

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UAE

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GLOBALIZATION has great relevance in the context of higher education (HE). This paper explores the benefits and harms of globalization of HE in the UAE. The different approaches to globalization outlined by Santiago, et al. (2008) have been utilized to assess the impact of globalization of HE in this paper. While the mutual understanding approach, the revenue-generating approach, and the capacity-building approach are relevant in the UAE, the skilled migration approach does not seem to be applicable in the country. Globalization of HE in the UAE has mixed impacts. It has been instrumental in improving the level and quality of education in general in the UAE. It also helped diffusing of advances in education and technology into the UAE HE system and facilitated creating a globally competent workforce and in order to create a knowledge society for a knowledge economy. Globalization of HE is also necessary to meet the TE needs of children of the expatriate workforce in the country who do not have access to federal schools. Reinforcing mobility of students and academic staff without any constraints is another positive impact of globalization of higher education in the country. However, it has several adverse effects. It is evident that globalization of HE has resulted in a rush of universities and institutions to the country making HE landscape an overcrowded marketplace and pose great potential for declining quality. The foreign providers seem to have ignored their responsibility of preserving and enriching the Emirati culture. It is imperative that the foreign providers in the country need to be more proactive, socially responsible, and pay serious attention to preserve the UAE culture.

Introduction

The term globalization was coined by Reiser and Davies in 1944 to refer to the process of integrating societies by removing geographical, legal, and political constraints (Scholte, 2000). It is one of the important issues that has attracted global attention of academicians, researchers, businessmen, policy makers, politicians, social workers, etc., in the recent times. Globalization has great relevance in the context of higher education (HE). It is especially important in the modern technologically advanced world where progress of individuals greatly depends upon the level of specialized knowledge and skills they possess. Although education is a fundamental human right, societies around the world are not uniform in terms of providing educational facilities to impart the required knowledge and skills to its members. Globalization of HE is answer to this constraint to a large extent (Peterson, 2001). The fundamental objective of globalization of HE is to help rapid and more extensive diffusion of technology, knowledge and ideas across societies. It helps disseminating advances in education, and technology to cross boarder societies and makes members of societies skillful and competent to meet the growing demands of labor market. It also contributes to establish global standards for maintaining quality education (Lauder et al., 2006). Yet, it poses many challenges. Globalization of HE in the UAE has mixed impacts. While it helps improving quality of education and creating a knowledge society for a

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knowledge economy, it has adverse effects on social and cultural landscape. In this paper an attempt is made to explore the benefits and harms of globalization of HE in the UAE.

Globalization of Higher Education in the UAE

The UAE is a small oil-rich Arab state on the Arabian Peninsula. It comprises of seven emirates and has about 4.5 million people (Hadid, 2006). Although this small state was little known until mid 20th century to the outside world, the discovery and commercial exploration of oil that in the latter half of the last century made it a prominent nation not only in the Arab world but also globally. The UAE now is a favorite destination for people to work, do business, and enjoy leisure and shopping in the world.

Globalization of HE is inevitable in the UAE due to several reasons. The nature of economy, labor market, and demographic structure are important forces. The oil boom in the mid-20th century transformed the traditional economy and lifestyle. People performed fishing, dates cultivation, and carried out nomadic animal husbandry in the past. But, the discovery of oil triggered rapid industrial and economic development. It transformed the UAE into a vibrant landscape for global business and industries (Nydell, 2002). The globally oriented firms required internationally competent workers to meet their demands. Multinational employers look for graduates with internationally recognized qualifications as their important strategy. The demographic factor is the other important reason. The tiny population size coupled with relatively poor higher education level of people made the state extremely inadequate and insufficient to meet the growing demands of rapidly expanding industrial economy (Gill, 2008). Globalization of tertiary educational (TE) is also necessary for meeting the TE needs of children of the expatriate workforce in the country as they do not have access to federal schools. Therefore, private and foreign tertiary educational institutions (TEIs) are essential to cater to the HE needs of the expatriate community (Globalhighered, 2008).

