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## **English as the Lingua Franca in Transnational Higher Education: Motives and Prospects of Institutions That Teach in Languages Other Than English**

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### **Abstract**

Although there seems to be a wide held assumption that transnational higher education programmes have to be taught in English in order to be legitimate 'international' programmes, there are a few examples globally of international branch campuses that teach in languages other than English. Using seven institutional case studies from around the world, the research seeks to identify the motives of universities for establishing campuses abroad that deliver degree programmes in languages other than English. The problems and issues experienced by these institutions are examined and their future prospects are considered. The main motives of the seven featured institutions for establishing campuses abroad were found to be altruistic rather than financial, but teaching in languages other than English presents both advantages and disadvantages to institutions. In 2012, none of the seven institutions had more than 800 students although two institutions had been in existence for over 16 years, indicating success at some level.

### **Keywords**

English language, lingua franca, transnational higher education, international branch campuses, student recruitment

### **Introduction**

The first decade of the new millennium saw a massive increase in the number of higher education institutions establishing campuses outside the countries in which they are based. On the basis of Lawton & Katsomitros's (2012) audit and documented openings since then, at the start of 2013, there were over 220 international branch campuses globally (also known as offshore campuses). Most of these campuses have been established by institutions from Anglophone countries and in 2009 the three largest source countries of international branch campuses were the United States (US), Australia and United Kingdom (UK) (Becker, 2009). Such was the race among institutions from these countries to establish campuses outside their home countries – particularly in China, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – that some commentators referred to the international expansion as an educational gold rush.

International students have always been drawn to Anglophone countries and just four countries (Australia, Canada, the UK and US) are host to over half of all students studying abroad (Hughes, 2008). As English has become the lingua franca in international business, diplomacy and aviation (air traffic control communications), so too it has become the lingua franca in international higher education. A lingua franca is a language that is used as a medium of communication between people or groups of people who speak different native languages (Gnutzmann, 2000, p. 356).

In their quest to raise their profiles and to be recognised as 'world class' universities, as well as seeking new sources of fee-paying students, institutions based in Anglophone countries were the first to establish international branch campuses. Most of these institutions aim to replicate their home campus operations as closely as possible, so they offer the same or very similar degree programmes, they teach in English, and they use the same methods of teaching, learning and assessment.

During the last 5-6 years, institutions from non-Anglophone countries have increasingly entered the transnational higher education market, establishing international branch campuses in every continent around the world (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012). These institutions are based in many different countries, which include France, Germany, India, Italy, Malaysia and the Netherlands. Despite coming from non-Anglophone countries, the vast majority of these institutions use English as the language of instruction at their offshore campuses.

It is not surprising to find Dutch institutions establishing international branch campuses that teach in English since the Netherlands boasts the largest number of speakers of English as a foreign language per capita in the world (Onsman, 2012). In aiming to establish a European higher education area, one unintended consequence of the Bologna Declaration, signed by the European Ministers of Education in 1999, has been the introduction of teaching in English, particularly at master's level (Tatzl, 2011). Many European universities have seen the introduction of teaching in English as a means to achieving internationalisation objectives such as improving the employability of their graduates, attracting more international fee-paying students and facilitating international exchange activities.

These universities, which have faculty that generally possess excellent English language skills as well as several years' experience of running English-taught programmes, are perhaps well-placed to establish branch campuses abroad that teach in English. However, we are now beginning to see institutions based in countries where English is not widely spoken enter the transnational higher education market and establishing campuses that use English as the language of instruction. For example, Xiamen University, a top twenty higher education institution in China, intends to open a campus for 10,000 students in Malaysia in 2015 and all teaching will be in English. Many of the faculty positions at this new campus are likely to be filled by lecturers who currently teach in China. There have been concerns about quality at some campuses given that the English language proficiency of both faculty and students is not always of a high standard (Hughes, 2008). Even in countries where English is more widely spoken, the level of students' language proficiency is often not adequate for degree-level study.

Although there seems to be a wide held assumption that transnational higher education programmes have to be taught in English in order to be legitimate 'international' programmes, there are a few examples globally of international branch campuses that teach in languages other than English. Using seven institutional case studies from around the world, this research seeks to identify the motives of institutions for not teaching only (if at all) in English and the achievements, issues and challenges experienced by these institutions with regard to language of instruction. Finally, we consider the extent to which institutions that teach in languages other than English might have a place in the transnational higher education market in which they can survive, grow and prosper. Thus, the research is concerned with the language of instruction used in transnational higher education as a strategic decision of institutions.

In the following section, we provide a brief overview and discussion of English as the lingua franca in transnational higher education. Then, we specify our research aims and questions. Following the presentation of our seven institutional case studies, we provide a summary of our findings and a conclusion that discusses the possible prospects of international branch campuses that deliver programmes in languages other than English.

