

Student experience at international branch campuses

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Many higher education institutions now have offshore campuses in foreign countries. To attract students in the host country, these international branch campuses typically rely on the parent institution and home country higher education system reputations. Institutions that operate international branch campuses typically claim that the student experience at the offshore campus replicates the onshore home campus experience. Such claims are made even though the majority of offshore campuses lack the scale or financial strength needed to invest in physical infrastructure and resources. This article is a consideration of the extent to which claims of replicability may be true. It is concluded that although institution claims of replicability between onshore and offshore student experience may be somewhat fanciful, it may be reasonable to judge the offshore experience as largely comparable, particularly at the larger branch campuses.

Keywords: transnational higher education, offshore education, international branch campuses, offshore campuses, student experience

Introduction

Student experience has become an important concept in higher education institutions worldwide. Higher education systems have become increasingly market-based, and students have become 'customers' that demand a high-quality student experience. The term 'student experience' usually refers to a student's overall interaction with an institution, which refers to teaching and learning activities, non-academic support and student life. Most institutions have devised objectives, policies and processes to provide student experience, and institutional performance is increasingly monitored by governmental quality assurance agencies.

Institutions that operate international branch campuses in foreign countries typically claim that the student experience at the offshore campus replicates the onshore home campus experience. For example, promotional literature of Monash University claims, 'our education is consistently excellent – across campuses and international boundaries. It doesn't matter where our students start their journey, if they are at

Monash they can expect the same high-quality education, and their teachers will be leading academics in their field' (Monash University, undated).

This article considers the extent to which claims of replicability between offshore and onshore student experience may be true. Bhuian (2016) observes that much of the discourse regarding the dissatisfaction of offshore students is speculative and based on anecdotes rather than well-designed empirical research. International branch campuses operate in unique contexts, and student experience may be affected by the lack of scale or financial resources at branch campuses; the commercial objectives of joint venture partners; the problems of recruiting and retaining high quality staff; as well as the differing expectations of students in different countries.

Transnational higher education – also known as cross-border and offshore higher education – involves providers and programs crossing national borders. Thus, the term 'transnational higher education' 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). Traditionally, when students wanted a foreign education, they had to travel overseas as international students, typically to countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

Over the last two decades, transnational education provision has mushroomed, and now students can access foreign education in their home country (or in a neighbouring country) via franchised/joint programs delivered by local providers; distance/online programs; international study centres; and international branch campuses. As one of the more conspicuous forms of transnational higher education, international branch campuses have received considerable attention from researchers and higher education commentators.

Wilkins and Rumbley (2018, p. 14) define an international branch campus as,

an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a specific foreign higher education institution, which has some degree of responsibility for the overall strategy and quality assurance of the branch campus. The branch campus operates under the name of the foreign institution and offers programming and/or credentials that bear the name of the foreign institution. The branch has basic infrastructure such as a library, an open access computer lab and dining facilities, and, overall, students at the branch have a similar student experience to students at the home campus.

The concern of this article is with assessing student experience at campuses that fit with this definition.

Like all other higher education institutions, international branch campuses generally claim to offer students a high-quality student experience. A study by Wilkins and Huisman (2019), which analysed the content of six institution websites in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), found that every institution made claims about providing a high-quality student experience. However, Altbach (2010) claims that in terms of breadth of curriculum, quality of academic staff and students, physical environment, learning resources and social facilities, transnational programs are rarely comparable with home campus offerings. Some empirical research has supported this view.

For example, Bhuian (2016) found that students at international branch campuses in Qatar were dissatisfied with all the major services at institutions, including academic, administrative and facility services. Bhuian (2016) concluded that branch campuses could not meet, let alone exceed, the service quality expectations of students in any of the core dimensions of service quality. A comparative study by Shah, Roth, and Nair (2010) found that offshore students were less satisfied with the quality of teachers, student administration, library and learning resources than their onshore counterparts. In contrast, research by Ahmad (2015), Pieper and Beall

(2014), and Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman (2012) found that offshore students were largely satisfied with their program; lecturer and teaching quality; learning environment and resources; counselling and academic support; and social life/facilities.