The UAE labor market is a unique type. The statistics indicate that over 90 percent of its labor force is expatriate individuals (Hadid, 2006). The UAE's heavy reliance on foreign labor is not desirable for its sustainable development. The World Bank (2008) reported that educational reforms are vital for the Middle East countries including the UAE in order to develop a skilled workforce and sustainable development for which globalization of HE is an important strategy. The UAE government initiated several measures to produce graduates suitable to its globalized labor market. The Emirati students used to be encouraged to go abroad to pursue their university education with full federal support until the establishment of the first federal university, the UAE University, in 1972. Although many Emiratis still go abroad for their university education, the UAE University became an important source of TE for the Emiratis. The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) are the other TEIs established by the federal government in 1987. Now there are 17 technical colleges in the country. The Zayed University is the third federally supported TE system established in 1998. Besides, several vocational institutions have also been established in the country over the period to train Emiratis with the technical skills suited for various industries. While the federal universities and vocational training institutions offer Emiratis students the opportunity for TE, the children of expatriate employees do not have access to these schools. Moreover, many Emiratis students who could not enroll in federal institutions also require a viable arrangement for TE. Therefore, the UAE government embraced globalization of HE by allowing private local universities and foreign universities to establish in the country (UAE Education, 2008). Now there are 69 universities/TEIs accredited by the ministry of higher education in the UAE (CAA, 2010).

Benefits of Globalization of Higher Education in the UAE

Globalization of HE has several positive consequences in the UAE. Along with the other features of globalization, the different approaches to globalization outlined by Santiago, et al. (2008) have been utilized to assess the impact of globalization of HE in this paper. While the mutual understanding approach, the revenue-generating approach, and the capacity-building approach are relevant in the UAE, the skilled migration approach does not seem to be applicable in the country.

Improving Content and Delivery of Programs

Improving content and delivery of education is an important benefit that UAE TE system derives from globalization. The UAE government recognizes that it is important to have internationally competent workforce. The earlier strategy to this effect was to encourage Emirati students go abroad to pursue university education with federal support (UAE education, 2003). The other measure was developing internationally comparable curriculum, contents, and delivery system that help students to develop international and intercultural skills without travelling abroad. The federal universities have also collaborated with the different European/U.S./Australian universities for short-term exchange programs for Emirati students. The private universities and the campuses of foreign universities in the country are also committed to develop internationally competent graduates. While the campuses of foreign universities such as Sorbonne University, the University of Wollongong, Exeter University, the British University, the Middlesex University, New York University, etc., follow their same curriculum and teaching methods on their UAE campuses, several other private local universities have adopted an “infusion approach” in which they tried to provide a global and international flavor to TE by infusing global curriculum at all levels (Gill, 2008). The infusion approach that is considered to be an effective way to help students develop international and intercultural skills without leaving the country (Santiago et al., 2008) is being practiced effectively in the UAE. The American University of Sharjah, American University of Dubai, American College in Dubai, American University of Ras Al Khaimah, American University in the Emirates, the Canadian University of Dubai, etc., are good examples of the universities adopted infusion approach (Globalhighered, 2008).

Collaboration and Capacity Building

According to the mutual understanding approach, globalization of HE helps enhancing academic exchanges and cooperation between cross-national universities (Santigao et al., 2008). Both the federal and private universities in the UAE have collaborated with several foreign TEIs and derive great benefits (Globalhighered, 2008). All federal schools in the country have different types of collaboration especially with the different western universities. This arrangement is found to be extremely helpful for the federal institutions to enhance quality, share innovations, and introduce innovative technology and methods. For instance, the HCT is seeking institutional accreditation with the North West Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), USA. Similarly, various HCT programs are accredited by the different Canadian, US, UK, and Australian universities/institutions. The HCT students are also getting short-term scholarships and visiting opportunities from the HCT-collaborated TEIs abroad and are able to enrich their university experience (AAA Newsletter, 2008). These arrangements help the tertiary educational institutions to maintain and enhance quality and improve international competence of students.

Capacity building, another important contribution of globalization of HE, is found to be highly relevant in the UAE. Innovative research institutions play a decisive role in the sustainable development of the country. Globalization of HE enables the country’s TEIs to enhance their technical capability. It also helps establishing innovative research centers and enhancing skills of researchers for sustainable development (Sasson, 2007). The Masdar Institute in Abu Dhabi, established in 2006, aims at developing innovative methods to produce clean and renewable energy. Its association with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) enables it to receive enormous technical support to accomplish its goals. The institute also receives support from the MIT to develop graduate level research centre that focus on renewable energy technologies. Further, the Masdar scientists attend the MIT courses in Boston and are being technically supported to develop research and courses at Abu Dhabi (Sasson, 2007). This arrangement helps the country significantly to accomplish its objective of producing renewable energy.