### **English as the lingua franca in transnational higher education**

In many countries around the world, different varieties of language have developed for different social situations, such as a local language for expression of cultural identity, local government and everyday use and English for international communication (Coleman, 2006). The economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions of globalisation have promoted the use of English as a language for communication among individuals or groups who do not share a common language. English has also become the lingua franca in international higher education and governments have set targets even

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for public universities to introduce programmes taught in English, examples being Lithuania (Urbanovič & Wilkins, 2013) and Malaysia (Onsman, 2012).

English is the language that is perceived to carry essential linguistic capital and parents in non-Anglophone countries are increasingly choosing to educate their children in English (Sears, 2012). While many families are interested in an English language education abroad for its own sake, proficiency in English gives individuals social status and enhanced career prospects, both in their home countries and internationally. These facts explain why 70% of all Asian students studying abroad are at institutions in Australia, the UK or US (Hughes, 2008). However, in many countries – such as China (Hu & Lei, 2013) and South Korea (Jon, Lee, & Byun, 2013) – domestic institutions have rushed to introduce programmes that use English as the language of instruction.

Since the turn of the century, higher education institutions have increasingly become involved with offshore delivery, either through partner institutions, distance education or international branch campuses. All of Australia's 38 public universities are involved with offshore delivery (Hughes, 2008) and more non-European Union students are now taking UK higher education programmes outside the UK than in it (Morgan, 2011). The commitment of nations to the liberalisation of education markets, as advocated by the World Trade Organization (WTO), has acted as a driver to promote higher education internationalisation and institutional mobility across borders (Van Vught, Van der Wende, & Westerheijden, 2002) and many Western governments have encouraged higher education institutions to engage with offshore delivery to generate increased export income. For example, in 2004, the total value of transnational higher education to the UK economy was nearly £200 million a year (Lenton, 2007).

At the start of 2012, the countries hosting the largest numbers of international branch campuses were the UAE (with 37), Singapore (with 18), China (with 17), Qatar (with 10) and Malaysia (with 7) (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012). With the exception of China, these are countries that have large numbers of nationals or expatriate residents who are relatively competent in English and where the demand for higher education taught in English is high. Nevertheless, undertaking higher education in English is a challenging undertaking for many non-native speakers of English. For example, a survey undertaken in the UAE found that many professors believed their students had only average or below average ability in writing in English, and as a consequence, many students were awarded higher grades than they deserved (Gerson, 2010).

Apart from the fact that higher education institutions in Anglophone countries probably believe that students at their offshore campuses specifically want to study in English, these institutions are usually forced to deliver programmes in English in order to satisfy the requirements of both the home and host country regulatory and quality assurance bodies. In the UK, for example, the guidelines of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) state that when offshore programmes are delivered in a language other than the language used where the awarding university is based then important questions are raised about the capacity of the university to assure the quality of these programmes (QAA, 2010). Although institutions from non-Anglophone countries do not usually face such restrictions, the vast majority still choose to use English as the language of instruction at their offshore campuses.

Through various studies, researchers hold that learning in English poses problems for students whose mother-tongue is not English (Coleman, 2006). It has been observed that the language used for teaching and learning is crucial for learners' acquisition of knowledge, their understanding and skills development, and for their ability to demonstrate their knowledge effectively in assignments and examinations. Generally, the mediocre performance of second-language learners has been explained by linguistic and psychological factors (Johnstone & Selepeng, 2001).

If students have inadequate language skills, they will have problems developing educationally and they might experience difficulty with listening, understanding professors' use of humour and examples, reading, oral communication and class participation, as well as writing in different styles and undertaking critical analysis (Andrade, 2009; Berman & Cheng, 2001; Mavondo, Tsarenko, & Gabbott, 2004). Professors often perceive international students to have difficulty with oral and

written communication, which can affect course performance (Trice, 2003). Evans and Morrison (2011) examined the language-related challenges that first year students face when adjusting to the demands of English medium higher education in Hong Kong and identified that students experience four particular problems: understanding technical vocabulary, comprehending lectures, achieving an appropriate academic style and meeting institutional and disciplinary requirements.

Hughes (2008) argues that when English is used as the language of instruction in transnational higher education, neither professors nor students whose native language is not English are able to perform at their full capacity. Thus, using English as the language of instruction might hinder both effective teaching and learning. In contrast, a survey by Maiworm and Wächter (2002) of 1558 European higher education institutions found that in general neither students nor teachers seemed to have substantial language proficiency problems with English.

Gow (2007) claims that the biggest single problem for any institution establishing a campus in China is continually securing enough high quality staff able to teach in English to the highest levels. Research by Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman (2012) involving students studying at international branch campuses in the UAE suggests that a student's ability to read and write fluently in English usually has a great impact on their academic attainment as well as their level of satisfaction. However, Heffernan et al. (2010) claim that the cultural and learning differences of students in different countries might affect students' quality of learning as much as their language competence. It is clear that the large body of research on English as language of instruction has produced inconclusive results.