Given the contrasting claims about student experience (and satisfaction) in transnational education, the purpose of this research is to provide a review of documented, reported and claimed evidence related to student experience at international branch campuses. The review reveals the extent to which students at international branch campuses enjoy the same student experience as their home campus counterparts. The review involved analysis of institution websites and reports; scholarly papers; practice-oriented articles; newspaper articles; and the reports of host and home country quality assurance agencies. The findings are presented in three sections, related to offshore students' academic and campus experiences, and the support services that institutions offer to these students.

International branch campuses

International branch campuses are a fairly recent phenomenon in higher education. Of the 263 international branch campuses operating at the end of 2017, only 33 existed before 1995 (Garrett et al., 2017). In fact, almost half of the international branch campuses currently operating are less than ten years old. The countries that host the largest number of international branch campuses are China, the UAE, Malaysia, Qatar and Singapore. The largest source countries of international branch campuses are the US, UK, France, Russia and Australia.

Although there are a few international branch campuses that have over 5,000 students – such as Monash University Malaysia, the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China and RMIT Vietnam – the vast majority of campuses have fewer than 1,000 student enrolments. In terms of physical infrastructure, many institutions possess only a few rooms in an office block, and many of these institutions offer only a single qualification, or a very small number of qualifications, while others employ few or no full-time academic staff in the host country. While it may be impossible for such small operations to replicate the student experience that is provided to students at the institutions' much larger home country campuses, it may be reasonable to judge the extent to which the offshore student experience is equivalent or comparable to the onshore experience.

Although a vibrant stream of literature on transnational education emerged in the 1990s, researchers largely ignored international branch campuses. The first collection of articles on international branch campuses was published in 2011 (Lane & Kinser, 2011). It was not until the 2000s that home country quality assurance agencies such as the Australian

Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) conducted rigorous and systematic quality audits at international branch campuses. Host country quality assurance agencies were generally even slower to begin quality evaluations of branch campuses. Hence, there is little published research on student experience at international branch campuses before the mid-2000s. As this article seeks to report on the quality of student experience at international branch campuses at the present time, and given that it takes several years for most institutions to develop the scale necessary for investment in infrastructure and resources, it was appropriate to focus on reviewing reports and publications published during the last decade.

Student experience

Student experience is important because it may impact upon student learning and attainment; student motivation, commitment and satisfaction; and even post-graduation opportunities in the labour market. The whole range of facilities and services offered by institutions contribute to the student experience. Students who receive a high quality experience are more likely to be satisfied with their program and institution, and satisfied students are more likely to perform better academically (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011). Satisfied students are also more likely to participate in positive word-of-mouth and give higher scores in student satisfaction surveys, which may improve institution positions in rankings.

Through funding initiatives and other authority structures, such as national quality assurance schemes and institution rankings, the discourse on student experience in higher education has treated students as rational technical learners (Sabri, 2011). Policy makers assume that students have the capacity for free rational choice and are not constrained by social or cultural background, or financial resources. Furthermore, it is assumed that by collecting, analysing and disseminating data on student experience, institutions will be motivated and empowered to improve student experience, and students will be able to make better choices.

The concept of student experience typically positions students as the most suitable stakeholder to define what quality in higher education means, and to determine what benefits institutions should deliver to students participating in higher education. However, some students may not have the ability to be objective in assessing student experience, while marketised higher education systems and high levels of tuition fees may cause students' expectations to be unrealistic and unreasonable (Gibbs & Dean, 2014). Such expectations may be particularly common in transnational education, where many institutions lack the scale or financial resources needed to invest in physical infrastructure and resources.

As the term 'student experience' refers to the totality of a student's interaction with the institution, the next sections of this article are discussions of offshore students' academic and campus experiences, and the support services that institutions make available to these students.

Academic experience

Program quality

By their very nature, transnational programs are usually designed in a country other than the one in which the program is actually delivered (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). Some international branch campuses deliver 'off-the-shelf' standardised programs, which are irrelevant or inappropriate in the host country context (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). The dilemma for institutions is that some students, parents and employers expect transnational programs to be exact replicas of their onshore counterparts, while other students, parents and employers expect programs to be adapted and customised for the local environment. In some host countries, local regulations require students to take extra courses. For example, in Malaysia, the Malaysia Qualifications Agency (MQA) requires Malaysian nationals who have not been exempted through earlier studies to take courses in the national language, Malaysian studies, Islamic studies and Moral Education. The University of Nottingham Malaysia delivers these additional courses on Saturdays (QAA, 2010).

