Issue Introduction

Critical Perspectives on Global Partnerships in Higher Education: Strategies for Inclusion, Social Impact, and Effectiveness

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THE IMPORT OF GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Today, it is axiomatic that the phenomenon of globalization has radically transformed the landscape of higher education. Regional universities that were once content to teach local students, offer a limited range of degrees, and serve regional labor demands now actively recruit international students, seek opportunities to develop transnational joint degree programs, and consult global ranking services to assess their status in a competitive institutional environment. Young researchers who might have been advised, only a few years ago, to exclusively cultivate local or national scholarly networks are now incentivized to seek job opportunities and funding for research in countries that are thousands of miles away from their home institutions. At the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic, when many predicted an abeyance of global activities in higher education, technology was strategically employed by institutions, faculty, and students to maintain transnational ties and implement methods of virtual teaching and learning across disciplines, cultures, and borders. As a result, institutional aspirations for global partnerships, once predicted to decline in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting travel restrictions, are likely to escalate in the coming decades. For example, Lane et al. (2021) have compellingly argued that international branch campuses may thrive due to increased local demand for globally recognized credentials combined with "tougher immigration restrictions, barriers to travel, unsteady post-study work visa arrangements, and unstable labor markets in the West" (para. 14). Additionally, the importance of reliable communication in securing accurate and timely scientific information has been underscored by the fog of uncertainty at the beginning of the pandemic. Teleconferencing software is no longer considered a last-choice option for meetings; it has been normalized as part of the daily culture in higher education institutions worldwide.

Global partnerships in higher education can assume many forms. In terms of size, they can range from relatively limited transnational research collaborations that involve a handful of scientists to ambitious international branch campuses that enroll thousands of students. They can be loosely-coupled collaborations where meetings occur intermittently to update progress on a specific task, or they can be robust institutional alliances where legal documents stipulate the conditions under which students, faculty, degree programs, and other organizational assets will be shared for multiple years. The attractions of such ventures are plentiful. As I have observed previously, global partnerships between colleges and universities "can

strengthen existing academic networks and business relationships, promote greater intercultural awareness, and open new opportunities for innovative research" (Lanford, 2020, p. 93). Global higher education partnerships can also act as a catalyst for deeper ties between countries. What unites these variegated types of global partnerships is the (1) involvement of individuals and/or institutions from more than one nation and (2) a commitment, either formal or informal, that the partners will contribute financial, intellectual, and/or physical resources to advance a specific set of goals.

Nevertheless, global higher education partnerships, to date, remain largely exclusive operations that, despite their obvious appeal, have remained cloistered from their local communities and therefore are arguably of limited significance for society. Hence, many partnerships have ultimately failed to live up to their initial promises, leaving partners dissatisfied and stakeholders questioning the investments required for implementation when so many in higher education are laboring in an environment of austerity.

THEMES AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue focuses on three areas of concern related to global higher education partnerships: (1) a lack of inclusion; (2) a lack of social impact; and (3) a lack of institutional effectiveness.

Accordingly, this special issue has three primary objectives. The first objective is to critically challenge the exclusionary nature of global higher education partnerships, which are too often the domain of elite institutions and wealthy countries. To this end, this special issue emphasizes the power of action research, as well as the development of thoughtful and impactful partnerships between Global North and Global South countries, in enabling positive societal change. It also illustrates how neocolonial, postcolonial, and decolonial theory; comprehensive internationalization theory; and open systems theory each could critically analyze global higher education partnerships so they are re-envisioned as inclusive institutional activities that can recognize community needs, respond to problems, and contribute to artistic and scientific life beyond academe.

The second objective is to argue that global higher education partnerships are not, nor should they be, immune to social movements (such as the emergence of the #MeToo movement) or geopolitical events (such as demonstrations and protests to counter fascist leaders, police violence, and the exploitation of migrant workers). Rather, global partnerships should martial their significant intellectual and financial resources to enlarge public discourse, promote the public good, and support marginalized individuals. A reimagining of global higher education partnerships is particularly imperative in an historical moment when free speech is under attack throughout the world and neo-nationalist movements threaten to restrict scientific inquiry, public debate, the dissemination of public scholarship, and the development of deeper intercultural understanding through interaction and communication. In short, global higher education partnerships must meaningfully engage with their local and regional communities, lest they become socially irrelevant during a dangerous regressive period marked by authoritarian limits on public discourse and the ubiquitous surveillance of individuals who may express dissenting viewpoints and advocate for social and economic justice.

The third objective is to offer compelling evidence and strategies for how global higher education partnerships can be effective in different cultural environments, national systems of higher education, and institutional configurations. Several of this issue's articles present actionable data on promising educational initiatives that demonstrate how governmental support, strategic planning, communication, and an honest accounting for power dynamics are crucial for fruitful and durable partnerships. The collective goal of these papers is not to say that one approach is best; rather, the authors in this issue are careful to explain, with

great contextual detail, how the goals of a partnership must be informed by existing institutional values and individual areas of expertise. As such, the empirical and theoretical papers in this issue can helpfully inform the development of future partnerships, particularly between institutions from Global South and Global North countries.

