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When the Borrower Becomes the Boss: The Dynamics of Educational Transfer in Qatar

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借り手がボスになるとき カタールにおける教育移転のダイナミクス

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Abstract

This paper maps the landscape of the mobility of American higher education institutions to the Arabian Gulf region. It examines how and why Qatar has borrowed the American model of higher education, in light of the issues and challenges of educational transfer and implementation at Education City in Doha. The paper also considers Qatari efforts to resist, adapt and modify the borrowed model within the local context to make the borrowed model their own.

This approach ascribes agency to policymakers/leaders in Qatar, and shifts the focus of scholarly attention toward the motivations and objectives that guide their partnerships with the American universities at Education City, as part of Qatar's national education reform initiative. Finally, the paper considers the broader implications for the future of educational transfer of the American model of higher education in the Gulf region, in light of the exponential growth in the number of foreign branch campuses operating or opening worldwide.

Keywords: International Education, Internationalization, Higher Education, Educational Transfer

Introduction

National education systems do not exist in a vacuum but rather interact with other social institutions domestically and across national boundaries. Indeed, whether due to historical models based upon colonial legacies or intra-regional ties, or because of contemporary examples and measures of international educational achievement (e.g., OECD's PISA survey, UN Human Development Reports), modern nation-states have regularly looked to other nations for institutional and pedagogical paradigms in order to build or change systems of education for their own citizens. As such, there is a long history of countries reforming their education systems by looking outside of their borders for best practices and importing policies, practices and programs. With the development of information communication technology and international benchmarks—perhaps even more so for governments like Qatar which are outward-looking, proactive and forward-thinking—policymakers, researchers and educators have access to a broad forum of educational ideas, practices and models at national, regional and international levels.

Educational transfer is an important and fundamental theme in the fields of comparative

and international education; and the concept of policy borrowing in education has been a consistent theme from the early 19th century. Broadly defined, educational transfer is concerned with the movement of ideas, structures and practices in education policy from one time and place to another[1]. In the field of comparative education, the place analyzed is typically a nation-state, so the movement or transfer usually occurs across international borders. Typically, there is a borrower and a lender, although the history of educational transfer encompasses a variety of paths and mechanisms of transfer, including diffusion, imposition or lesson drawing[2]. Essentially, educational transfer follows a common pattern: a) a local problem is identified; b) solutions are sought in foreign educational systems; and b) a tested institution or educational practice is adapted to the new context and then implemented[3].

Across the Arabian peninsula today, American educational practices, curricula, and structures are prevalent enough as to seem uniform, but the borrowed model of higher education has taken various site-specific forms to meet the needs of the host society and environment: the American-style institution (e.g., American University of Kuwait), the turnkey institution (e.g., American University of Sharjah), the branch campus (e.g., Carnegie Mellon University, Qatar), or a full-fledged replica liberal arts campus (e.g., New York University, Abu Dhabi)[4]. This institutional diversity is significant, because while it may seem obvious or instructive to compare the contemporaneous development of higher education institutions (HEIs) and characterize them in regional or global terms, I argue in this paper that education reform and change among the Arab Gulf states is a local affair based on local realities, not the least of which are individual leadership and the particular socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts in which the educational transfer occurs.

Discussion

More than in any other world region, the Arab Gulf states are experiencing a "higher education boom," followed by China and India, in terms of the quantity and quality of institutions and programs now available. Over the past two decades, the Gulf states have imported a Western, largely American, model of higher education to address inefficiencies in labor markets and invest in their economic futures, to meet national reform agendas, and in some cases, to function as profit-making ventures. At last count, nearly 60 colleges or universities have been founded in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Oman by provincial governments, nation-states, private organizations and individuals[5].

The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) estimates the total number of international branch campuses (IBCs) worldwide at 263 at the end of 2017, up nearly 33% from the end of 2010. While China has now surpassed the UAE in hosting the greatest number of IBCs, the Gulf states alone play host to nearly 25% of the total number[6]. The market for IBCs is dominated by a handful of countries: the top 5 host countries are China, the U.A.E., Singapore, Malaysia and Qatar, with the U.S. the top home institution country for the IBCs. At the end of 2015, an estimated 180,000 students worldwide were enrolled in IBCs[7].

