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The common factors underlying successful international branch campuses: towards a conceptual decision-making framework

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ABSTRACT

The last 25 years have witnessed the emergence of the International Branch Campus (IBC) as a means of providing Transnational Higher Education (TNE). The growth in the number of IBCs has not been without examples of failure and in some cases controversy, necessitating informed decision-making on the part of university leaders contemplating such a venture. Based on a systematic review of literature concerning the motivations for establishing IBCs; the drivers of sustainability and longevity; and case studies of successful and unsuccessful ventures by UK universities, this paper identifies key characteristics of successful IBCs. It proposes a framework – combining strategic, leadership, academic, financial and operational factors – for use by decision-makers in determining whether to establish and how to manage an IBC.

Introduction

The founding of International Branch Campuses (IBCs) can be regarded as a tool for socio-economic progress and social mobility within 'host' countries by 'home' universities, which claim to use them for capacity building and to develop local higher education systems (Knight 2004). However, a neoliberal perspective would suggest that the primary motivation for setting up IBCs is to gain direct or indirect utility, commercial advantage and generate income. In the UK, US and Australia, the approach often taken by a home university to move into the international market – including the decision to create an IBC – is perhaps best explained by transaction cost analysis theory, which suggests that the entry strategy depends on both the capability of the organisation and market dynamics (Dunning 1980; Williamson 1985). Where the home university is based in other markets, this model may vary, for example, some are associated with donor funding, as is typical in Germany, and others with soft power, as is often the case in China. The variety of forms of IBC and proliferation of terms (Altbach 2011; Healey 2015; Knight 2016; Knight and Liu 2017) may have arisen because universities are frequently repositioning their activities in light of changing regulatory and organisational demands (Lawton and Katsomitros 2012), or because of variations in financial or legal structures (Lane and Kinser 2013). Some forms place importance on the name of the home institution being included in the IBC brand (Kinser and Lane 2012), whilst most specify the need for on-the-ground presence, a curriculum and quality assurance specified by the home institution, and the awarding of a home university degree (Knight 2016, 2020).

Defining success for IBCs is challenging, given their diversity and the range of motivations for their creation on the part of home institutions and host countries (Wilkins and Huisman 2012; Lawton and Katsomitros 2012) and the range of forms they can take, with different funding and partnership models, and physical and virtual accommodation arrangements (Verbik and Merkley 2006). Wilkins and Huisman (2012) draw upon the 'three pillars' of institutional theory (Scott 1995) – regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive – to frame an analysis of motives for establishing IBCs. The regulative environment has both 'push' (reduction in public funding from home institution's governments) and 'pull' (host country regulations favouring IBC establishment) aspects, whilst the 'normative' dimension concerns institutional autonomy and attitudes towards commercialisation of higher education in both home and host countries. This may help explain why the majority of IBCs derive from USA-based universities. Cultural-cognitive understandings concerning the 'taken-for-grantedness' of the quality of Western HE complete this framework, to which the authors add the concept of 'institutional distance' – the difference between regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive environments in home and host countries (Phillips, Tracey, and Karra 2009) – to predict the likelihood of success. From a neoliberal perspective, underpinning Wilkins and Huisman's framework and accounting for half of the ten motivations for IBC creation identified by Lawton and Katsomitros (2012), the clearest definition of success is the ability to generate revenue and profit, but as noted by Kosmutzky and Putty (2016), publicly-available data related to the financial performance of IBCs is limited. As a proxy, this article will define success in relation to three factors: the longevity of operation; the growth in student enrolment (on the basis that in most cases student numbers are the principle source of income); and the perceptions of performance by stakeholders including students, staff, managers, local businesses, the home institution, and the host government, since much of the literature on IBCs is perception based. It is acknowledged, however, that defining success in this way is potentially limited given the diversity of motivations referred to above, which however are rarely made public (Wilkins 2020).

Method

This paper aims to identify key characteristics of successful IBCs and establish the foundations of a conceptual decision-making framework based on a systematic review of the academic literature on IBCs and grey literature including reports from the UK Government and mainstream press articles. The size of the IBC literature is growing, and according to Knight and Liu (2019), constituted around 35% of the peer-reviewed mode-specific Transnational (TNE) publications since 2000, equivalent to 128 works. Common themes including management and development (36% of publications), student issues (19%) and faculty perspectives (14%), but with a limited focus on financial and commercial matters (Knight and Liu 2019; Bennell 2020). It is skewed towards the perspective of the home institution or country.

