they may be unfamiliar with the culture and practices of the home campus. The university is then obligated to provide training and induction courses for these expatriate staff members. Similarly, in their study on staffing issues, Hill and Thabet (2018) report that some of the expatriate staff members, recruited from other countries but based in Malaysia, had very little knowledge of the UK or Nottingham. Without knowing the expectations of the home campus or with limited knowledge of how the Malaysian education system worked, these international staff members performed based on their perception and belief system, and created a host of problems; some of which were inappropriate teaching styles, unrealistic academic expectations, unsatisfactory work performance, and failing to understand the local customs and behaviours.

Cai and Hall (2016) contend that the staffing and recruitment of expatriate staff members for the IBCs in Malaysia are not sustainable. The authors concur with the view, and staff turnover rate is a huge concern for most of the IBCs. Hill and Thabet (2018), for example, cite that the IBCs typically attract staff members who are in the early stages of their career, and feel excited at the prospect of moving overseas for a teaching job. These young academics are often motivated and highly enthusiastic about teaching, but may lack the depth and experience in teaching, often requiring further training and academic support from the university. Once these staff members are suitably trained and fully equipped with the knowledge and expertise of teaching in an international university, many of them will end up leaving to teach at other IBCs, or return to their own country, or in some cases start employment with the rival IBCs bringing along with them valuable expertise and experiences. Salt and Wood (2014) echo similar findings in their study; they found that it was an arduous task to persuade staff members from the main campus to work in Malaysia for a long duration.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT OF IBCs IN MALAYSIA

The rapid expansion and growth of the IBCs in Malaysia occurs within diverse cultural, economic, political and socioeconomic settings. This complex interplay of power structure and identities (Caruana & Montgomery, 2015) has various implications on the operation and management of the IBCs.

As far as accreditation is concerned, the IBCs can reduce the pressure of bureaucracy by working towards the attainment of the self-accreditation status, which allows the university to self-monitor and evaluate their programmes and courses; the regulatory bodies will only visit the university periodically to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning and the courses are maintained (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2018). To date, four IBCs have been awarded self-accreditation status: Monash University, Sunway Campus; The University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus; Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus; and Curtin University Malaysia. With the self-accreditation status, the institutions concerned are able to set up an audit team to manage the accreditation process effectively. This self-accreditation status also significantly reduces the duration whilst giving respective IBCs the opportunity to ensure that the quality and standard of the programs offered still meets the requirements of the Malaysian Qualification Agency strictly. The self-accreditation is a badge of honour of which the IBCs can use it to attract more students, both locally and internationally.

As mentioned previously, a moratorium has been imposed on the foreign universities to open new branch campuses; this move has serious implications on the Malaysian education landscape. With the recent change of government and leadership after the 2018 General Election, a number of significant policy changes have taken place, one of which is the Prime Minister's effort to build partnerships with

Japan. This has resulted in a plan for a Japanese University to set up a branch campus in Malaysia. It is difficult to predict the growth and expansion of the Western-based IBCs in Malaysia in the foreseeable future. Arguably, the new move may be a positive signal for the Malaysians as presumably, it could be more affordable to study at a Japanese university, without compromising the quality of education. It may be premature to assume that the growth of the IBCs will continue as there is an adequate supply of educational providers to meet the current needs of the country. The recent Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has also caused a decrease in student enrolment in most of the private and public universities in Malaysia, so the demand for IBCs or foreign education may experience a slower growth at least for next few years.

To encourage professional development among the employees, the staff members from the host and home countries are encouraged to collaborate in research projects, which will increase the research profile of the institution. It is a win-win situation for the IBCs to forge an international partnership with the home campus; it will benefit both institutions, especially when applying for research grants. One example is the One Curtin strategic positioning, whereby the offshore branch campuses together with mother campus in Australia, collaborate to develop international research capabilities and capacities in key research areas. This partnership builds upon, and diversifies its research income through grant schemes. Concomitantly, it impacts on student enrolment especially higher degree research students. Furthermore, working with the staff members from the home campus offers a vast number of learning opportunities, especially for offshore campus staff members who may have very little chance to participate in research. Despite the need to comply with the rules of different governing bodies on research, the collaborative efforts would be beneficial to the local staff members. As the IBCs gear towards increasing their research profile, the faculty should be encouraged to forge long-term research collaborations with the host organisations and PHEIs in Malaysia as well as to expand knowledge and widen the access to the collective pool of experts in specified fields. Although the IBCs need to comply with the different research agencies, meeting the standards set by the agency will greatly improve the quality of the university research and thereby increase the ranking; all these concerted efforts of the IBCs will help solidify the position of Malaysia as the regional hub for education. In Malaysia, informal networking forums have been established to foster better interactions between the host government, including the regulatory authorities and the IBCs of UK universities (Healey, 2015).