While English is currently the lingua franca used at the vast majority of international branch campuses, it is not inconceivable that in ten or twenty years' time languages such as Spanish and Chinese could become alternative languages commonly used in transnational higher education. Spanish might appeal to international students in Latin America, where Spanish is the official language in several countries and is widely known in others, while the spread of large and successful Chinese companies into countries across Eastern and South Eastern Asia could result in Chinese becoming a popular language of instruction among higher education students in these regions. Soochow University, which teaches in Chinese at its campus in Laos, could be the first example of Chinese universities establishing campuses abroad where the language of instruction is Chinese.

### **Research aims and questions**

Although there now exists a growing body of published research that has examined various aspects of international branch campuses and transnational higher education in general – see Lane and Kinsner (2011) for a bibliography – we could not find any study that has specifically investigated offshore branches that deliver programmes in languages other than English. This research aims to identify the reasons why some higher education institutions have chosen to establish campuses abroad that offer courses which are not taught in English. We then identify achievements, issues and challenges experienced by international branch campuses that are associated with their decision to not use English as the sole language of instruction. Thus, we aim to assess the extent to which these institutions might enjoy future growth and success.

Our research questions are:

- (1) What are the motives of higher education institutions for establishing campuses abroad at which some or all degree programmes are delivered in languages other than English?
- (2) To what extent does language of instruction affect student recruitment at international branch campuses?
- (3) What are the problems and issues experienced by international branch campuses that teach programmes in languages other than English?
- (4) How successful are international branch campuses that offer programmes in languages other than English?
- (5) What are the prospects of international branch campuses that offer programmes in languages other than English?

## Research method

The featured case studies are the outcomes of both secondary and primary research. Secondary research provided the majority of the data used. Data were obtained from a literature search that included institution websites and literature; newspapers and trade journals; reports from government and research organisations; and academic journals and books. Additional data were also obtained from respondents that held senior management positions at the featured institutions. The job titles held by respondents include Deputy Director, Dean of Faculty, Dean of School, Director of International Office and Senior Officer of International Students. The respondents communicated with the researchers either by email or telephone. As well as communicating facts about their institutions to the researchers, the respondents also shared their own personal views and opinions. Relying on both secondary and primary data sources allowed the triangulation of data, which ensured the accuracy of the data collected. We were unable to obtain primary data from Federico Santa María Technical University and St Joseph University.

## Institution case studies

### 1. Soochow University of Laos

*Home country: China*

*Host country: Laos*

Soochow University is a large and well-regarded university located in the Jiangsu province of China. It has over 50,000 students including over 1,300 international students from 37 different countries. In 2007, a private company invited Soochow University to establish a campus in an economic development area on the outskirts of Vientiane, the capital of Laos. Although the United Nations lists Laos as one of the world's least developed nations, economic and social reforms have resulted in rapid economic growth. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Laos increased by 7.6% in 2009 and bilateral trade between Laos and China increased by 66.8% in 2011. The increasingly favourable economic and political conditions in Laos has resulted in many Chinese companies investing in Laos, creating jobs particularly in construction and manufacturing. These Chinese companies require labour that possesses expertise and high-level skills as well as competence in both Chinese and Lao languages.

In 1995, the Chinese Ministry of Education launched an initiative known as Project 211, which aims to promote research standards and socio-economic development as well as improving the international profile and reputation of Chinese higher education. Project 211 has encouraged Soochow University to set objectives such as recruiting more international students, promoting cultural exchange and socio-economic development, and becoming internationally known as first class.

Some years later, the Ministry's *2003-2007 Action Plan for the Revitalisation of Education* stressed the importance of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in order to expand the global influence of Chinese. The plan also promoted the provision of education aid to developing countries (Wang, 2013). Soochow University has established its campus in Laos as a public service and it does not expect to profit financially from it.

Soochow University is the first Chinese university to establish a branch abroad and it is also the first foreign university to open a campus in Laos. Soochow University of Laos recruited its first undergraduate students in October 2012. In May 2013, the institution had 25 students studying on a degree programme in International Business and more than 200 students studying on Chinese language programmes. It is envisaged that the institution will eventually grow to 5,000 students.

Nearly all subjects are taught by Chinese lecturers who were recruited in China. Locally recruited teachers deliver the political classes, which are mandatory in the single party authoritarian state. All of the students enrolled in 2012-13 were Lao citizens, but most were also ethnic Chinese. Nevertheless, all students are required to complete a preparatory course in Chinese language before starting their degree programme and they also all receive on-going support in Chinese language

during their degree programme. Even though some students find it difficult to write in Chinese, no serious problems related to Chinese language proficiency among students have yet been encountered.

The university's research has found that considerable interest exists in Laos for higher education programmes taught in Chinese, mainly in order to secure higher paid jobs in Chinese companies that also offer superior working conditions and career prospects. However, in a country where average annual per capita income was about US\$1,200 in 2011, tuition fees of US\$1,500 per year represent a major obstacle to many prospective students from actually enrolling. Nevertheless, Soochow University believes that student numbers will grow substantially in the near future and it plans to invest at least US\$25 million in a new campus for Vientiane.