Programs must equip students with the knowledge and skills (use value) that will enable them to gain employment in local, regional and international labour markets (exchange value). A study conducted in Malaysia by Ahmad (2015) found that students generally perceived that their program offered both good use and exchange values. The research participants agreed that their program was intellectually stimulating, that it was made relevant to the Malaysian context, and that it prepared them well for a future career. Younger learners often favour transnational education because they regard themselves, or want to develop themselves, as global citizens (Pieper & Beall, 2014). Compared to public institutions, offshore programs often incorporate more opportunities for developing international and intercultural competences, as well as English language competency.

Many international branch campuses focus on offering programs in business, management and computer science/information technology. Such programs are considered to be popular with students, and these programs are relatively cheap to deliver, as they do not require substantial investment in equipment or resources. Data published by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) reveals that approximately 40 per cent of students in transnational education in the Emirate of Dubai study in the field of

business. In 2011, there were 170 programs in business offered in the emirate, but fewer than ten science programs. As a result, it is likely that many students in transnational education are not studying their subject of first choice. Furthermore, when student enrolments fail to meet targets, or if suitably qualified and experienced teachers cannot be found, institutions often fail to deliver courses that were advertised at the time the student entered the program. In recent years, there has been an increase in the establishment of offshore medical schools, particularly when host country governments actively encourage the development of such schools, or contribute to their funding.

A number of studies have found that offshore students are attracted to transnational education – particularly programs and institutions from Australia, the UK and the US – because they are perceived as being of higher quality than local alternatives (e.g. Ahmad, 2015; Mok, 2012; Pieper & Beall, 2014; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). However, these students also believe that transnational programs are not as high quality as the programs delivered at the main home country campuses. In some countries, foreign students and expatriates are not admitted into the public institutions, or, even if they are admitted, there is insufficient capacity to satisfy student demand. In such situations, transnational education may be the only option for a student who wants to study in a particular country. Many of the students at international branch campuses are mature 'second chance' learners, who study part-time. Offshore providers often offer more flexible modes of program delivery, which satisfy the needs of working students.

Wilkins (2017) observes that maintaining quality standards may become problematic when local management has autonomy over curricula, assessment, and the recruitment of teaching staff and students. Issues and disagreements concerning ethics and academic integrity are common. Many international branch campuses are owned or operated with a local partner. Conflict between institutions and local partners may occur because each party may have different and conflicting objectives (Healey, 2015). Local partners may seek to maximise student enrolments by not rigidly enforcing entry requirements, while institutions may prioritise the maintenance of academic quality, often to avoid reputational damage. Altbach (2010) claims that many students studying at international branch campuses would not have been accepted into the same program at the institution's main home campus. Very often, students lack sufficient English language competency, and it is difficult for such students to enjoy a positive classroom experience.

Grade inflation is an increasingly common phenomenon in higher education globally, but empirical research and quality assurance audits have found it particularly prevalent in some transnational settings. In some institutions, it is

not uncommon for academic staff to have their contracts terminated if they receive poor course evaluations. Badri et al. (2006) found that in the UAE, student evaluations of teaching were a key factor in determining promotions, merit awards, long-term contracts and contract renewals. Thus, concerns over complaining students and job security may encourage teachers to reduce the academic demands of programs and to award marks that are higher than would be given at the institution's home campus.

Institutions such as Middlesex University Dubai avoid this problem by sending the majority of examinations and other major assessments to the UK for (first) marking. Other institutions also send student work to the home campus for first or second marking, or moderation. However, when coursework and examinations are marked or moderated at the home campus, it generally takes longer for students to be informed of their final marks, and this is often a source of student dissatisfaction with the assessment process.

Some institutions have campuses in multiple foreign countries. For example, New York University has international branch campuses in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai, and Heriot-Watt University, based in Scotland, has campuses in Dubai and Malaysia. It is quite usual for such institutions to encourage campus rotation, whereby students change campus for different parts of their program. Most institutions have reported greater student flows from offshore branches to home campuses than from the home campuses to offshore branches.