This review draws upon the findings of Kosmutzky and Putty (2016) who undertook an earlier systematic review of the TNE literature. They noted a shortage in quantitative empirical studies to that point, which reflects the quality of data available (Altbach 2007; Naidoo 2009). Whilst data in relation to the size and performance of IBCs is limited at a global level, it is a compulsory component of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) information gathering in the UK. These data, together with published case studies of UK university IBCs have been included in the review, but it should be noted that the depth of analysis in such articles tends to be stronger for successful examples than for notable failures.

Literature review

Motivations and benefits: the home institution

Whilst the diversity of reasons for establishing an IBC are as broad as for embarking on any form of TNE (Middlehurst 2013), there is a consistent aim to generate revenue, in some cases to re-invest in

the home campus or in other cases (for private HEIs) to make a profit (Bennell and Pearce 2003). Revenue is typically a function of student numbers, and there is an underlying principle and motivation across most home institutions that an IBC represents an opportunity to grow the student base, often in untapped markets where the demand for HE outstrips supply (Altbach 2010). The relationship between IBC creation and revenue is consistent across most IBCs, but the financial model, be that with the aim of maximising revenue or profit, or to operate as a loss leader focusing on increasing the attractiveness of the home campus, varies by institution type (Marginson 2006; Bennell 2019a). IBCs created by elite universities produce the highest-level positional goods and limit their supply to maximise status, whilst less prestigious universities focus on the mass market; place filling where demand is greater than supply and growing until the point where marginal cost exceeds marginal revenue (Marginson 2006).

Bennell (2019a) suggests that IBCs can also be a platform to recruit additional international students to the home campus, who can be more financially valuable than offshore learners, although this link is disputed by Levantino (2017). Others argue that the main motivation is income diversification, rather than just growth, especially from universities in markets such as the UK where there has been a squeeze in domestic funding, growing competition, increase in for-profit HE and in parallel a liberalisation of the regulatory environment (Knight 2007a; Becker 2009; Lane 2011a). Favourable operating conditions have been created, regulations relaxed and monetary incentives made available to attract foreign providers (Naidoo 2006; Wilkins and Huisman 2012). In some cases, international education policies have been created in sending countries, such as the significant government backing to establish German IBCs in the 1990s (Middlehurst 2013).

In addition to the direct financial incentives, the literature discusses a range of sources of indirect utility. Some suggest that IBCs have been developed on the belief that they improve the international profile and brand of a university (Naidoo 2006; Wilkins and Huisman 2012), helping to attract the top scholars and other talent (Knight 2007a; Healey 2021) and that international engagements will improve the quality of the home campus and its teaching curriculum (Becker 2009; Lane 2011a; Healey 2021). Others point to student and faculty research opportunities and in particular, the opportunity that IBCs provide in tackling global challenges that cannot be addressed purely from a single location (Garrett and Verbik 2004; Knight 2007a). In an empirical study on university motivations for creating IBCs, Knight (2007a) found that wider student and staff development, including enhanced intercultural skills and knowledge capacity, were significant drivers. Outside of a neo-liberal framework, reasons cited for IBCs include the desire to contribute towards capacity building in countries and less developed HE sectors (Verbik and Merkley 2006; Knight 2011).

A common reason cited by authors for the choice of an IBC over alternative TNE is control. In creating an IBC, a university internalises many of the risks, including opportunistic partner behaviour, information asymmetry, and contingency claims (Verbik and Merkley 2006; Bennell 2019a). It also maximises its ownership advantages in relation to its own teaching curriculum, people and research base, and removes the conflict of interest possible when using a partner in relation to the scale versus quality debate (Healey 2008). From a purely financial perspective, it could be argued that IBCs reduce the international transaction costs that occur in other forms of TNE, and allow a home institution to set fee levels and manage the operation to maximise return on investment (Bennell 2019a). Whilst often the most expensive and high-risk model, IBCs are, however, potentially the lowest risk in terms of quality control and brand protection. In addition, IBCs can gain a competitive advantage over rival TNE (e.g. franchising, validation or twinning) as potentially they can more reflect the home campus (Mazzarol 2003).

Motivations and benefits: the host country and students

The increased appetite from sending institutions has been matched by a desire to attract IBCs in receiving nations. In many countries, such as the UAE, Malaysia and Singapore, IBCs have been

proactively targeted to enhance the domestic HE system, especially where high-quality public and/ or private universities are absent (Becker 2009). Lane and Kinser (2011) provide a summary as to why IBCs are important to host countries, suggesting that they: first, provide programmes from prestigious systems; second, offer new ways of teaching and wider choice for students; and third, add to the country's HE capacity, absorbing and creating new demand. Together these can rapidly expand HE provision, especially where demand has significantly outstripped domestic supply, whilst saving governments the expense of building systems solely from the ground up.

