The benefits & drawbacks of transnational higher education

Myths and realities

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The purpose of this article is to analyse some of the key ongoing debates in transnational higher education (TNHE). First, we discuss a selection of the claimed benefits and drawbacks of TNHE for home and host country stakeholders (students, governments and institutions), and then we suggest alternative realities, for which there appears to be evidence in practice. It is concluded that (1) recent TNHE developments on the provision side act as a counterforce to the spread of neo-colonialism; (2) international branch campus development continues but there is evidence that the forms, motives, and markets of these initiatives are changing; (3) distance/online/MOOC programs do not pose a threat to the sustainability of other forms of TNHE; (4) the majority of TNHE programs are of acceptable quality due to high levels of competition in international higher education markets and increased regulatory demands from quality assurance agencies; and (5) these forces also contribute to students generally being satisfied with their TNHE study experience.

Keywords: transnational higher education, TNHE, cross-border education, off-shore education, borderless education

Introduction

Over the last two decades, transnational higher education (TNHE) has emerged as a major form of internationalisation in higher education institutions. The term 'TNHE' refers to all types of higher education study programs or educational services in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2001). In the scholarly literature, TNHE is also known as cross-border, offshore and borderless higher education (Knight, 2016). Together, these four terms have created a new thematic field of research that comprises nearly two thousand contributions, which discuss both the benefits and drawbacks/weaknesses of TNHE (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016).

The main modes of delivering TNHE are distance/virtual education; franchised or partnership programs; joint or double degree programs; study abroad; and international branch campuses. The majority of research on TNHE focuses on international branch campuses, which are the foreign branches of universities that award degrees of the home institution. Franchising and various forms of partnership/collaboration are arrangements whereby the home university provides the curricula, accredits the qualifications awarded, and takes responsibility for quality assurance but the students are registered with a local institution that delivers the program in the host country (UK HE International Unit, 2016). In joint or double degree programs, students are generally enrolled with a local education provider for the first part of the qualification

and then at a foreign partner institution for the final part. In a joint degree program, the student receives one qualification that is accredited by both partner institutions, whereas in a double degree program, the student receives two full degrees, one from each partner institution. Online and distance education programs, including massive open online courses (MOOCs) are also nowadays established parts of TNHE.

While TNHE has become a popular and legitimate form of education that has enjoyed well-publicised success stories, it has simultaneously received a lot of criticism. For example, critics have attacked the educational quality and student experience in TNHE (Altbach, 2010), and argued that TNHE is often about soft power manipulation (He & Wilkins, 2018), which can be regarded as modern-day colonialism. In reply, higher education institutions argue that they are merely fulfilling unmet demand for higher education, and some even operate with an altruistic purpose (Wilkins & Urbanovič, 2014). As a consequence, there are several contradictions and persistent myths that prevail in contemporary TNHE research. We claim that such contradictions and myths exist because previous research on TNHE has tended to focus on the home institutions and countries, and less work has considered the host country's point of view. To understand these contradictions, we argue that one must look through multiple lenses, especially when dealing with multiple stakeholders. Therefore, we consider the potential benefits and drawbacks of TNHE from the perspectives of a range of home and host country stakeholders with special focus on students, governments and the partner institutions in the host country, which may all have conflicting objectives and agendas. Thus, the purpose of this article is to first examine the origins of the contradictions on TNHE by looking into the claimed benefits and drawbacks of TNHE, and then to identify recent evidence, so that the realities can be separated from the prevailing myths. We conclude the article with a discussion of the impact of TNHE for home and host countries in the light of the apparent 'realities' of the TNHE field as it is currently, and identify areas for future research.