Teaching and learning experience

Teaching is universally acknowledged as the core activity in higher education. Most international branch campuses focus on the delivery of undergraduate programs in the social sciences. Offshore teachers need a unique combination of knowledge, experience and skills, which include subject expertise; knowledge of the home country and institution's systems and approaches to teaching and assessment (e.g. interactive, student-centred learning); and the ability to apply subject content in a way that is relevant for the host country context. Very few international branch campuses engage in research, but among those that do, the quality of output is sometimes higher than that of the host country's public universities, and even occasionally the institution's main home campus (Pohl & Lane, 2018).

Teaching staff at offshore campuses are typically recruited using three different approaches: (1) recruiting full-time teachers, with a high proportion sourced from outside the host country; (2) adjunct academics employed locally; and (3) visiting academics from the institution's home campus (Neri & Wilkins, 2019). Many international branch campuses rely heavily on adjunct staff. For example, in the 2019-2020 academic year, Modul University Dubai's website revealed

that its Department of International Management employed only two full-time lecturers (who were both employed as assistant professors) and seven part-time lecturers. Prestigious institutions previously relied heavily on the fly-in staffing model, but this has been used much less in recent years because of the high costs associated with flying in and accommodating visiting staff from the home campus, and the reluctance of academic staff to undertake offshore teaching assignments.

A number of studies have found that students are generally satisfied with their lecturers and teaching in their program (e.g. Ahmad, 2015; Mok, 2012; Pieper & Beall, 2014; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). However, satisfaction with lecturers does vary according to their contract type. Both scholarly research (e.g. Miliszewska & Sztendur, 2010; Mok, 2012) and audits conducted by quality assurance agencies (such as the UK's Quality Assurance Agency – QAA – and Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency – TEQSA) have found that while students are typically satisfied with the quality of full-time and visiting academic staff, they are less satisfied with the subject expertise and availability/support of adjunct staff.

Transnational education is typically delivered according to the idealised norms in the main Western higher education systems, e.g. that students are actively involved in their classroom learning and that they undertake substantial amounts of learning independently. For students who have only previously experienced didactic teacher-led education, as is the case in some host countries, this can be challenging. For example, Chinese students often feel anxious when they are asked or expected to communicate in English in lessons. In such situations, some academic staff encourage and support the students to adjust to Western styles of learning, while other staff may simply regard these students as low quality.

Given that most international branch campuses have fewer than 1,000 students, class sizes tend to be much smaller at offshore campuses than their home country counterparts. Offshore students are more likely to feel special; receive more attention from academic staff; and generally enjoy more staff interaction (Garrett et al., 2017). However, small cohort sizes may make it more difficult to run clubs and out-of-class activities. Most institutions have a mechanism by which students may suggest and establish clubs and societies, both for academic and recreational purposes. Virtually every offshore campus has a system for pastoral care, which typically involves each student having a personal tutor, with whom they meet two or three times each academic year, to review academic progress and to resolve any issues related to study, careers or personal problems/difficulties.

Technology use has become popular in higher education worldwide, to extend modes of program delivery and to provide learners with new opportunities to gain knowledge and skills. Some research has generally found that offshore learners are mostly satisfied with the information and communication technology (ICT) facilities provided in classrooms; their teachers' use of ICT; the availability of computers with appropriate software for personal use; and the provision of online learning resources for independent study (e.g. Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012).

However, Ahmad's study (2015) in Malaysia, and Nair, Murdoch, and Mertova's study (2011) in South Africa, found that some students could not gain wi-fi access throughout the day, while others complained that computer labs had insufficient opening hours. Most international branch campuses have fairly modest libraries, in terms of their

physical size and the number of items stocked. However, most offshore students have access to the same online journals and electronic resources available to onshore students at the main home campuses,

which typically results in the offshore students being satisfied with the overall level of learning resources available to them (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012).

In many countries, including the UK, assessment and feedback is one of the areas in which student satisfaction is lowest. The same tends to apply in transnational education, and learners are generally less satisfied with the guidance, support and assessment feedback provided by adjunct teaching staff. The vast majority of offshore learners pay tuition fees, which are often relatively high in the local context, and therefore students commonly perceive that they are 'buying' an education. In some countries, such as those in the Arab Gulf region, the local culture emphasises social status and reputation. As a result, students and their families often expect that students will receive high grades regardless of their ability or effort. Furthermore, Randeree (2006) found that plagiarism is common in the UAE because students are naive and view the sharing of work to be simply an act of kindness and helpfulness, rather than an unethical act. Some offshore programs do not incorporate the compulsory training and testing of student knowledge on plagiarism that exists at home campuses.