The earlier phases of the HE internationalisation – including the increased mobility of students in the 1990s and 2000s – have also created a renewed desire for IBCs to avoid 'brain drain' where talented students travel overseas (Healey 2008). TNE in general – and IBCs in particular – are now seen as a crucial component in economic development, with foreign-owned universities and research centres driving direct and indirect employment, industrial and commercial growth and modernisation, and talent retention (Verbik and Merkley 2006; McBurnie and Ziguras 2007; Becker 2009). In the UAE, and to a lesser extent Malaysia and Singapore, this has led to countries moving beyond the attraction of single IBCs to the creation of education hubs as significant drivers of work-force development, economic diversification and transformation, knowledge and technology trans-fer, regional profile and wealth creation (Knight 2011; Knight and McNamara 2015; Healey 2021). Healey (2021, 11) discusses Qatar's Education City as a good example of where an education hub has underpinned a 'knowledge megaproject' to legitimise the country and project soft power.

Numerous country-specific multidimensional examples of the benefits of single or clustered IBCs can be found in Lane (2010) on Dubai, Lane (2011b) covering Malaysia and Dubai, and Timol (2020), discussing Mauritius. Common across these are the host country motivations to retain talent, create choice, capacity build within the local system and drive new demand, including attracting international students of their own.

Across studies undertaken to examine the motivation of students to attend IBCs (Wilkins 2012; Knight and McNamara 2015; Sin et al, 2019), many of the core reasons are common with other TNE options, including the desire to improve their relative economic status and develop their careers using a degree from a 'better' HE system. The 'pull' factors of studying within the home country include the ability to continue working, stay at home with family, avoid the time and cost of travel, take advantage of sometimes less strict entry requirements and lower fee levels, and a range of country-specific reasons (often related to culture, religion, safety or lifestyle) (Mazzarol 2003; Wilk-ins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman 2012; Wilkins and Balakrishnan 2013; Wilkins and Huisman 2015; Healey 2015). Conversely, the main 'push' factors are around capacity constraints, limited choice and high entry tariffs (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman 2012). The relative attractiveness of IBCs in relation to other forms of TNE would be worthy of more empirical research.

Attitudes towards IBCs contributing to their failure or success

Despite a strong growth in the number of IBCs since the 1990s, there has been debate around this model of TNE and concern over its prospects. Some are critical of university motivations, suggesting that they have been dominated by profiteering and have switched from a focus on capacity building to the goal of building institutional status and profile (Altbach and Knight 2007; Knight 2012). Marginson (2006, 2007) and Knight (2007b; 2013) suggest that IBCs are further symptoms of the commercialisation and commodification of HE and signal a fundamental shift in its purpose, role and values, from the sharing of ideas, culture and values to trade, economic and political factors. This is linked to the perception by many that there is a neocolonial power imbal-ance inherent in the IBC model and a 'North-South' asymmetrical movement of knowledge (Alt-bach and Knight 2007). However, Wilkins and Juusola (2018) argue that TNE – including IBCs – can act as a foil to neocolonialism and that the emergence of Russia, India and China as key pro-viders of IBCs means that knowledge flow is no longer unidirectional. There is also a question over where the 'power' really lies in the modern IBC landscape. It could be argued that it rests more with

increasingly organised and outcome-orientated host country governments and students than with utility-seeking universities from western systems. The impact of IBCs on the cultural dilution versus harmonisation debate discussed by Knight (2007b, 2012, 2013) is more difficult to challenge or justify, but may depend on the extent which each IBC takes local conditions and context into consideration in curriculum, staffing and research.

Also prominent in the literature are concerns over the quality of teaching and ability to retain faculty (Altbach 2011; Chapman et al. 2014; Healey 2020) or willingness to adapt the curricula to different learning styles and cultures (Hoare 2013). Altbach (2010, 2011) is critical of the facilities provided by IBCs, suggesting that they rarely resemble the home campus and are not comparable in the quality or range of academic or social facilities. Several authors have challenged this viewpoint, with both Heffernan and Poole (2005) and Marginson (2011) reporting that many IBCs in East Asia and Singapore have established learning styles that balance local cultures and the values of the home university. Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) found that levels of student satisfaction at UAE IBCs were generally high, with key factors determining satisfaction being the quality of lecturers, availability of resources and effective use of technology, and Wilkins and Juusola (2018) claim that most IBCs are of acceptable quality due to increasing competition and regulatory demands.