## **2. Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi**

*Home country: France*

*Host country: United Arab Emirates*

Invited and funded by the Abu Dhabi government, Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) opened in 2006. It initially operated from a temporary building but in 2009 it moved to a new purpose-built campus. In order to contribute to the emirate's economic and social development, the Abu Dhabi government was keen to attract elite universities to the emirate that would bring the best international standards in higher education and research. New York University's campus in Abu Dhabi was another funded by the Abu Dhabi government.

PSUAD has adopted the same teaching structure and methods as implemented in Paris and most teaching is done by lecturers from Paris. Part of PSUAD's philosophy is that students should stay rooted to the French culture, language and way of thinking. It was an almost natural decision therefore that programmes in Abu Dhabi would be taught in French. The licence (bachelor) and master degrees awarded by PSUAD are French degrees that follow the European credit transfer system. Recognising that in the field of science there is not a demand for French-speaking individuals, since September 2013 the licence degree in physics has been taught in English. However, students must still study French as a second language. At the start of 2013, PSUAD had 700 students on a range of programmes across the humanities and social sciences but the agreement signed with the Abu Dhabi government stated a target of 1,500 students by 2016.

Although PSUAD targets UAE nationals, they currently account for only a third of all enrolments due to the high entry requirements. Most Emiratis learn English as a foreign language and therefore most of these students need to complete a one-year intensive French course before starting their degree programme. Teaching staff report that this course has been very successful in adequately preparing those with no or little prior knowledge in French for undergraduate study. PSUAD recruits many of its students from across the Middle East and North Africa, where proficiency in French is often higher, but the university has also recently visited countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan in its bid to attract the highest quality students from around the world.

Given that PSUAD's enrolment of 700 students in 2013 is far short of its target of 1,500 students by 2016 it might be assumed that the institution is struggling to achieve its recruitment targets. Apart from its high entry requirements, the need for students to be proficient in French might be another contributory cause of under-recruitment. Many potential students who do not have one of the recognised French language qualifications and who do not pass PSUAD's French language aptitude test may not want to spend one year taking the intensive French course. It seems that PSUAD will only continue in operation as long as the Abu Dhabi government is willing to fund the institution's on-going operating expenses.

## **3. Stockholm School of Economics Russia**

*Home country: Sweden*

*Host country: Russia*

Founded in 1909, the Stockholm School of Economics is the oldest private economic university in Sweden. The Stockholm School of Economics Russia (SSER) was established in 1997, which is the year in which it opened its branch in St. Petersburg. Even though SSER is 100% owned by the Stockholm School of Economics, its launch was supported financially by the Swedish and Russian governments and a range of sponsors that included a large donation from the Rausing family, owners of the Tetra Pak company. In 2003, a second Russian branch was opened in Moscow. SSER was the first business school to offer a European style Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) programme in Russia. In 2011, SSER's MBA was still the only one delivered in Russia that featured in the Financial Times global executive MBA rankings.

SSER aims to deliver a business education that is international in scope and Swedish in character and in 2011 foreign lecturers accounted for 58% of the institution's teaching staff. Its programmes aim to integrate the best achievements of Western management thought with cases of the most successful Russian businesses. SSER specialises in teaching the top managers and owners of Russia's largest and most successful businesses. As well as delivering MBA programmes, SSER offers customised corporate programmes, delivered mainly in the Russian language.

As most other transnational MBA programmes globally, SSER's courses were initially delivered only in English. In 2009, SSER began offering its EMBA programme in Russian alongside the programme delivered in English. SSER is the only foreign business school operating in Russia that offers an MBA programme taught in Russian. In 2013, the EMBA taught in Russian had 83 students enrolled while the English version had 57 students.

The Russian version EMBA enables Russian managers who are not proficient in English to achieve a classroom-based Western-style business education from a leading European business school without having to leave Russia (except for a short compulsory period in Sweden). It appeals particularly to older and more senior managers, those running their own businesses, and those living outside Moscow and St. Petersburg. Some of the students who enrol on the Russian version EMBA are in fact proficient in English and faculty at times experience challenging teaching/learning situations when students start talking to each other in English given that most students do not understand English.

Since the turn of the century, business education has taken off considerably in Russia. In 2012, around 10,000 managers were receiving a business education at one of the 80 licensed business schools that operate in Russia (Kilyakov, 2013). SSER's Russian version EMBA is unique in Russia's business education market and SSER's management foresee and hope for further increases in student enrolment on this programme over the next 5-10 years.

#### **4. University of Bialystok in Vilnius**

*Home country: Poland*

*Host country: Lithuania*

The Vilnius branch of the University of Bialystok (UBV) was established in 2007 on the initiative of the Scientists' Society of Lithuanian Poles. The University of Bialystok is the only Polish university that has faculty abroad and that uses Polish as the language of instruction. Also, it is the first branch of a foreign university to be established in Lithuania. According to Lithuanian law, UBV operates as a branch of a foreign university, while in accordance with Polish law it is regarded simply in terms of its long distance/non-resident faculty. In 2012-13, approximately 60% of UBV's faculty came from its main campus in Poland and the remainder was recruited locally. In the same year, UBV had 500 students, mostly graduates of Polish schools in Lithuania, who were following programmes in Computer Science and Economics.