Campus experience

'Campus experience' is a term that is commonly used to refer to student experiences that are not directly related to teaching and learning (which in this article has been referred to as the academic experience). Student services associated with study

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outside the classroom, careers and personal well-being are referred to as student support in this article. Thus, the campus experience is mainly concerned with the quality of the physical campus environment as a place to study, undertake sporting and recreational activities, socialise, and possibly live. However, it should be noted that the vast majority of international branch campuses do not offer student accommodation.

The main barriers that prevent offshore branches providing a high quality campus experience are lack of scale and financial resources. In 2014, the UK's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (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). Because the vast majority of international branch campuses have fewer than 1,000 students, they do not possess the scale needed to develop purpose-built campuses that offer social and sporting activities, dining facilities, student accommodation and extensive library or computing facilities (Wilkins, 2018). Many institutions fail to achieve enrolment targets or financial break-even, and in these circumstances it is a huge risk investing in campus infrastructure.

Because it generally takes a number of years before it is known whether a new campus will be successful and sustainable in the long term, it takes a number of years after campus establishment before institution decision makers will commit to large-scale campus investment. Hence, it is the campuses that were established before 2010, and which now have over 3,000 students, that are most likely to offer campus experiences that are comparable with home campuses. A problem for students when deciding where to study is that most institutions claim on their websites and in their promotional literature that they offer a high quality student experience. Those institutions that have good campus infrastructure – like Amity University Dubai – will emphasise the fact whenever possible, and those institutions that do not – like Synergy University Dubai – will offer in their website and publicity materials little or no information about their physical infrastructure, and will emphasise instead other things such as graduate careers (Wilkins & Huisman, 2019). As an example, Amity University Dubai's website boasts:

Our 700,000 square feet campus in Dubai International Academic City boasts top-notch infrastructure that inspires anyone who walks through our doors. From our digital classrooms and high-tech specialised labs in the academic block, to the world-class residential, recreational and fitness facilities, the campus is unmatched by any other in the region.

One solution available to offshore providers that do not possess the scale or financial resources to develop their own purpose-built campus is to operate from a shared campus. Shared campuses exist in countries such as Malaysia, Qatar,

South Korea and the UAE. In the UAE, there are two shared campuses: Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) and Dubai Knowledge Park (DKP). Among other institutions, Amity University (India), Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani (India), Curtin University (Australia), Heriot-Watt University (UK), Manipal University (India), Murdoch University (Australia) and the University of Birmingham (UK) are based at DIAC, while Islamic Azad University (Iran), Middlesex University (UK) and the University of Wollongong (Australia) are located at DKP.

On shared campuses, the infrastructure provider, often a property developer, may provide the physical structures for dining facilities; sports and leisure facilities; health services; and student accommodation, which is typically available for use by students of different institutions. Some infrastructure providers also organise recreational and careers events, and sports competitions. EduCity, a shared campus in Malaysia, has a sports complex featuring a 6,000-seat stadium; a 1,500-seat indoor arena; an Olympic-sized swimming pool; student accommodation; and a common student area for socialising and special events. Despite these facilities, some students have still complained about the lack of food and beverage options and entertainment outlets, as well as poor accessibility because of limited public transport (Wan & Weerasena, 2018).

It is not only the physical infrastructure that determines the quality of the campus experience. Students who use the facilities available to them and who participate in activities – whether sporting, cultural or recreational – are more likely to be happy and satisfied with their overall student experience. Also, students who identify with their institution may be happier and more satisfied. In particular, many US institutions are known to be successful in developing and nurturing student-institution identification, i.e., students' sense of belonging and oneness with the institution. For institutions, the benefits of student-institution identification include students and alumni spreading positive word-of-mouth (recommending the institution to others); graduates participating in alumni events; alumni making financial donations; and alumni sending their children to the institution they attended. Most offshore campuses have some sort of student representative body, such as a student council or union, but these vary in influence and effectiveness, often because of the host country culture and political regime.