The quality debate extends to students and academic standards. Altbach (2010, 2011) suggests that multiple IBCs alongside growing domestic provision in countries such as China and India create more competition but suppress entry standards. This may mean that IBCs are unable to attract students of the same quality as home campuses. The growth in IBC development has coincided with an increase in the number of commercial and self-appointed accreditation providers, together with so-called degree mills and rogue for-profit operators (Becker 2009; Knight 2012, 2013; Healey 2018). An argument could be made, however, that IBCs are the form of TNE with the lowest level of opportunity for fake degrees and poor accreditation standards, as the host institution retains a strong stake and control of quality. More pertinent, perhaps, are concerns by Altbach and Knight (2007) and Knight (2007a) on the extent to which the academic and professional qualifications gained at an IBC are relevant to the host country, and whether pressures to localise programmes, staff and research strike the right balance between maintaining an equivalence with degrees studied at the home campus and appreciating local context (Healey 2016).

Concerns exist around the quality of the management and associated decision-making in IBCs. Aside from the universal business challenges of working across cultures and learning styles (Neri and Wilkins 2019) and managing the different expectations of stakeholders (Wilkins 2020) there are concerns that IBCs managers typically have little previous senior management or international experience. In a study involving several IBC leaders, Healey (2016) notes that decision-making is perceived as 'amateurish' and that professional services are not equipped to support an IBC. Emery and Worton (2014), and Caruana and Montgomery (2015), extend this to claim that the HE sector is less equipped to manage IBCs over time than at the 'exporting' stage which simply involves the recruitment of overseas students.

Factors contributing to IBC failure

Healey (2020) identifies challenges for IBC operators in relation to working with organisations with different motivations – including partners where profit maximising is the main goal – and in adapting to an unfamiliar environment, with different host nation country legislation, business practices, political systems, social culture, region and language. IBCs are expensive to establish (Ziguras and McBurnie 2011), susceptible to population and demographic changes and sensitive to host government policy and licencing (Healey 2020). Lane and Kinser (2014) suggest that there were 27 IBC closures between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, at a time when hundreds were being established, and more recently Wilkins (2016) and Wilkins and Juusola (2018) highlighted that around 10% of modern IBCs had ceased operations by 2014. Perhaps the highest profile UK-led IBC case was the closure of the University College London (UCL) campus in Qatar in 2020. UCL has previously

closed campuses in Adelaide in 2017 and in Kazakhstan in 2015, and reports claimed that when the Qatar decision was made in 2017, it was home to only 140 students across its five programmes (Bothwell 2019).

The level of financial returns generated by UK IBCs is undoubtedly a cause for failure and instability. Bennell (2019b) reports that of the 11 UK Institutions that provided financial data in a 2015/16 HESA survey, the median revenue/student was £5378 and the profit/student ranged from −£400 to £1200. This suggests mixed levels of business planning. An example of this and much criticised approach to IBC development is the model adopted by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), which has included activities in Cyprus, Sri Lanka and Thailand. The University and Colleges Union (UCU) characterised this strategy 'a series of great speculative gambles, risking assets and revenue built up with public contributions', referring to the significant resource allocated to create IBCs in controversial locations (UCU, 2014, 1). The Cyprus campus has received public criticism by the United Nations due to its locations in the buffer zone between the Greek and Turkish sides of the island (Marginson 2020), whilst the IBC in Sri Lanka was openly condemned by Amnesty International due to the treatment of the Tamil minority by the ruling national Government (Morgan 2014). UCLan's attempt to create an IBC in Thailand failed before opening. Having acquired a plot of land for a new campus, reports suggest that a second, enabling acquisition being handled by a third-party agent, then collapsed, leaving the University £3.2 m in abortive costs (Marginson 2020).

Factors contributing to IBC success

Of the 45 UK-led IBCs that were open at the end of 2020, the largest and most established were Xi-an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJLU), the University of Nottingham in China (Ningbo) and Malaysia (UNM), Heriot Watt University (HWU) in Dubai and Malaysia, and Middlesex University in Dubai, Mauritius, and Malta (Bennell 2019a, C-BERT 2020). Together these accounted for around 75% of all students at UK IBCs. On first inspection, the two large campuses in China are very similar, but as discussed in detail by Feng (2013), they employ two different models in relation to governance, management and strategy. Nottingham Ningbo has adopted the 'convergence/globalisation' model, an unequal marriage with what Feng considers to be a weak Chinese partner. Nottingham controls curriculum, based on a traditional UK offer, dominates the Board and awards one UK degree to students. XJLU, conversely, is built on a 'localisation' model, jointly led by two equal partners of comparably high academic standing. They have developed and have co-control over a shared curriculum which is specifically reflective of local employment needs and future requirements. Governance is balanced, with a Board structure that is slightly constructed in favour of local actors, and two degrees are awarded to students, one from each institution. The Liverpool and Nottingham ventures do, however, share a joint focus on enhancing research intensity and local relevance, on developing the student experience, on quality and on recruiting staff domestically (Altbach 2010; Feng 2013). Both home institutions clearly have close and financially relevant relationships with their Chinese partners and governments at municipal, regional and national levels [Verbik and Merkley (2006) report that the University of Nottingham received US$18.7 m from the Zhejiang provincial and Ningbo municipal governments, on launching] and appear invested in these IBCs for the long term. Indeed, in 2018 Liverpool University announced a second China campus, in Taicang, to double student numbers in China to 24,000 by 2028. This will be focused on developing graduates in science and technology, in line with local industrial needs (Grove 2018).