According to the 2011 population census, Poles account for 6.6% of Lithuania's population, making them the largest non-native ethnic group. Over 16,000 children attend Polish schools in Lithuania. The idea of establishing a Polish university in Vilnius was born after the 2001 census, when it was revealed that the level of educational achievement of Lithuanian Poles was half the national average (among Poles there were 63 graduates per 1000 inhabitants against a national average of

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126). Also, establishing a branch outside Poland fit with the University of Białystok's mission to 'join East and West'. Selection of the initial study fields was based on labour market demand and the fact that fields such as information technology were not on the list of regulated professions. UBV has recently extended its premises and it is in the process of broadening its curriculum, even introducing subjects in the humanities, such as European Studies and International Relations. UBV's programmes must be accredited in both Poland and Lithuania, which complicates the organisation of studies as the requirements in each country are different.

The Polish government provides subsidies to UBV, so students pay a low tuition fee that equates to approximately US\$575 per year. However, since the economic downturn, many students are finding it difficult to pay even this relatively low amount. The lecturers from Poland and UBV's students have different dialects and use different expressions, which can sometimes lead to difficulties in communication and understanding. The majority of UBV's graduates enter the local labour market with some establishing businesses in Lithuania. Of graduates who progress onto Master degree programmes, about a third go to study in Poland. UBV is an ambitious institution; its faculty is increasingly undertaking research and staff are beginning to compete for projects funded by the European Union.

## **5. Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics, Dubai Branch**

*Home country: Russia*

*Host country: United Arab Emirates*

Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics (ENGECON) became a university in 2000 but it evolved from an institution that was founded in 1906. ENGECON is one of the oldest and largest universities in Russia that specialises in engineering and economics education. Founded in 2005, ENGECON Dubai was the first branch campus of a Russian university to be established outside the Russian Federation. The Dubai branch resulted from an invitation received by ENGECON from an academic infrastructure provider (a private company/investor) at Dubai's Technology and Media Free Zone. The decision to establish a branch in Dubai also fit with ENGECON's internationalisation strategy.

The aim of ENGECON Dubai is to provide the best Russian education for both Russian and non-Russian speakers who live in the UAE. However, its students are mostly from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). ENGECON Dubai offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees taught in both Russian and English languages. The programmes follow the fundamental standards of Russian higher education, but combine these with insights into local culture and business practices as well as Arabic language. All degree programmes are accredited by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority of Dubai (KHDA).

The major subjects in ENGECON Dubai's degree programmes are delivered in Russian while some of the minor subjects are taught in English. The Master programme in International Tourism Management, which is designed to combine a theoretical approach with practical experience in the tourism field, involves intensive study of English. Between 2010 and 2013, 60 students have graduated from ENGECON Dubai with degrees in Management or Tourism/Hospitality. The majority of these graduates entered the UAE labour market and some established their own businesses in the UAE. ENGECON continues to operate as a very small-scale operation.

## **6. Federico Santa María Technical University, Campus Guayaquil**

*Home country: Chile*

*Host country: Ecuador*

Federico Santa María Technical University (SMU) is a private university that was founded in Valparaíso, Chile in 1926. The university has always had strong international ties and during its first ten years most of its professors were foreign, recruited mainly from Europe. Collaborations between visiting professors are now common and SMU has developed links with other universities in every continent. Many students participate in exchange programmes. The university's mission includes

objectives such as seeking academic excellence and continually supporting those who, lacking economic means, have the intellectual capacity and the drive to achieve success. In 1996, SMU established a campus in Guayaquil, Ecuador as part of its internationalisation strategy. In a review of higher education internationalisation in Chile, Sanchez (2005) declares SMU Guayaquil as the most important Chilean campus abroad. SMU was also the first Chilean university to open a campus abroad. In 2012, SMU Guayaquil had approximately 800 students.

Guayaquil is the largest and most populous city in Ecuador and SMU believed there was demand here for high quality programmes in engineering, science and technology, as well as in business and management disciplines. SMU's successful Master of Business Management (MBA) programme has been delivered continuously in Guayaquil since 1997. However, SMU is best known for its science and engineering programmes, which rank among the best in Latin America. Chile and Ecuador are both Spanish speaking countries, so Ecuadorian students studying at the Guayaquil campus are not receiving instruction in a foreign language. However, to prepare students for life and employment in a globalised world, and to support the university's internationalisation strategy, most programmes are taught partly in English or have a requirement for students to take and pass a course in English language. Increasingly, SMU is attracting applications from international students who are not proficient in Spanish and these students are provided with intensive Spanish language courses before they start their degree programmes.