Claimed benefits and drawbacks of TNHE for home country stakeholders

In many countries globally, it has become an expected norm among home country stakeholders that higher education institutions and their academic staff engage with internationalisation issues. Among the early pioneers of TNHE, gaining new revenue streams was a common motive for international expansion, particularly among Australian and British institutions. For example, in Australia, Monash University's development plan of 1999 included aims for becoming more financially self-reliant, with less dependence on government funding, and pursuing more entrepreneurial income-generating activities (McBurnie & Pollock, 2000). As government funding of higher education has increasingly failed to keep up with expansions in student numbers and rising costs, the revenue generated by TNHE has undoubtedly been a benefit to institutions. For many institutions in the home countries of TNHE, franchising, joint programs and articulation agreements have been easily gained revenue streams that have required relatively little risk or effort. Also, with widening access to the Internet globally, online and virtual programs gained in popularity from the early 1990s.

It is not only institutions that benefit financially from TNHE; so too do the governments of the home countries. For example, in 2016-17, over 700,000 students were studying for a UK degree overseas, which had an estimated value of £550 million to the UK economy (Universities UK International, 2018). Several governments globally actively encourage higher education institutions to engage in TNHE, particularly to countries where the local government is willing to offer generous funding or operating terms for TNHE. Governments sometimes publicly acknowledge and reward institutions that have been proactive and successful in their TNHE ventures. In the UK, Middlesex University, with campuses in Dubai, Malta and Mauritius, has twice received the Queen's Award for Enterprise in recognition of its contribution to international trade. Sometimes the motives may be also political. Governments have recognised that TNHE delivers soft power, which can generate socio-cultural influence (He & Wilkins, 2018).

However, it is clear that not all TNHE operations are motivated by economic or political considerations. The attractions of TNHE are also linked to reputation and image. Institutions believe that TNHE brings them legitimacy and helps in developing global brands and improving status through international rankings. For example, such motives were expressed when New York University announced its decision to establish campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai (Krieger, 2008). Institutions that participate in TNHE may benefit from enhanced rankings and perceived brand value, and this in turn may help attract students and research funding. Even lower-ranked institutions with international branch campuses can brand themselves as 'global institutions', enhancing their perceived status among key stakeholders such as students and employers.

It is often claimed that TNHE is driven by altruistic motives, such as enhancing internationalisation at home. Home campus staff often interact with institutions abroad as visiting academics or as managers overseeing curriculum design and quality assurance. Hepple (2012) argues that work experience abroad can help staff to identify and question their assumptions about international students and about teaching and learning. Academics may become more culturally and globally aware as a result of interacting with staff at the foreign outposts, and curricula may be internationalised to help learners become 'global citizens' and to satisfy the needs of students arriving at the home campus via articulation agreements. TNHE also benefits students as it provides them an opportunity for inter-campus mobility that will enrich the student's learning experience. Study abroad helps students to develop foreign language skills, as well as making them more culturally aware and accepting of other cultures, and the presence of international students at the home campus can improve the learning experience of all students. Australian and British institutions have now joined American institutions in promoting the possibility of inter-campus mobility as a benefit that will enrich the student's learning experience.

Simultaneously, TNHE arrangements have received criticism from the home country stakeholders as TNHE goes beyond the traditional mission of universities as institutions for public good and it involves considerable risks. There are well-publicised cases of TNHE initiatives that have failed and caused reputational and financial damage for the main campus and the home country (Alajoutsijärvi, Juusola, & Lamberg, 2014). When universities, especially publicly funded ones, get physically involved with governments beyond their own territory it raises questions concerning profit-generating aspects and allocation of home campus resources in TNHE, but also more profound issues when expanding to controversial countries that may limit or have questionable stances towards civil, political and human rights, as well as academic freedom (Wildavsky, 2010). Such limitations of freedoms are often against the principles and values of the home campus. For example, academics, students and alumni at Yale raised concerns over such issues when Yale announced its plan to open a branch campus in Singapore (Lewin, 2012). Although staff members, students and alumni are important stakeholder groups, they are not always consulted on TNHE plans.