Certainly, this higher education boom has been financed by the region's oil and gas wealth, but what is often overlooked in the attention placed upon the multi-billion-dollar international deals and investments are the foresight, agency, and political will on the part of individual national leaders to plan for a knowledge-based future by investing in tertiary education today.

Most literature on educational borrowing/lending has focused on primary and secondary education in developing countries, usually in a grantor-grantee relationship between a developed

country, or institution thereof, and a developing one. As such, a dependency or neo-institutionalist paradigm has prevailed whereby the developed country, in the role of a governmental agency, foundation, or as part of an international organization, has been seen to impose its institutional structures and practices upon a less developed one, signaling an unequal, North-South power relationship[8]. However, in contemporary educational transfer projects in the Arab Gulf states today, that historical power dynamic has been turned on its head, and the relationship between borrower and lender can be characterized instead as one of patron and client. Today, the borrowing Arab host country (or organization or individual) wields preponderant economic and political power as the local sponsor of educational products, services, and/or expertise. Thus, power dynamics are inverted due to the financial, legal, and political sponsorship of the borrowing nation, as well as by the agency and active engagement of its educational leaders.

This power shift allows the host country to control the financial terms and conditions of the partnership, if not always the quality and administration, of the provision of educational products and services. As such, the present importation by Arab Gulf states of Western higher education represents a paradigm-shifting phenomenon that accompanies the contemporary view of education as a service or commodity that is not only produced and consumed domestically but also traded internationally[9]. The traditional view of "granting" a Western education is not really applicable in a part of the world that is economically able to choose, buy, and import educational products and services. Far from being passive recipients of an ideal, global model of education or "world culture" that is universally applicable and relevant, the higher education initiatives in the Arab Gulf states are characterized by strategic research and planning, active engagement and partnership, and adaptive and results-oriented entrepreneurship. Indeed, in practice, the processes of educational transfer and the implementation of the foreign higher education model within the local context are more problematic, unpredictable and challenging than can be fully anticipated in the conceptual or planning stages. On the ground, there is a process of resistance, modification, and indigenization that occurs in the partnership between the borrower and lender. This "mutual adaptation" is indicative of the educational change that is effected through adaptations and decisions made by the parties to the transfer as they work with new policies, programs, and structures.

In the case of Qatar and its unprecedented investment in higher education at Education City, the country-specific factors of leadership and local context are significant. The last Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani who abdicated ruling power to his fourth son Sheikh Hamim bin Hamad Al-Thani in June 2013, founded the non-profit Qatar Foundation (QF) in 1995 and designated his consort, Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Misnad, as its Chairperson. The Foundation's stated mission is "to build durable human capacity [in order] to transform Qatar into a knowledge-based economy" by investing in the three pillars of education, science and research, and community development[10]. QF's flagship project, Education City, is a 2500-acre campus that houses a network of learning institutions and centers of research which QF hopes will collaborate and cross-fertilize to become an engine of growth and change for the nation. Specifically, the primary goal is to make Qatar less dependent on foreign professionals by educating and training its citizens to assume positions of leadership and enterprise in a knowledge-based economy.

The Emir founded the Foundation the same year that he assumed political power, suggesting that the Emir and Her Highness possessed a clear personal vision of Qatar's future from the beginning and acted early on to put in place the appropriate people and structures to realize that

vision. Virginia Commonwealth University, the first American HEI to join Education City in 1997, began offering its arts and design classes to female students only. Now co-ed, VCU was joined by five other top-rated American universities over the past decade, each offering programs considered vital to Qatar's economic development: Weill Cornell in 2001 (Medicine), Texas A&M in 2003 (Engineering), Carnegie Mellon in 2004 (Business and Computer Science), Georgetown in 2005 (International Affairs), and Northwestern in 2008 (Journalism and Communication). In 2010, QF also signed agreements with HEC Paris (Executive MBA, Executive Education and Management) and the University College of London (Museum Studies, Conservation and Archaeology) to offer their respective programs of study; and there is discussion of bringing a law school to Education City as well.