## **7. Saint Joseph University in Dubai**

*Home country: Lebanon*

*Host country: United Arab Emirates*

Founded in 1913, the Faculty of Law and Political Science at St Joseph University (SJU) is the oldest law school in Lebanon. It is now one of the top law schools in the Middle East. In 2008, SJU opened a branch in Dubai, which was its first campus outside Lebanon. SJU's branch in Dubai (SJUD) offers undergraduate and postgraduate law degrees, taught mostly in Arabic. The four-year Bachelor of Law (LLB) programme incorporates aspects of Sharia, Arabic and European law and includes courses in aviation law, civil law, constitutional law, contract law, human rights, intellectual property rights, international relations law, labour law, maritime law, property law, tax law and tort law. Some elective courses are taught in English or French. Applicants to SJUD are expected to be proficient in both Arabic and English and language courses are offered to students to help them reach the required levels.

SJUD was established mainly to serve students living in the UAE but it also seeks to attract applicants from other Gulf States and Arab countries. SJUD accepts both male and female students, which means that national women can study law at the highest level without having to leave the UAE. The bachelor programme educates students about local laws and jurisdictions and qualifies graduates to work in the public prosecution office and in areas such as immigration and customs.

SJUD aims to supply lawyers who will eventually become the future judges in Dubai's court system, as well as future leaders of Dubai for whom a background in law will be invaluable. The programmes support Dubai's Strategic Plan 2015, which includes the pillars of security, justice and safety, and which requires the best-trained lawyers. SJUD intends to introduce new programmes in languages, media and translation, as well as a doctoral programme in law. New programmes will be linked to the needs of the local labour market. Given the planned broadening of the curriculum, SJU's management expect that SJUD will grow and increase its student enrolments.

## **Summary of findings**

All of the institutions featured in this study are relatively small operations as none have more than 800 students. The Stockholm School of Economics Russia (SSER) and St Joseph University in Dubai (SJUD) are both examples of niche campuses that offer a limited range of courses within a single discipline. Over the last five years, niche campuses have accounted for a large proportion of the new international branch campuses that have opened. Other examples (which do teach in English)

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include Newcastle University's medical school in Malaysia and University College London's (UCL) branch in Qatar, which specialises in archaeology. Niche campuses are generally cheaper and easier to establish as they are simpler operations that require lower levels of capital investment. They are often considered less risky than multi-discipline campuses as they are more likely to earn a rapid return on investment due to lower capital outlays and their ability to achieve educational quality and favourable reputations through specialisation. The UAE hosts 37 international branch campuses, which is more than any other country worldwide (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012). The high level of competition among higher education providers in this small country – which has a population of only 7.2 million – might explain why the majority of international branch campuses in this nation have less than 200 full-time equivalent students (Lawton & Katsomitros, 2012).

### **Altruistic motivations**

According to Wilkins and Huisman (2012), the most common motives for establishing an international branch campus are revenue/profit, influence and status. However, it seems that the motives of our featured institutions were more altruistic, as most institutions claimed to be primarily interested in enhancing the welfare of others – at both individual and country levels. Soochow University of Laos was established as a public service with no expectation of making profit and the University of Białystok in Vilnius was established to raise the educational achievement of ethnic Poles living in Lithuania. Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics in Dubai (ENGECON Dubai) essentially serves Russian-speaking expatriates living in the UAE and Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) aims to contribute to Abu Dhabi's economic and social development.

Apart from the Stockholm School of Economics Russia (SSER), all of the other featured institutions deliver programmes in the language of their home country. Federico Santa María Technical University in Guayaquil (SMU Guayaquil) and St Joseph University in Dubai (SJUD) both deliver programmes using languages shared by both their home and host countries. Some institutions are invited to establish an international branch campus by host country governments and organisations. Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) was invited and funded by the Abu Dhabi government while ENGECON Dubai was invited to the UAE by an academic infrastructure provider.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the isomorphic forces of change encouraged higher education institutions to establish branches abroad. In their search for legitimacy, institutions adopted similar strategies and processes. When, for example, some institutions began to establish branch campuses in Dubai others were encouraged to follow. The higher education market in Dubai quickly became over-crowded, hence why institutions had to find gaps in the market, like SJUD establishing a law school. SJUD is also supporting its host country by contributing to Dubai's economic and social development.

In all cases, delivering programmes in languages other than English enables the institution to better serve the needs of their students. At SSER, the EMBA programme enables managers and business owners who are not proficient in English to achieve a classroom-based Western-style business education from a leading European business school. SJUD delivers its programmes in Arabic to meet the requirements of the local labour market so that its graduates will be immediately employable in the UAE or other Arab Gulf States.

Although our respondents generally cited altruistic motivations as explaining their institution's decision to establish an international branch campus that delivers programmes in a language other than English, there was also evidence of 'soft power' motivations. Soft power involves using ideas and culture rather than military or economic power to influence the beliefs and behaviour of others. For example, PSUAD's aims to spread French culture and language while Soochow University believes that international expansion will improve its international profile and reputation as well as contribute to the Chinese Ministry of Education's Action Plan to promote the global influence of the Chinese language. As all of our data originates from the institutions themselves, we acknowledge that there is scope for bias in our results and conclusions.