To build good relations between the staff and students, it is important for the management to consider some form of orientation programme for the newly hired expatriate staff and familiarise them with the local cultures and organisational practices of the institution (Tierney & Lanford, 2014). The curriculum and teaching methodology of the courses should be reviewed on a regular basis, so that adaptations and changes can be made to suit the local context and meet the students' needs. Furthermore, the IBCs can offer professional development programmes for the staff, and encourage knowledge sharing between the staff from both campuses to improve teaching quality (Clifford, 2015). Similar orientation programmes and student development schemes should be initiated to help students cope with the demands of their studies. A sustainable support programme can also be developed to guide and mentor the students to adjust themselves to the demands of learning at IBCs.

The IBCs have to be in constant communication with the teaching staff members as well as students so that teaching resources and assessments are standardised, and that the curriculum suits the needs of the students. It is imperative that the teaching staff work closely with the counterparts from the host university to maintain the uniformity of teaching and the quality of delivery. Besides that, all assessments must be moderated to ensure consistency of evaluation and fairness to the students. Crafting clear guidelines and policies for curriculum development, changes and evaluation will assist the faculty and students of

the various IBCs to narrow the disparity between the Western and non-Western learning styles, while providing the necessary scaffolding for students to develop and learn more effectively.

CONCLUSION

The IBCs are unique educational institutions and offer an array of benefits to both the students and the host country. First, the students have the experience of studying in an environment quite similar to that of the home campus, with emphasis on high quality curriculum, numerous faculties offering a diverse range of courses and an international community comprising students and teaching staff members from various countries. Second, the IBCs are fully or at least partially owned by foreign entities and award credentials similar to those from the home-country universities. Third, the strong partnership between the IBCs with the local community provides rich educational opportunities to the people of the host countries. However, a home campus needs to go through a long and tedious bureaucratic process to establish a branch campus overseas. Besides this, the IBC set up has to resolve many issues and consider many aspects in order to remain sustainable and relevant, while facing the intense competition from other rival IBCs. There are some issues an IBC needs to deal with: adapting to the host country's quality assurance framework and other regulatory policies that govern the running of the IBCs; recruiting trained, qualified academic staff who can deliver the programmes with the same quality and standard similar to those of the home campus. These are the aspects which will affect the day-to-day operations of an IBC: adhering to the conflicting requirements of accreditation, curriculum development; managing talents, raising research profiles and sourcing for funding. It is imperative that the administrators examine how the decisions related to abovementioned issues and aspects will impact the various stakeholders. Meeting the expectations of the home campus and compromising on the expectations of the host country is a delicate balancing act for the administrators who operate an IBC outside of their home country. While it is inevitable to have conflicts and tensions between the students, faculties and administrators, it is also worthwhile to explore how these predicaments can be addressed and mitigated or even resolved to facilitate the smooth running of the IBCs. On the flip side of the coin, a stringent set of criteria imposed on these institutions may have a positive effect-- guaranteeing higher quality teaching and learning, which will ultimately benefit the students.

LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

As a proposal for further investigation, future researchers can explore how the IBCs have addressed or managed the issues, and difficulties of operating foreign-owned education institutions in a host country. The study results will provide a better understanding of how these institutions can continue to develop in Malaysia as there is tremendous potential for cross-border, transnational higher education to contribute to the education needs as well as economic growth of the host country. This research is not in any way exhaustive as there are limited data about how IBCs, particularly those that are Australian based, perform in Malaysia. The University of Nottingham Malaysia and Xiamen University Malaysia are the two IBCs that had carried out research on the complexity of operating IBCs in Malaysia therefore the examples and literature is based on the experiences reported in the literature. There is a lack of information from other IBCs particularly in the areas of the university's performance, student enrolment and other administrative

issues. Due to the incomplete scope of this study, there are many topics related to the managing of IBCs that warrant further investigation. In addition, other areas that deserve future research are the social, cultural, and economic implications of IBCs on the host countries (Escriva-Beltran, Nunoz-de-Prat & Villo, 2019). In the same vein, future research can be conducted to investigate the extent COVID-19 pandemic impact on IBCs international student recruitment in developing countries (Sia & Abbas, 2020; Yong & Sia, 2021). Furthermore, studies can also be carried to examine the relationship between marketing mix and branding in IBCs (Lim, Jee & De Run, 2018) which may assist IBCs marketing manager in students' recruitment. It is hoped that the research findings of the abovementioned areas would help the policy makers and university marketing directors make better decisions in operating and managing the IBCs more profitably and efficiently.

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