Universities have often been criticised for prioritising lucrative TNHE arrangements over their home country operations to the detriment of local stakeholder groups, which may be regarded as the institutions' primary stakeholders. For example, Middlesex University was criticised by local politicians for expanding overseas while shutting down some of its poorer-performing campuses in London (McGettigan, 2011). Critics of TNHE have also argued that as universities engage in profit-motivated operations, the quality and standards of education are often compromised (Sidhu, 2009). The home institutions in TNHE arrangements often have little or no control over the execution of programs overseas (Wildavsky, 2010), and TNHE programs are typically delivered by faculty who are not as experienced or qualified as faculty at the home campus (Wilkins, 2016). Partner institutions frequently have different and conflicting objectives (e.g. maximising student enrolments versus maintaining academic quality), which may damage the brand value of the home institution (Healey, 2015a).

It may be argued that rather than 'internationalising' education, TNHE may actually strengthen the influence of Western culture on host countries, as the flow of information in such arrangements is often unidirectional. For example, branch campuses are typically teaching institutions and only a few of them contribute to relevant local research (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). Lastly, institutions cannot escape the fact that they are potentially cannibalising their own existing markets of foreign students, as they typically offer the same curricula in the home campus and through their TNHE options. Hence, the home campus may lose a number of incoming foreign students who decide instead to enrol in a TNHE program (Healey, 2015b). It is often difficult to ascertain the extent to which a particular higher education institution benefits (or loses) from its TNHE operations, because the data relating to these operations are generally kept confidential.

Claimed benefits and drawbacks of TNHE for host country stakeholders

The first, and arguably, the main beneficiary of TNHE in host countries are the students. Without TNHE, many of these students would be unable to participate in higher education, usually because of insufficient higher education capacity, but also sometimes because of the subject they want to study, or their level of educational achievement, nationality or socio-economic background. TNHE students often choose to take distance/online programs because they are usually cheaper than campus-based programs and more flexible in terms of time commitment than face-to-face delivery. This is advantageous for TNHE students that are typically older and in full-time employment (Pieper & Beall, 2014). Also, MOOCs now present a viable option for TNHE learners at little or no cost as many universities

in the United States (US) and Europe already recognise MOOC credits for accreditation of prior learning (Annabi & Wilkins, 2016).

However, it should not be taken for granted that TNHE ventures are licensed or that their degrees or programs are recognised by the host country for the purposes of public sector employment or for professional accreditation. In many countries, foreign distance/online education programs are not recognised at all because they do not have a physical local presence (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011). For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Government has only recently started to recognise certain online programs, but it still enforces stringent criteria for programs to be recognised. This has not deterred or prevented TNHE providers from operating, but it has shifted the risk to the students, who may experience difficulties in getting their degrees attested or recognised by employers.

Host country governments have noted that TNHE has the potential to increase higher education capacity, satisfy labour market skills needs, and contribute to knowledge creation and innovation. Countries such as Qatar, Singapore and the UAE have used TNHE to encourage innovation and the development of knowledge economies. The research output of some international branch campuses is now comparable with both the leading domestic institutions in the host country and the institution's home campus, and in Qatar, for example, TNHE accounts for over a quarter of the national scholarly research output (Pohl & Lane, 2018). In the Arab Gulf region, TNHE had been used to reduce youth unemployment and to satisfy the labour needs of the private sector, which enabled the UAE to increase its gross domestic product (GDP) 236-fold between 1971 and 2014 (UAE Interact, 2016). Thus, TNHE can help host countries implement and achieve their economic development plans, by offering programs that are in demand locally. This explains why the governments of Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Singapore have been willing to fund TNHE initiatives.

A further benefit of TNHE for host country governments is that when nationals enrol in TNHE programs rather than at public institutions, the government is not forced to bear the cost of tuition (unless it is funding the branch campus, as is the case at Education City in Qatar). TNHE may help reduce 'brain drain', as students stay in their native country rather than going abroad, and this also reduces currency outflows. Some branch campuses are even successful in attracting international students to the host country, whose spending contributes to economic growth. For example, branch campuses in Mauritius target students in several African countries. In countries with less developed higher education systems, the increased competition provided by TNHE providers has the potential to drive quality improvements throughout the nation's higher education sector.