### **Student recruitment**

Institutions such as Stockholm School of Economics Russia (SSER), Federico Santa María Technical University in Guayaquil (SMU Guayaquil) and St Joseph University in Dubai (SJUD) deliver programmes in the language of the host country so language proficiency is not usually a barrier to student recruitment. All of the featured institutions require applicants to possess qualifications in the language of instruction and/or to sit language proficiency entrance tests. Most institutions reported that the inadequate language proficiency of applicants acted as a significant barrier to student recruitment. Even at Soochow University of Laos, where the majority of students are ethnic Chinese, all students follow courses in Chinese language both before and during their degree programme.

When achieving a degree in a particular non-English language gives graduates a competitive advantage in the local labour market then those programmes will appear attractive to students. For example, Chinese companies in Laos are widely perceived as offering the best working conditions and career prospects and so achieving a Chinese degree is seen as advantageous in securing employment in these companies. Students at Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) might believe that achieving a degree at this prestigious institution might enable them to take up employment in France or another European country, or in one of the African countries where French is still widely used. Some ethnic Poles living in Lithuania study at the Vilnius branch of the University of Bialystok (UBV) rather than at a Lithuanian institution of higher education because of their lower language proficiency in Lithuanian and their lower levels of achievement in secondary education. However, many high ability ethnic Poles who might previously have gone to Poland for their higher education also now choose to study at UBV.

Some of the featured institutions operate in countries where levels of per capita income are relatively low. Even though institutions such as UBV and Soochow University of Laos charge tuition fees that are very low by international standards, the fees charged are still unaffordable to many would-be students. Since the economic downturn, UBV in particular has noticed that students are struggling to pay their tuition fees.

The extent to which degrees in non-host country languages are recognised in host countries by local governments, employers and accreditation bodies will have a large impact on student recruitment. This is less likely to be a problem for internationally prestigious institutions like PSUAD, but UBV has experienced difficulties related to language of instruction, funding and ownership. Until, 2012, UBV was not regarded as a Lithuanian institution of higher education even though it had received accreditation in Lithuania. UBV was not included in national rankings of higher educational institutions and Lithuanian students could not use their higher education vouchers to claim government funding for tuition fees at UBV. Since 2012, however, UBV has been able to compete 'on a level playing field' with other Lithuanian institutions of higher education.

### **Problems and issues**

Most international branch campuses are required to achieve dual accreditation – in their home country and in their host country. For all institutions, this can be a complex and time consuming task to achieve, especially when the two accreditation systems are different and with conflicting requirements. When the language of instruction used at an international branch campus is not the language used in the host country or in the institution's home country, an already complex dual accreditation process typically becomes even more complicated.

Establishing an international branch campus is a very expensive undertaking. Given that the featured institutions seem to be motivated mainly by non-financial rewards it is not surprising that they all operate on a relatively small-scale. Most operate by renting space in office blocks or similar accommodation and therefore they do not offer students the facilities found on larger university campuses, such as extensive libraries, refectories and sports/leisure facilities. In a competitive higher education environment where students are increasingly expected to bear the costs of their

education, students increasingly evaluate the costs and benefits of different higher education options.

In Lithuania, the University of Bialystok (UBV) might be regarded by ethnic Poles living in Lithuania as the low cost option (if their high school grades were not high enough to qualify for the government's vouchers that pay tuition fees) whereas in the UAE, Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) is a prestigious high-cost option, as is Soochow University in Laos. PSUAD's tuition fees are relatively high and so scholarships have to be offered to secure the highest quality students. When there are insufficient nationals who are able to meet the entrance requirements of elite universities these institutions often have to recruit their students internationally. This can create problems for an institution if it receives funding from the host country government as the government may not want to subsidise the education of foreign students.

The nationalities and language proficiency of students can have a large impact on the teaching and learning experience. At Federico Santa María Technical University in Guayaquil (SMU Guayaquil) most students are Ecuadorians who speak Spanish and at Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics in Dubai (ENGECON Dubai) virtually all students are Russian-speaking expatriates living in the UAE, so language-related difficulties in the classroom are fewer and less serious than in institutions with mixed-ability groups of different nationality. However, even on the Russian version EMBA at the Stockholm School of Economics Russia (SSER) it was reported by one respondent that there was a frequent tendency for students to start speaking to each other in English even though the majority of the class cannot speak or understand English. Given that the students on this programme are mainly senior managers it can often be complex task for lecturers to manage classroom dynamics and processes.

### ***Institutional successes***

Institutional success can be measured by various means, including growth in student enrolments, ability to achieve institutional objectives, ability to break-even or make a financial profit, employment statistics of graduates, and indicators of quality and reputation, such as accreditations held and positions in rankings. It is very difficult to evaluate the success of most of the featured institutions because they are relatively new and not much data exists in the public domain. Also, most institutions do not make publicly available the financial performance of their international campuses. One institution – Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics in Dubai (ENGECON Dubai) – would not even tell us how many students they currently had enrolled.