Academic and Student Mobility

Probably, the biggest benefit of globalization of HE in the UAE is the mobility of academic staff. The HE landscape in the country has certain unique characteristics. There is a scarcity of qualified academic staff to teach at all levels of education in the country (UAE education, 2008). The mobility of academic

staff helps the country compensate this inadequacy. The federal and private TEIs as well as campuses of foreign universities recruit their academic and non-academic staff from different countries. The staff composition of HCT (Table.1) illustrates the extremely high level of academic mobility. It can be seen that the Emiratis represent only 9.80% of the employees in the HCT system that prompted it to hire employees from other countries (Human Resources Newsletter, 2008-09). Similar staffing scenario is reported to exist across TEIs in the country (Gill, 2008; UAE education, 2008). It is interesting to note that HEIs in the UAE are able to utilize the services of highly multinational academic and non-academic workforce. Globalization of HE is instrumental in this important benefit.

**Table 1: Country-wise distribution of staff 2008-09:
Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), UAE**

Country	% (Number)
India	18.26 (339)
UK	17.50 (325)
Canada	11.31 (210)
US	10.50 (195)
UAE	9.80 (182)
Australia	9.26 (172)
New Zealand	3.29 (61)
Philippines	3.12 (58)
Jordan	3.12 (58)
Lebanon	2.96 (55)
Ireland	2.42 (45)
Others	8.46 (157)
Total	100.00 (1857)

Source: HCT-Human Resources News letter <https://portal.hct.ac.ae/sites/hrs/default.aspx>.

Not only the academic staff, but the mobility of students is also quite impressive in the UAE. Large numbers of students from various TEIs in the UAE are able to transfer their credits to various universities around the world and vice versa. Since most of the private and foreign universities follow international curriculum and credit system or the same curriculum of their parent universities, students can transfer their credits to any universities around the world and complete their studies (Gill, 2008). The American University of Sharjah, for instance, has students from over 70 countries (Globalhighered, 2008) that illustrates high degree of mobility of students.

Institutional and Program Mobility

Another important benefit of globalization of HE is establishment of the campuses of several foreign universities. The UAE has established dedicated free zones for HE such as Knowledge Village and International Academic City in Dubai and Educational free zone in Ras Al Khiamah. The dedicated HE free-zones, probably the first of its kind in the world, are unique arrangements designed to provide education from world-class universities that include universities in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, Belgium, India, Pakistan, etc., (UAE education, 2008). While the Knowledge Village in Dubai established in 2003 has over 450 HE business partners that includes universities, professional training centers, HR consultancies, linguistics centers and assessment centers (Dubai Knowledge Village, 2010), 26 foreign universities have so far been established in the International Academic City, offering a wide range of programs. All the universities established in the free-zones follow the same programs as at their home campuses. Moreover, these HE free-zones have highly flexible visa policies for students and staff that add value to mobility of academic staff and students (DIAC, 2010). The other private universities

established outside the HE free-zones in collaboration with foreign universities also offer the same programs of their foreign partner universities providing opportunity mobility for students/staffs. For instance, the American universality of Sharjah offers programs of American University in Washington DC (Globalhighered, 2008).

Revenue Making

The globalization of HE is viewed as a source of income according to the revenue-generating approach (Santiago et al., 2008). This is relevant in the case of the UAE. Although the federal TEIs are non-fee paying institutions, the private and foreign providers are for-profit institutions and are quite expensive schools. The American/European/Australian schools are especially expensive. The American University of Sharjah, for example, is one of the highly expensive schools in the region (Globalhighered, 2008). Since the children of expatriate employees have no access to federal schools, they need to be enrolled in private and foreign schools by paying huge fee. Some of the reputed schools in the UAE such as The American University of Sharjah, The American University in Dubai, The Middlesex university, the British university, the university of Wollongong, etc., are not only enrolling the children of expatriate employees, but they are also attracting international students especially from the Arab world and earn enormous revenue to its shareholders.