Many of the recent successes at Nottingham Ningbo may well have been informed by institutional experience learned at UNM. Launched in 2000, only two years after Monash University created the first ever IBC in Malaysia, UMN is the oldest UK-led IBC (Mok 2008). In its early years, UMN faced quality and retention issues around staffing with many seconded from the UK, and, according to Hill and Thabet (2018), it has taken time to create a campus experience

that is comparable to the home institution. Twenty years later the faculty is stable and increasingly local, and there is a strong focus on student life activities, English language training and clubs and societies (Neri and Wilkins 2019). Locally relevant research is also seen as being a crucial component of success and the campus culture (Bothwell 2019; Lane and Kinser 2011).

In the Middle East, arguably the most successful UK-led IBCs are the Dubai campuses of HWU and Middlesex University. Like those led by Liverpool and Nottingham Universities, they both offer a full suite of courses across all levels including research degrees. HWU has recently announced a move to a new modern campus, committing to a further ten-year lease (Mok 2008; Symon 2019). Wilkins (2010) and Garrett (2018) attribute HWU's success to an excellent working relationship with the educational quality assurance and regulatory authority of the government of the UAE, and to the commitment to offer good education at competitive prices. It is also evident that this IBC has been able to achieve a balance between domestic and expatriate students in the UAE, something that others have struggled with (Wilkins 2010; Lane 2011b). Above all, perhaps the most critical component to HWU's success in Dubai is that it is a core component on the overall institutional strategy, alongside the home campus in Scotland, its campus in Malaysia, and its online offering. It is now marketing itself based on its ability to operate globally (Rogmans 2019).

The choice of host country may be important to the success of an IBC. Mauritius presents an interesting example, with Aberystwyth, Greenwich and Middlesex Universities, and the University of Wolverhampton – in addition to Curtin University from Australia – all establishing IBCs in this country of 1.2 m inhabitants since 2009. Whilst Middlesex University had reached over 1000 students by 2019, others have not performed so well (Marginson 2020). In 2017, two years after opening, Aberystwyth University announced that it would close its IBC, having enrolled only 106 students against a capacity of 2000, with claimed losses of £1 m since opening (Knight and Timol 2020). The University of Wolverhampton closed its Mauritius campus in 2015, having been open four years, with claims that it had only 140 students (Bothwell 2018). At the time, the University claimed that it has no 'fixed' investments in either buildings or people, which opens up the debate as to whether full institutional commitment was in place (Morgan 2015). Little has been documented as to the detail behind these failures, but it is likely that unrealistic student enrolment estimates led to non-existent or poor business cases, and fewer local students were willing to pay western University fees than anticipated. Changes to regulatory requirements, market saturation, the failure to adapt the curricula to local conditions, issues around staff recruitment and a lack of student English proficiency may also have played roles (Bothwell 2017).

Towards a decision-making framework for universities contemplating IBC creation

A decision to establish an IBC is typically taken in a UK university by its Vice-Chancellor (VC) and Executive Team, with endorsement from the Governing Body and/or Senate. Some decisions may form part of a wider university/internationalisation strategy, whilst others may be based on the personal bias or belief of the leader, and sometimes ventures may be opportunistic or led by a host country invitation. Figure 1 proposes a framework of key success factors based on the above literature review, that could be used to help make an informed and balanced decision. This includes 15 dimensions along which an IBC can be formed, broadly grouped in strategic, leadership, academic, financial, and operational themes, which incorporate both host country and home institution factors. A higher chance of IBC success is associated with those that sit to the right of these continuum.