Despite the possible benefits of TNHE, there is a lot of criticism that questions the contribution of TNHE for host country stakeholders, which contradicts many of the claimed benefits. International branch campuses are often criticised for acting as business entities that do not necessarily promote the same national values and priorities as local institutions. It has also been questioned whether TNHE does, in fact, have a significant impact on reducing brain drain, as many of the most gifted students still travel overseas for their higher education rather than study in a TNHE program in their native country (Chiang, 2012; Healey, 2015a).

Local stakeholders are often concerned over the motivations of TNHE; for example, whether financial opportunism may lead to the lowering of standards and entry criteria to programs (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011), or to offering only programs that are relatively profitable and affordable to establish, which may not be the programs that the host country actually needs (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010; Naidoo, 2003). The sustainability of TNHE programs is also often questioned, as many TNHE ventures have unexpectedly shut down or downscaled their operations, such as the branch campuses of George Mason University and Michigan State University in the UAE. Furthermore, as the quality assurance of TNHE often falls outside the control and supervision of home country quality assurance systems, it is difficult to verify whether the quality of TNHE programs is similar to the home campus, particularly when linkages to the main campus may be vague due to lack of collaboration and different student bodies.

The critique on the online and virtual provision of TNHE, including MOOCs, has also addressed issues in the quality of the programs, teaching and learning, poor retention rates as well as lack of locally-tailored content (Altbach, 2014; De Freitas, Morgan, & Gibson, 2015; Lane & Kinser, 2012). Furthermore, the majority of MOOCs score poorly on most instructional design principles (Margaryan *et al.*, 2015) and distance-learning courses are also vulnerable to online fraud due to difficulties in verifying who completes the assessments (Healey, 2015a).

Conflicting claims about TNHE

The previous sections have characterised a range of sometimes conflicting claims about the benefits and drawbacks of TNHE for the home and host countries. It should be noted that much of the discourse on TNHE,

and particularly on branch campuses, is hypothetical and based on old assumptions rather than recent empirical investigation (Healey, 2015b). For this reason, we regard many of the unsubstantiated claims made about TNHE as myths. We claim that these myths stem from contradictory but yet interrelated interests of the home and host country stakeholders. As a consequence, many claims seem logical in isolation but conflicting when viewed from different perspectives.

In the following sections, we aim to go deeper in understanding these myths by critically examining the assumptions to construct a more accommodating perception of the opposite views. The assessment of the success and effectiveness of TNHE is to an extent socially constructed, and what we are proposing in this article is a set of alternative realities, for which we believe there is evidence in practice. The evidence to support our claimed realities came from empirical research findings and statistics compiled by reliable sources, such as government and quasi-government organisations. In the light of these, we address five of the common myths about TNHE that were identified and then discuss the realities behind these myths. It should be noted that some of the myths are specific to only particular modes of TNHE delivery, e.g., online programs or international branch campuses.

The myths and possible realities of TNHE

Myth 1: TNHE acts as a form of neo-colonialism

It is widely claimed that TNHE acts as a form of neo-colonialism, particularly in the form of branch campuses, as it increases the divide between the developed and developing worlds (Altbach, 2001, 2004, 2008; Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). This divide occurs due to the unidirectional relations in knowledge production and consumption between source and host countries, which benefits the institutions from Western countries and increasingly marginalises the institutions in smaller and emerging economies.