Adverse effects of Globalization of Higher Education in the UAE

Globalization of HE indeed has several benefits, yet its adverse effects cannot be overlooked.

Too Many Providers and Poor Quality

It is apparent that the pace of growth of HE in the UAE is not realistic. The unrealistic and ambitious expansion of HE has led to an explosion of HEIs in the country. It is reported that there are around 500 HEIs in the HE free-zones in Dubai alone, 29 in the International Academic City and over 450 in the Dubai Knowledge Village, (Dubai Knowledge Village, 2010; DIAC, 2010). It is to be noted that this is the situation of the HE free-zone alone. There are several other HEIs operate elsewhere in the country. It appears that UAE being a small country with a population of only 4.5 million has a large number of TEIs. The far too many institutions in the country are making the HE landscape an overcrowded marketplace. Competition for students is extremely high in the country that has potential to decline quality. The quality of education and the degrees awarded by some of the foreign universities on their UAE campuses are matters of important concerns in the country. There are no strict regulations on quality and standards in place in the HE free zones in the UAE. In the absence of such regulations, many foreign providers reportedly do not teach the courses in the same standard as of their home campuses. The degrees that students receive from the UAE campuses of foreign university are not the same caliber of those one normally expects at the home campus of the providers (Gill, 2008). Probably, too large number of institutions along with absence of quality regulations, force the providers compromise on quality in order to sustain in the hypercompetitive HE market.

Many universities including some of the high-profiled universities could not survive in the hyper-competitive HE market in the UAE and forced closure. The University of Southern Queensland in Dubai and George Mason University in Ras Al Khiamah are the two such instances of ill-fated universities. The University of Southern Queensland, Australia opened its Dubai campus in September 2004 in Dubai Knowledge Village and had to close down in 2005 primarily due to its inability to sustain in the market (Schoepp, 2009). Similarly, the UAE campus of the Virginia based George Mason University in Ras Al Khiaimah also faced the same destiny in 2009 after three years of struggles in the HE market (Zacharias & Bardsley, 2009). It is apparent that the number of foreign HEIs in the country is too surplus than actual requirements.

Challenges to Cultural Values and Identity

Although the proponents of globalization of HE claim that due consideration will be given to protect and preserve cultural identities of states (Santiago et al., 2008), it does not happen always. It has been quite

undesirable to the UAE cultural values and identity (UAE education, 2003). The HE is expected to have the responsibility of preserving and protecting the national cultures and prepare individuals for citizenship and serving the national social and economic objectives (Bubtana, 2007). But, this is not maintained in the UAE. The foreign universities in the UAE offer curricula that have little relevance to socio-cultural values of the country. They do not help in preserving and promoting Emirati culture, instill cultural identity and educate individuals for citizenship (Bubtana, 2007). The Emiratis educated in the universities abroad are also reported to have poor commitments to preserve Arab family values and culture. Traditionally, Arabs favor extended families and collectivism. However, the foreign university educated Emiratis have less inclination to these values. They tend to show great affinity to live in nuclear families. Moreover, they value individuality to the traditional collectivism (Barakat, 1993). These changes create conflicts in family and community. Further, Arabs believe that education is a basic human right of human beings and it must be provided either free or at affordable cost. But, the foreign providers offer HE at extremely high cost making higher education into an expensive marketable commodity that endangers the highly esteemed Arabs principles and values (Bubtana, 2007). Essentially, globalization of HE is destroying the unique cultural identity of Emirati society instead of preserving and promoting it.

Conclusion

It is true that globalization of HE has been instrumental in raising the level and quality of education in general in the UAE. It helps diffusion of advances in education and technology into the UAE HE system and helps creating a globally competent workforce. Further, it enables mobility of students and academic staff without any constraints. However, it has several adverse effects. It is evident that globalization of HE has made a rush of universities and institutions in to the country making HE landscape an overcrowded marketplace and pose great potential for declining quality. The foreign providers seem to have ignored their responsibility of preserving and enriching the Emirati culture. It is imperative that the foreign providers in the country need to be more proactive and socially responsible and pay serious attention to preserve the UAE culture.

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