Strategic factors

Case studies of UK-based home universities suggest a link between the success of an IBC and its integration with the institutional strategy of the sending university. The presence of IBCs has been a prominent feature of both the University of Nottingham and HWU's strategies, indicating that the mission and vision of the branch and the home campus are aligned, and supported by
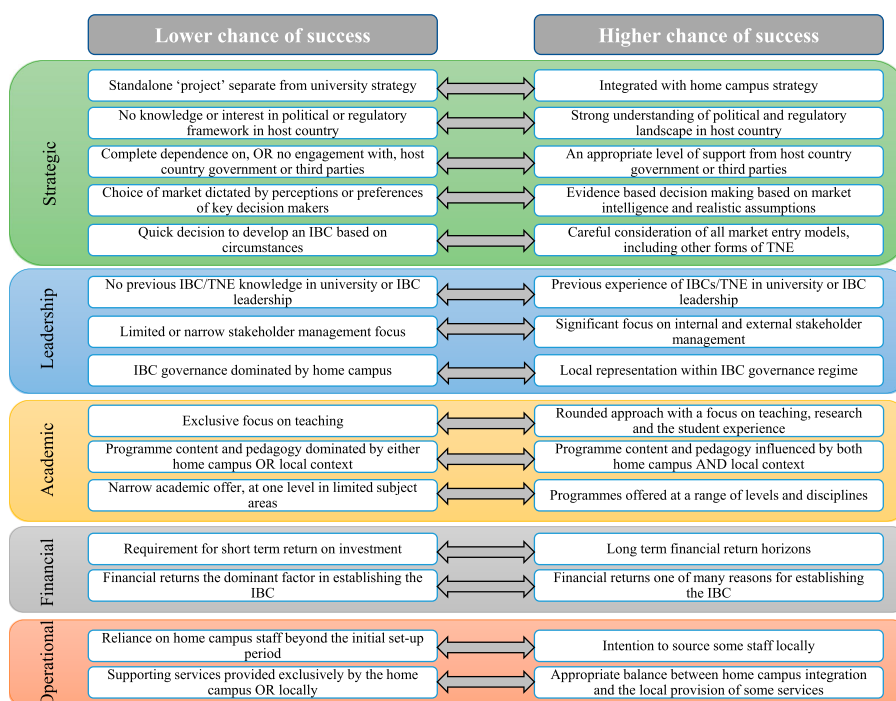
Lower chance of success		Higher chance of success
Strategic	Standalone 'project' separate from university strategy ⟷	Integrated with home campus strategy
	No knowledge or interest in political or regulatory framework in host country ⟷	Strong understanding of political and regulatory landscape in host country
	Complete dependence on, OR no engagement with, host country government or third parties ⟷	An appropriate level of support from host country government or third parties
	Choice of market dictated by perceptions or preferences of key decision makers ⟷	Evidence based decision making based on market intelligence and realistic assumptions
	Quick decision to develop an IBC based on circumstances ⟷	Careful consideration of all market entry models, including other forms of TNE
Leadership	No previous IBC/TNE knowledge in university or IBC leadership ⟷	Previous experience of IBCs/TNE in university or IBC leadership
	Limited or narrow stakeholder management focus ⟷	Significant focus on internal and external stakeholder management
	IBC governance dominated by home campus ⟷	Local representation within IBC governance regime
Academic	Exclusive focus on teaching ⟷	Rounded approach with a focus on teaching, research and the student experience
	Programme content and pedagogy dominated by either home campus OR local context ⟷	Programme content and pedagogy influenced by both home campus AND local context
	Narrow academic offer, at one level in limited subject areas ⟷	Programmes offered at a range of levels and disciplines
Financial	Requirement for short term return on investment ⟷	Long term financial return horizons
	Financial returns the dominant factor in establishing the IBC ⟷	Financial returns one of many reasons for establishing the IBC
Operational	Reliance on home campus staff beyond the initial set-up period ⟷	Intention to source some staff locally
	Supporting services provided exclusively by the home campus OR locally ⟷	Appropriate balance between home campus integration and the local provision of some services

Figure 1. A success framework for establishing an IBC.
Source: Author.

senior leaders. These IBCs are not perceived as different, at the organisational periphery or of lesser importance than the home campus (Lane 2011a). It also helps to eliminate the possible friction identified by Lim (2008) between the home campus and IBC.

The literature indicates that the stronger a sending university's understanding of the political and regulatory environment of IBC host countries, the less susceptible the venture is to risk and failure (Healey 2018). IBC leaders need to be aware of the fragility of the local environment and of any political fluidity within the HE sector. They should also appreciate that different countries have radically different trade and quality assurance regulations (Lane 2010; Shams and Huisman 2012). This variation in conditions suggests that a university embarking on an IBC project needs to reject a one-size-fits-all approach and adopt a case-by-case analysis of the receiving market, and be clear when there is a divergence between home and host system regulations. Connections, cooperation, and the ability to create positive working relationships with local regulators are important (Garrett 2018).