The fact that these particular American universities are resident at Education City was not a foregone conclusion or outcome; none of them lobbied to be there and, understandably, each institution had its own initial questions and concerns about the enterprise. It is known that QF originally tried to bring just one, multi-disciplinary research university to Qatar, but when it was unable to find a partner institution, it then went about inviting top-tier institutions with degree programs that met the nation's most vital education and training needs. Each HEI was specifically targeted and sought out by QF for the reputation, knowledge, and expertise of their respective academic programs. In its choices of institutional partners and programs, QF was strategic with regard to Qatar's national interests and considerate of long-term objectives, signing a multi-year contract with each institution[11]. While QF funds all operating costs, infrastructure, housing, and salaries at Education City, each institution negotiates its own budget and turns over all tuition money to QF. A key element of QF's agreements with the universities, negotiated from the beginning and included in their respective Memoranda of Understanding, is that the branch campus follow the same curricula as at the home campus, charge the same tuition fees, and employ the same admissions standards.

Contrary to QF's ambitious goals at the start of the enterprise, local realities have revealed some limiting factors, such as the poor quality of the public K-12 education and the dearth of Qatari males in higher education[12], requiring QF leaders to rethink and adjust their expectations. While admissions at Education City are open to students of any nationalities, QF initially set targets that the majority of students, about 75%, would be Qatari nationals. Education City was initially expected to have tens of thousands of students, and as many as 15 universities. In the 2009–10 academic year, Education City had a total student population of about 1,500 students, of which about 45% were Qataris. In 2015, there were a total of 2000 students enrolled at Education City. As enrollments at Education City have risen, the percentage of Qatari students has declined. QF now says it will be home to no more than 5,000 students and 10 universities. Qatar Foundation academies are proud that Qatari nationals represent the highest percentage of their students, accounting for more than 70% of the total number of students in 2013-2014[13].

In the face of these local realities, QF has responded with strategic thinking and decision-making. In June 2010, QF announced that it had formed a new umbrella institution, Education City University, since renamed Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU) after the Father Emir, which would supersede and encompass the six existing American branch campuses at Education City[14]. By most accounts, this was a surprise development that appeared to suggest a new direction in the evolution of Education City, one that would play out in the coming years.

The newer University administration, headed by Dr. Sheikh Abdulla bin Ali al-Thani, previously Vice President of Education at QF, would bring

under one entity the six different American HEIs, as well as the newer European institutions, brought to Education City over the past decade[15]. More recently, HBKU, now led by Sheikha Mozah and her daughter, Sheikha Hind bint Hamad al Thani, has evolved into an "emerging research university"[16] that currently benefits from its proximity to and cooperation with the Western HEIs at Education City. The general consensus is that QF intends for HBKU to be a home-grown national research university offering graduate programs that will complement the undergraduate offerings of the HEIs on the multi-university campus, eventually supplanting them. The American HEIs at Education City recognize and understand that QF leadership would like to eventually make the HEIs obsolete or otherwise phase them out, once effective Qatarization of higher education prevails.

Previously, the HEIs had operated as largely separate institutions on a shared campus, each with its own identity and academic mission. By bringing the six university branch campuses under one institutional umbrella, QF would conceivably consolidate their programs, resources and activities. First, by creating an overarching institution that would now house all current and future foreign branch campuses, QF would gain greater oversight of the universities' administration, programs and activities. This development would also seem to alter the recruitment and admissions processes for the resident universities, who heretofore have competed against one another for top students from a limited pool of qualified high school candidates in the region. Second, the newly "integrated, multi-disciplinary institution"[17] would also come closer to QF's original idea to have a single, multi-disciplinary research university at Education City. Thus, Qatari educational leaders are adapting, modifying and indigenizing the borrowed higher education model to make their national investment work for them. Whether or not that educational vision includes a liberal arts-based education in the long term or that Education City will become a latter-day House of Wisdom remains to be seen, but the Qatari policymakers are clearly willing to adapt and experiment as they deem necessary. Qatar's national and educational leaders have a clear vision and know what they want; and they are taking strategic, decisive action.