Ten years ago, the US, UK and Australia were the top providing countries of TNHE and few could see any foreseeable change in this status quo. For example, Scott (2013) argued that countries such as China and India would not replace the existing dominant players in international education because of political and socio-economic reasons in these countries that would act as barriers. However, the recent evidence does not entirely support such arguments as the patterns of TNHE are evolving in ways unpredicted by most commentators. Western countries are no longer the sole dominant providers of TNHE. By the end of 2016, Russia, India and China had emerged as key providers of TNHE (OBHE/C-BERT, 2016). For example, Russian institutions have already established 21 campuses outside Russia (OBHE/C-BERT, 2016). Among the most successful non-Western operators of international campuses – with the largest numbers of students – are India's Amity University, which has five branches, and Iran's Islamic Azad University, which has four branches.

TNHE hubs such as Malaysia, Singapore and the UAE have seen significant development of their higher education sectors and branch campuses are increasing playing an important role in human resource development, innovation and knowledge production (see e.g. Lane & Pohl, 2017). Several branch campuses now have large numbers of doctoral students (e.g. University of Nottingham's Ningbo campus in China) while others (e.g. Amity University) are registering dozens of patents as evidence of innovation.

In addition, the increasing trend in transnational partnership programs in TNHE facilitates local and joint knowledge production rather than importing it. In China alone, there were over 1,000 cross-border higher education partnerships in 2009 (Altbach, 2009), while 140 of the 170 private tertiary providers in Singapore offered programs in collaboration with foreign institutions in 2003 (Garrett, 2015). Thus, to conclude, recent patterns in the provision side of TNHE suggests that the flow of knowledge in TNHE is no longer unidirectional and originating solely from Western countries. Rather, as institutions engage more in their operational contexts, e.g. by producing local research, TNHE is facilitating the joint production of knowledge. Therefore, it is clear that the current trends discussed in this section indicate that TNHE can act as a counterforce for neo-colonialism.

Myth 2: The trend for establishing international branch campuses is decreasing

By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the legitimacy of 'bricks and mortar' TNHE was accepted and branch campuses were able to overcome the challenges of liability of newness. This initiated a rush to set up overseas campuses. However, many institutions have since discovered that running an overseas branch is a complex and usually unprofitable undertaking. In fact, around 10 per cent of all branch campuses that were established later failed and ceased operations (Lane & Kinser, 2014). This failure rate resulted in a number of commentators – such as industry journalists and market intelligence organisations – predicting a downturn in future branch campus development (ICEF, 2015). In 2015, a study by the

European Association for International Education found that among European universities branch campuses had fallen to the lowest priority among fifteen different internationalisation strategies (EAIE, 2015).

Most international branch campuses have failed due to lack of proper planning and the inability to break-even and make a financial return (Wilkins, 2017). For example, Aberystwyth University's Mauritius campus was criticised for having only 40 students enrolled in its first two terms (BBC News, 2016), while Glasgow Caledonian University spent nearly US$12 million on a campus in New York but even three years after opening, it had no students due to the lack of a necessary operating licence (Campbell, 2016). In 2015, Tisch Asia, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in Singapore was closed after losing as much as US$6 million a year (Sharma, 2012).

Despite these well-publicised failures, in the light of recent developments, we claim that more international branch campuses are likely to open in the next decade, but there is evidence that the forms, motives, and markets of these initiatives are changing. First, we expect to see more diverse organisational forms in new branch campuses that involve various forms of partnership. It has become clear that many high-ranking institutions prefer the partnership model when expanding abroad, examples being Yale-NUS College in Singapore and Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University in China. Second, much of the growth in campus-based TNHE will be driven by host country governments, which will decide what kind of providers they will host. For example, China's higher education strategy is to encourage more cooperation and relationships with foreign institutions, but particularly with world-leading institutions (He, 2016). Third, the new markets for branch campuses will shift to emerging economies that are keen to expand their higher education capacity, promote knowledge creation and innovation. At the start of 2017, at least 14 branch campuses were under development in emerging countries, such as Brazil, China, Mexico and Nigeria (OBHE/C-BERT, 2016). Emerging countries are expected to attract (and maybe also fund) medical schools and institutions that specialise in energy or industries that are relevant to the local economy. Fourth, more institutions have expressed interest in running branch campuses on an altruist not-for-profit basis (*cf.* Wilkins & Urbanovič, 2014), such as some of the institutions operating in Africa.