As discussed by Wilkins and Juusola (2018), much of the IBC growth in recent years has been driven by host governments and they increasingly dictate the mix and form this flavour of TNE (including the growth of education hubs and the policy in China to mandate the joint venture model). From a home university perspective, it would seem logical that some funding or structural support would be advantageous, and would support a strong working relationship. It may be that opportunism alone, however, does not necessarily lead to strong outcomes. The failure of UCL's venture in Qatar, which was entirely funded by the national government, is in stark contrast to the successful campuses in China established by the Universities of Nottingham and Liverpool which were funded jointly with host partners.

From a strategic perspective, an important factor in deciding to launch an IBC is the presence of a strong evidence base. Healey (2016) advocates an externally verified business plan, which should include an appraisal of market size, competition and likely institutional competitive advantage. This

should be accompanied by a due diligence process and vetting of potential partners and campus locations (Lane 2011a), together with a comprehensive risk assessment (Heffernan and Poole 2004). Once established, a process to track, monitor and support progress should be implemented. Another part of the decision to approve is the consideration of alternative entry modes into TNE and the various organisational and ownership options for the IBC, which vary in terms of the risk and reward (Lane 2010; Wilkins and Juusola 2018). One of the factors why relatively few UK universities have thus far established an IBC may include a lack of appetite or ability to create a clear business plan, or the relative attractiveness of low cost – low return alternatives (Bennell 2019b).

Leadership factors

Universities with IBC aspirations need senior leaders who can balance home and host country requirements and can deal with cultural distances, societal differences and the business challenges of working across borders (Eldridge and Cranston 2009; Lane 2011a). Stafford and Taylor (2016) highlight the importance of having a VC who can think strategically, network effectively, communicate internally and externally, operate well politically and delegate effectively, in relation to an IBC. A strong and mature relationship between the home campus leadership team and the, often relatively inexperienced, IBC manager is also critical, with ideally key decisions made collaboratively and with a level of international competence evident (McBurnie and Ziguras 2009).

University leaders also need to take a positive approach to managing the stakeholders associated with an IBC. Sustainable relationships with the host government, regulators, local businesses, students, staff, parents and other universities have been evident in the successful examples discussed in this paper. Neri and Wilkins (2019) discuss the difficulties of striking a balance between the sometimes-divergent needs of various stakeholder groups whilst Acquaah (2007) outlines the importance of networking and social relationships in emerging economies. Heffernan and Poole (2004) discuss some effective tactics, including the development of communication plans, strategies to develop trust and openness, and the acknowledgement that accepted business practices are likely to vary between the sending and host country. As has been seen at XJLU, this engagement can become formalised, with representation from local stakeholders in the IBC governance regime. Borgos (2016) suggests that a Board comprised of members with local connections, knowledge of the environment and a vested interest in success can be beneficial.

Academic factors

The academic factors impacting the success of an IBC link to the 'Integration–Local Responsiveness' trade-off discussed at length by Healey (2018) and others. From one perspective, it appears critical that IBCs maintain a high level of similarity with the home campus in terms of programmes and teaching styles. Demonstrable equivalence would be demanded by students and would align with marketing and branding (Altbach 2010; Shams 2016). From another viewpoint, there are several motivations for modifying programme offerings and pedagogy to the cater for the local context, job market, economic requirements and culture (Miliszewska and Horwood 2006; Dunn and Wallace 2006). This model would also take into consideration cultural distances and different learning styles (Heffernan et al, 2010). Perhaps the most pragmatic and optimum solution to this conundrum is a balanced approach, where the curriculum is localised whilst trying to offer equivalent courses and quality as at the home campus. Shams and Huisman (2012) emphasise the hazards of polarisation between global integration and local responsiveness and – alongside Dunn and Wallace (2004), Healey (2018) and others – advocate such a balanced approach. The same principles apply to what is taught at an IBC. The literature suggests that many institutions that have created IBCs have been tempted to focus on 'profitable' programmes such as Business and Information Technology (IT) that are inexpensive to teach and require few bespoke facilities, whilst rejecting other courses that might be critical to the host country (McBurnie and Ziguras 2007). It appears

that many of the most successful IBCs deliver across many levels (from foundation to research degrees) and across a significant number of disciplines, including those where the host government believes there is economic demand, those which match the home campus identity, and those that in-country students want to study (Lane 2011a; Garrett 2018).