Conclusion

While there are only a handful of countries in the world like Qatar that could possibly finance and sustain an ambitious educational endeavor such as Education City, the general applicability of Qatar's case remains rather limited for educational borrowers, in particular those from less developed or less wealthy nations. Nonetheless, issues and challenges regarding the implementation of educational transfer, particularly leadership and the local context, apply worldwide. Moreover, educational lenders such as the Western HEIs at Education City—their leadership, administrators, negotiators and decision-makers—would benefit from greater awareness of this power dynamic, along with the unintended consequences of an unequal alliance.

With the exponential growth in the number of foreign branch campuses operating or opening worldwide, this research is intended to contribute to understanding on the part of university administrators, government officials, policymakers and educators regarding the challenges of educational transfer in the processes of implementing an American university program in a foreign context, so that strategies may be developed to meet these challenges and to better facilitate the process of internationalization by means of educational transfer. Further study and research might look at other university programs as case studies of educational transfer, both on a single-case basis

and as a collective in a comparative study among institutional types and among countries within the region. Additional study with regard to student experience and student outcomes would also be worthwhile. As these branch campus ventures mature and a generation of local graduates enter the workforce, start families of their own, and otherwise contribute to the national economies and human capacity development of the region, considerations of impact and sustainability would be both warranted and necessary.

Notes

1. Jane Knight, *2005 IAU Global Survey Report. Internationalization of Higher Education: New Directions, New Challenges*, 2006.
   "Educational transfer'" is here defined as the movement of educational ideas, institutions, or practices across international borders. Typically, there is a borrower and a lender.
2. David P. Dolowitz and David Marsh, "Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy - Making." *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration, 13*(1), 5–24, (2000).
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4. Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Elizabeth Hanauer, "Transnational Higher Education: Offshore Campuses in the Middle East," paper presented at the annual meeting of the 53rd Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Charleston South Carolina, March 22, 2009.
5. John Willoughby, "Let a Thousand Models Bloom: Forging Alliances with Western Universities and the Making of the New Higher Educational System in the Gulf," Working Paper Series, No. 2008-01 (Washington, DC: American University, Department of Economics, 2008).
6. Richard Garrett, Kevin Kinser, Jason E. Lane, and Rachael Merola. *International branch campuses: Success factors of mature IBCs, 2017*. London: The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education and C-Bert. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2u CFawr.
7. Ibid.
8. Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York and London: Longman, 1974); Philip Altbach and Gail Kelly, *Education and Colonialism* (New York: Longman, 1978).
9. IAU definitions, *www.unesco.org/iau/*. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is a set of multilateral, legally enforceable rules governing international trade in services that was negotiated under the aegis of the World Trade Organization and came into force in 1995. Education is among the 12 sectors of services covered by GATS.
10. Qatar Foundation website, *www.qf.org.qa*.
11. Contracts with the HEIs at Education City are for a period of seven to ten years.
12. Sheikha Abdulla Al-Misnad, "The Dearth of Qatari Men in Higher Education: Reasons and Implications," *Higher Education and the Middle East: Empowering Underserved and Vulnerable Populations*, MEI Viewpoints (October 2010), http://www.mei.edu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vBOcNODJbGg%3d&tabid=541.
13. www.qf.org.qa/qfschools
14. K.T. Chacko, "QF Higher Education under One Umbrella," Gulf Times, June 28, 2010.
15. In May 2011, Qatar Foundation announced that ECU has been renamed Hamad bin Khalifa University to honor the Emir.
16. https://hbku.edu.qa/en/about-hamad-bin-khalifa-university
17. Op cit. Chacko, 2010.

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