Texas A&M University at Qatar aims to create in Qatar the same institutional ethos of the home campus in Texas (Wood, 2011). Students at Texas A&M are commonly referred to as 'Aggies'. The department of student affairs in Qatar seek to replicate home campus traditions wherever possible. Every year, an evening of fellowship is enjoyed by current students, alumni and academic staff at the annual Muster held in Texas, Qatar and numerous other locations worldwide. It is an event full of symbolism and traditions. For example, candles are lit to

honour Aggies who passed away in the previous year. During Gig'em week, undergraduate students, in both Texas and Qatar, who have completed 90 credit hours toward a degree, may collect an Aggie ring (usually made of gold), which is an important symbol of Aggie values and ideals. Sports and athletics are important on most US campuses, and students at the Qatar campus are encouraged to participate both as players/competitors and spectators. Spectators are expected to wear the official maroon coloured T-shirts. Some Aggie traditions are difficult to replicate in Qatar – for example, students participating in community service and volunteering – but, overall, students in Qatar enjoy a campus experience that is somewhat comparable with their counterparts at the home campus.

Student support

Most students in higher education enjoy a range of support services outside the classroom, such as language support; personal counselling; careers information and advice; health services; and provision of accommodation or assistance in finding accommodation. The vast majority of transnational programs are taught in English, and at many offshore campuses English is integrated into the foundation or first year of programs, even though this may not occur at the home campus. For example, the first year of programs at the University of Nottingham's campus in Ningbo, China is considered as a preliminary year that consists of considerable English language training. After the first year, further English language support is available, but it is not compulsory.

Some institutions, such as the University of Wollongong in Dubai, position the English language centre in a separate college that provides pathway programs to higher education study. Such centres often focus on preparation of students for the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) English language test. Language support is also common at the offshore campuses that do not teach primarily, if at all, in English. At Soochow University of Laos, all students must complete a preparatory course in Chinese language before starting their degree program, and students also receive on-going support in Chinese language during their degree program. Although most students at this campus are Lao citizens and also ethnic Chinese, some students find it difficult to write in Chinese.

Only a handful of the very largest international branch campuses employ full-time staff that offer personal counselling or careers advice and support. The most common arrangement for these services is to have specialists who visit the campus for fixed time periods once or twice a week. While this may be sufficient for the majority of students, personal counselling may not be available immediately to a student who needs it urgently at short notice. In most

offshore campuses, graduates receive limited assistance in finding employment, mainly because these campuses have limited links with employers in the host country. However, internships and work placements are becoming more common in some campuses. At the University of Wollongong in Dubai, 'Professional Experience in Business' is an internship subject, which is designed to ensure that students engage with work integrated learning.

Most offshore campuses do not offer health services. However, students studying on shared campuses typically have access to medical centres, where they can visit a general practitioner or undertake the medical examinations required by international students to obtain study visas (e.g. having a blood test in the UAE). The vast majority of international branch campuses do not have their own student accommodation. Some campuses work with private providers to whom the institution refers students. Shared campuses usually have student accommodation that is operated by the infrastructure provider, but in some locations the rental charges may be expensive.

Conclusion

Although institutions are tasked with ensuring that students have a positive experience, there are aspects of the students' overall experience that are determined off campus. Unfortunately, institutions may have little ability to influence things like the scarcity and high cost of housing, or incidents of racially motivated attacks on students. Furthermore, individual students have their own personal expectations, desires and preferences, and these may even vary over time, making it difficult for institutions to achieve a high student experience rating from every student. Perceived student experience may influence a student's satisfaction, which may in turn influence whether the student completes their program or withdraws; achieves well academically; and engages in positive behaviours toward the institution, e.g. recommending it to others. Thus, student experience and student satisfaction are concepts that no higher education institution can ignore, particularly when quality assurance agencies and institution rankings expect institutions to provide student experience and achieve student satisfaction.

When researchers and quality assurance/regulatory bodies evaluate student experience in transnational education, they typically consider the extent to which the offshore experience replicates the home campus experience and/or the extent to which it is equivalent or comparable. Given that most international branch campuses are much smaller than their home campus counterparts, and have far fewer financial resources, it may be unreasonable to expect the offshore campuses to replicate home campus offerings. However, the evidence presented in this article suggests that

most international branch campuses – and particularly the larger campuses – offer a student experience that is largely comparable with that enjoyed by students at the main home country campuses. As offshore campuses continue to grow in size, and gain more experience of operating in foreign countries, it is likely that student experience will further improve.

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