There is emerging evidence to suggest that teaching and learning should not be the exclusive focus of IBCs, and that there should be parallel focus on research and the overall student experience. UNM is a good example of where an IBC has developed major resource capacity, benefited both in terms of access to local financial support, and in the ability to recruit and retain good quality, aspirational staff (Lane 2011a). Several authors have stressed the importance of the wider student experience as a key element of success within an IBC, whether that be the nurturing of student activities, co-curricular experiences and residential hall settings that both acknowledge different cultural expectations and norms, but also reflect the culture of the home campus (Pyvis and Chapman 2007; Tierney and Lanford 2014; Garrett 2018). It seems an integration–local responsiveness balance is also required when it comes to these factors.

Financial factors

Common in the literature is the view that IBCs offer no guarantees of an income windfall for the home institution and – even where success has been identified – require significant financial and organisational investment. Some UK-led IBCs have closed only a couple of years after opening, suggesting that realistic financial return horizons were not established from the outset, and were not tracked or monitored proactively (Healey 2015; Garrett 2018). There appears to be a relationship between the wider focus on societal, environmental and people factors discussed by Shams (2016) and the ability to secure strong local stakeholder relationships and a sustainable business model. Nottingham Ningbo perhaps provides the best example of a growing and financially vibrant IBC that has an outwardly visible focus on developing the local workforce and providing – through attractive scholarships – broad access to its courses.

Operational factors

From one perspective, the use of home campus staff gives the best chance of a comparable academic experience for students, but inflates costs, creates staff retention issues and means modifying teaching styles to suit the host environment (Shams and Huisman 2012). The alternative view is that staff should be sourced locally, as this is the most financially and culturally sustainable approach. It does, however, bring the risk of divergence between home and overseas campuses, and it can be difficult to source strong academics in some of popular IBC territories (Ziguras 2008). Healey (2018), neatly concludes that the optimal degree of staff localisation occurs when the proportion of seconded faculty is driven down to the lowest point that still satisfies students at an IBC. The literature suggests that it can take many months or years to reach this point, but it seems to now be the case in many UK-led IBCs set up in the early 2000s such as HWU and Middlesex University in Dubai, and XJLU. Whilst the overall trend amongst successful IBCs appears to be a local approach, the literature suggests that staff development remains important (Neri and Wilkins 2019), and that rights and status between campuses should be equivalent (Tierney and Lanford 2014).

The balance between a reliance on a home campus to provide administration and supporting activities, and their provision locally at an IBC is another area of potential tension. Due to their scale, IBCs often do not have the same level of support teams that would be available at home. Providing these locally would mean that services are fully tailored to IBC demands, but could lead to divisions and inconsistencies between campuses and may be inefficient and costly. Full integration with the home campus might be most efficient and promote cross-border working and buy-in from home campus leaders (Garrett 2018), but could suffer from practical issues in relation to time zones and cultural differences, restricting or delaying decision making. This could make local time

working and the job of the IBC manager more difficult (Lane 2011a). Eldridge and Cranston (2009), examining Australian IBCs in Thailand, suggest that the most successfully-balanced IBCs typically operate with services where institutional consistency is critical – such as academic standards, quality assurance and risk management – provided by the home campus, and other services provided locally. This would suggest that services where local agility and responsiveness are critical, such as IT, estates management and human resources, could be provided effectively within an IBC structure. This would merit further research.

Conclusion

The number of IBCs around the world continues to grow, reaching new territories and markets. Evidence from the last twenty years of IBC creation, success – and in some cases closure – suggests that university leaders need to be certain that an IBC fits with their institutional strategy and that they have the experience and knowledge of host markets needed to make the right decisions. IBCs need to be established in such a way that they balance the needs of the local society and economy and its students, with the culture and ethos of the home institution; a consideration that extends to staffing, programme offering, pedagogy, student experience, and governance and operational arrangements. Comprehensive stakeholder mapping and management are vital in this process. Above all, universities need to be realistic in the assumptions that drive their business case for an IBC, and the timescales over which they can expect a positive financial return. This paper has drawn upon secondary evidence from published sources; many of the themes identified in relation to IBC creation and sustainability warrant significant empirical research, including a more thorough investigation of Institution level data, where it exists, and potentially interviews with representatives from those universities that have established or considered an IBC. Discussion has been restricted to examining UK-led case studies, and has been written from the perspective of authors based in the UK, introducing inevitable 'home campus' bias. Little empirical analysis has yet been undertaken on the relationship between the viability of IBCs and many of the success factors identified in this paper, which would serve to test the validity and utility of the proposed decision-making framework.

Disclosure statement

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