Myth 3: Distance/online/MOOC programs will threaten other forms of TNHE

Distance/online programs enjoyed a mini boom in the early 1990s, at the height of the Internet boom. Many commentators claimed that the advent of MOOCs would be a turning point in international higher education, potentially hitting traditional college enrolments. In 2012, the president of Stanford University referred to MOOCs as 'a digital tsunami, which threatens to sweep away conventional university education' (Boxall, 2012). Indeed, some institutions have managed to register large numbers of participants. For example, Stanford enrolled 450,000 learners onto three computer science courses in 2011 (Vardi, 2012). More recently, some MOOC providers have also begun offering for-profit programs. For example, since early 2017, FutureLearn has offered a number of postgraduate degrees in partnership with Australia's Deakin University, with tuition fees starting at approximately US$21,500. Distance/online programs are popular among TNHE students in many countries, particularly mature working students. However, to date MOOCs have not taken off to the extent that some institutions had hoped. Completion rates are very low in most programs. Jordan (2014) reports an average completion rate for MOOCs of just 6.5 per cent.

There are several reasons why distance/online programs and MOOCs have failed to achieve their initial expectations. First, an online degree does not enjoy the same status as a campus-delivered program and most students want to interact with faculty and other students (Marginson, 2004). Second, they are quite expensive to run and difficult to organise (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011). Third, online education is not well-received and valued in certain cultures, such as in Asia (Wang, 2006). Fourth, although many online programs such as MOOCs are supposed to be free to users, students are often expected to pay for individual tutor assessments and/or certification, which most students refuse to do (Daniel *et al.*, 2015). Students may become confused seeing for-profit programs on a MOOC platform, and this may result in them shunning online higher education altogether.

To conclude, unless MOOC providers are able to cover their costs, it is unlikely that they will continue to expand in future to the extent that they would pose a threat to other forms of TNHE.

Myth 4: Quality standards in TNHE are lower than at the home country campuses

According to many critics, TNHE programs, particularly online/distance/MOOCs, are often considered as not offering a high quality learning experience due to the lack of knowledge of contemporary instructional design principles and learning theories among those who manage, design and deliver such programs (Healey, 2016;

Margaryan *et al.*, 2015). In terms of breadth of curriculum, quality of academic staff or students, physical environment, learning resources and social facilities, TNHE programs are rarely considered comparable with home campus offerings (Altbach, 2010). Maintaining quality standards may become problematic when local institutions have autonomy over curricula, assessment and the recruitment of faculty and students, resulting in issues over ethics and academic integrity (Wilkins, 2017).

Contrary to popular belief, most host countries of TNHE now have regulatory bodies and established procedures for assuring quality. Quality assurance mechanisms have become increasingly well-developed and, in several countries, institutions that have failed to meet the expected quality standards have been closed (Lane & Kinser, 2014). In addition, much TNHE provision must meet the standards of quality assurance agencies in the home countries. For example, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) conducts quality audits of British TNHE. The audits of both host country and home country quality assurance agencies indicate that the vast majority of TNHE is of an acceptable standard. It should be emphasised that the comparability of student experience in home and host countries (based on campus environment and physical resources etc.) should not be equated with quality of learning and student achievement. For example, at the Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance, students on 2+1 partnership programs routinely achieve higher grades than the students studying on the same programs at the home campuses of the partner institutions.

To conclude, quality assurance has become an established and fast developing part of TNHE, which helps ensure that the quality of TNHE programs is of an acceptable standard.