Institutional size and growth in student enrolments are common indicators of institutional success, but it seems that aggressive growth in student numbers is not a main objective of several of the featured institutions. That said, Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) agreed a target of 1,500 students by 2016 with the Abu Dhabi government and Soochow University of Laos hopes to eventually grow to 5,000 students. Established in 1996, Federico Santa María Technical University in Guayaquil (SMU Guayaquil) is the oldest branch campus among the featured institutions and the Stockholm School of Economics Russia (SSER) was founded one year later. The fact that these two branch operations have survived for so long indicates success at some level.

The Stockholm School of Economics Russia (SSER) has received financial support from both the Swedish and Russian governments whereas the University of Bialystok (UBV) receives funding from its home country government and PSUAD is fully funded by its host country (emirate) government. The willingness of governments to fund international branch campuses in the long term can be regarded as another indicator of the success of individual institutions. The fact that all of the featured institutions have achieved accreditation from home and/or host country quality assurance agencies indicates that they are achieving the quality standards expected in international higher education.

Institutions such as Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) and Soochow University of Laos are typically local students' institution of first choice, which indicates that these campuses possess favourable images and/or reputations and that their degrees are valued by students. There

can be little doubt that at some level the featured institutions have contributed to the economic and social development of their host countries, improved their own international profiles and reputations, and improved the employment prospects of their graduates.

## **Conclusion**

A main objective of this research was to assess the prospects of international branch campuses that offer programmes taught in languages other than English. We are interested not only in whether the existing operations will survive and prosper in the long term but whether more international branch campuses will be established that deliver programmes in languages other than English. Institutions are more likely to be successful in attracting students when there is a clear rationale and benefit to students of studying in a language other than English. For example, studying in Chinese at Soochow University of Laos or in Arabic at St Joseph University in Dubai (SJUD) improves the student's future prospects in the local labour market.

The economic environment impacts upon the financial performance of all institutions. Given that most international branch campuses are privately owned and require tuition fee income to survive, an institution's long term survival depends to a large extent on students' ability and willingness to pay tuition fees or governments/sponsors to subsidise tuition fees. International branch campuses may be established for altruistic reasons but they must still break-even to survive in the long term. Therefore, the ability of institutions to balance revenues and costs will determine whether they are financially viable.

The long term viability of institutions such as Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi (PSUAD) and the Vilnius branch of the University of Bialystok (UBV) may depend to a large extent on the future willingness of host and home country governments to continue funding them. For example, the Abu Dhabi government might evaluate the contribution of PSUAD to the emirate's economic and social development by examining a range of indicators and it might expect to see the improved human development of nationals achieved through higher enrolment rates of UAE nationals. If PSUAD is unable to recruit more suitably qualified UAE nationals then the Abu Dhabi government is likely to eventually question why it is funding the education of foreigners.

Trends in international language usage and influence will undoubtedly have a large impact on the languages of instruction used in transnational higher education. The emergence of China as a major economic power may for example increase the popularity of Chinese as a language for international trade and education, particularly across the nations of Eastern and South Eastern Asia. At present, most international branch campuses do not appear in national rankings of higher education institutions, if indeed these rankings exist at all. Achieving good positions in rankings enables institutions to claim legitimacy, and Farrugia and Lane (2013) claim that the ability to build legitimacy is a key determinant of an institution's success. As new rankings emerge and as transnational operators teaching in non-English languages are included, the positions of these institutions in rankings will play a large role in shaping their future reputations and popularity with students, employers and funding organisations. These institutions are likely to remain popular with students as long as they give students a competitive edge in local, regional and international labour markets.

All international branch campuses compete in the highly competitive market for international students. Future trends and patterns of international student mobility will impact on the enrolments of international branch campuses. China, for example, has been one of the world's largest sources of international students during the last three decades but China is itself now emerging as a destination of choice for international students (Pan, 2013). In highly competitive markets such as Dubai, it is possible that institutions such as Saint-Petersburg State University (ENGECON Dubai) can differentiate themselves and achieve a unique selling proposition by offering programmes taught in languages other than those of the host country or English. However, without the facilities offered by larger institutions these specialised niche-style campuses may fail to offer students the type of study experience that they are increasingly expecting and demanding.

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Transnational institutions can always be adversely affected by economic and political shocks such as exchange rate trends and military conflicts. However, such shocks are likely to affect all institutions from a particular country and not just those delivering programmes in a particular language. There are many variables that determine the success of international branch campuses so it is virtually impossible to predict the extent to which existing operations will survive and prosper in the long term. It seems likely however that the vast majority of these institutions will remain small-scale operations, if they survive at all, while a handful might eventually achieve enrolments of several thousand students. As institutions try to satisfy the particular needs of different countries and types of student and to find new ways to differentiate themselves in a crowded international higher education market, it is possible that more international branch campuses will be established that deliver programmes in languages other than English.

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