Myth 5: The student experience and student satisfaction is lower in TNHE than at home country campuses

There is ambiguity over the student satisfaction and how students perceive or experience TNHE. We know that completion rates in distance/online programs are generally low and that most TNHE operators claim that students receive the same program and educational experience as students at the home campus. However, when many TNHE programs are delivered at premises that comprise of only a few teaching and administrative rooms in an office block, it is unlikely that students could possibly enjoy the same experience as studying at a fully-fledged campus in places such as London, Paris or New York. In 2014, the UK's QAA concluded that only two of the eleven British universities that were operating in the UAE could be recognised as campuses in terms of their infrastructure and facilities (QAA, 2014), and this may hinder student satisfaction.

Research into student satisfaction at branch campuses in major education hubs has found mixed results. A study in Qatar found that students were dissatisfied with all the major services at institutions, including academic, administrative and facility services (Bhuian, 2016). This study concluded that branch campuses could not meet, let alone exceed, the service quality expectations of students in any of the significant dimension of the service quality. However, according to another study (Wilkins *et al.*, 2012), students in the UAE were found largely satisfied across the dimensions of program effectiveness, quality of lecturers and teaching, student learning, assessment and feedback, learning resources, use of technology, and facilities/social life. A similar study by Ahmad (2015) also found relatively high levels of student satisfaction at branch campuses in Malaysia.

A further study concluded that students as well as other stakeholders – such as parents and employers – are generally satisfied with the quality of TNHE (Pieper & Beall, 2014). This study involved a survey conducted in ten different countries globally of students enrolled in TNHE programs from a range of countries that included the UK, Germany, Australia and Malaysia. The study found that students were satisfied with their TNHE offering because it allowed flexibility not available in other higher education programs; it helped develop and strengthen intercultural awareness and competence; and it effectively equipped the student with the knowledge and skills needed to improve their career prospects (Pieper & Beall, 2014).

In the light of the recent market developments, we argue that increasing competition in international higher education markets and increased regulatory demands from host country quality assurance agencies has encouraged TNHE providers to further improve quality, which has enhanced the student experience and increased overall satisfaction among students.

Conclusion

Over the next decade, it is likely that TNHE will strengthen its status as a central feature of higher education in many parts of the world, and this mode of operation will evolve in terms of both supply and demand. We suggest that TNHE has been able to overcome many of its initial challenges and that the field is becoming more complex in terms of operating forms, quality, markets and the scope of

TNHE activities. When TNHE's scorecard is examined, we see clearly that TNHE has advantages and disadvantages, benefits and costs, as well as risks. The question that we seek to address here is whether the benefits of TNHE for both the home and host countries exceed the drawbacks.

When analysing the current state of TNHE it appears that many of the negative claims and myths of TNHE are unjustified. TNHE is effectively catering for and satisfying a different profile of student, who is typically older and employed. TNHE provides these students with access to higher education when they may otherwise not have had access to it, and it equips these students with the knowledge and skills needed to gain a competitive advantage in local, regional and international labour markets (Pieper & Beall, 2014).

TNHE clearly has risks for both institutions and host country stakeholders, but it also offers substantial benefits. Institutions may strengthen their reputations and brands internationally through TNHE provision, but benefits such as these are difficult to measure and quantify. For host countries, it is perhaps much easier to assess the contributions of TNHE to increasing higher education capacity, to innovation and knowledge development (through patents and research output), and to satisfying the needs of the local labour market, which has helped reduce youth unemployment in countries such as Qatar and the UAE.

Thus, we argue that overall the TNHE field is becoming more sophisticated, but it remains a complex field to study due to the variety of stakeholders in both home and host countries and their conflicting and changing expectations. To date, few studies on TNHE have addressed various stakeholders, which has contributed to the development of the myths discussed in this article. To facilitate the future development of the TNHE field, Bolton and Nie (2010) call for more critical understanding of sustainable models of TNHE including various stakeholders' interests in TNHE value propositions. To conclude, we call for future empirical studies on TNHE, addressing such issues from the perspectives of governments, students, employers, institution employees (managers, faculty and staff), and the wider communities in both home and host countries.

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