First Half of the Issue: Critical Perspectives on Global Partnership Models

In service of these three objectives, the first five articles present theoretical and empirical research on global partnership models, such as international branch campuses, microcampuses. and international joint and dual degree programs. The issue begins with a brilliantly challenging theoretical argument by Lauren Clarke of Sampoerna University entitled "'To Educate and Liberate?': Moving from Coloniality to Postcoloniality in the International Branch Campus Model." Clarke effectively critiques the role of international branch campuses in perpetuating colonialism through their replication of Western norms. Afterwards, Clarke proposes a new perspective on international branch campuses grounded in postcolonial theory, honoring a host country's linguistic, curricular, and cultural heritage. A critical lens on international branch campuses continues through the second article, "Sexual Harassment on International Branch Campuses: An Institutional Case Study of Awareness, Perception. and Prevention," by Li Cai, Ting Lin, and Wenyan Shi from the University of Nottingham Ningbo. Their action-oriented research concerning sexual harassment on an international branch campus is not only quite relevant to contemporary sociological discussions due to global pushback against sexual abuse, but it also artfully presents powerful survey and interview data drawn from students attending an international branch campus. These data make a compelling case for the importance of similar investigations in multiculultural campuses where vulnerable populations may not know where to find support, as they are torn between the cultural norms and expectations of their pre-university experiences, the host country, and the institution. The overall tone of the article preserves a note of optimism, however, as Cai et al. emphasize the tremendous support for their advocacy and research from their study's international branch campus, even despite the topic's sensitivity.

The third article, "Understanding the Attraction of the Microcampus," by Sowmya Ghosh, Jenny Lee, and John Haupt from the University of Arizona provides valuable insights into an emerging structural model of global higher education partnerships. Student decisions to enroll in "microcampuses" are explained through quantitative online survey data and the conceptual framework of "soft power." The fourth article by Zhenyang Xu, a doctoral student at Michigan State University, follows Clarke's call for resistance to colonialism. "Examining Neocolonialism in International Branch Campuses in China" cleverly employs the concepts of mimicry and resistance to critically analyze the development, curricula, and policies of an international branch campus in China. The final article of this opening section, "Understanding International Joint and Dual Degree Programs: Opportunities and Challenges during and after the Covid-19 Pandemic" by Roy Y. Chan of Lee University, shifts the issue's opening emphasis on structural models from the activities of international campuses to transnational joint and dual degree programs. Chan's nuanced analysis of collaborative degree programs between Sun Yat-sen University (China) and Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis (US) culminates in several recommendations for policy and practice that could apply to an array of global higher education partnerships, especially in times of crisis such as those occasioned by the recent pandemic.

Second Half of the Issue: Strategies for Future Global Partnerships

Articles from the second half of this special issue consider how global partnerships might look in the future by grounding their strategies and visions in existing partnerships and theoretical arguments. "Reimagining Global Partnerships in Higher Education through Open Systems Theory" by Katherine Adams and Michael Lanford from the University of North Georgia demonstrates how global higher education partnerships might have greater impact and durability by considering their activities through various concepts related to open systems theory, as well as a community engagement lens. These concepts include adaptive, maintenance, production, and managerial subsystems; organizational boundaries; and buffering, bridging, and boundary spanning strategies.

The next three articles present data from effective partnerships that thoughtfully consider equity and power dynamics between institutions and countries with varying degrees of human and financial resources. "Building a University Partnership to Support Early Grade Reading in Nigeria: The Case of the Nigeria Centre for Reading Research and Development" by Stephanie Simmons Zuilkowski (Florida State University) and Ismaila A. Tsiga (Bayero University) draws upon personal experiences to highlight a series of actionable recommendations for any partnership looking to develop a new university research center that is sustainable and has community and scholarly impact. The article also counsels patience in recognizing that many aspects of any transnational collaboration (e.g., governmental approval for degree programs) will inevitably be beyond the control of the partners. Shingo Hanada from Toyo University in Japan argues for a transition from "aid-focused partnerships" to "mutuality-focused partnerships" in the next article, "Higher Education Partnerships between the Global North and Global South: Mutuality, Rather than Aid." His persuasive argument is grounded in a case study of the Norwegian Funding Programmes for Higher Education Partnerships, where the importance of shared authorship, ongoing evaluation, and skill development among each of the partnership's stakeholders is accentuated. The next article, "Case Studies of Japanese Universities' Collaborations with ASEAN, China, and Mongolia" by Ariunaa Enkhtur, Ming Li, and Xixi Zhang of Osaka University, considers the motivations behind global partnerships for universities in Japan through analyses of three case studies: The Osaka University ASEAN Campus Project; the Chinese Japanese Joint Institute at the Dalian University of Technology; and the Mongolian Engineering Higher Education Development Project. Key takeways include the desire for comprehensive partnerships beyond a handful of joint degrees or student/faculty exchange programs, the goal of regional integration in key economic growth areas (such as knowledge-based services), and policies in Japan that support internationalization in higher education as a counterbalance to demographic declines in the country's college-age population.

The final paper of this special issue, by Jonah M. Otto from the University of Augsburg, draws on comprehensive internationalization theory to critically examine "The Impact of Evolving Transatlantic Relations on International Partnerships in Higher Education." Otto's paper is timely as it utilizes data from the past and present to project how transatlantic relations - and, of consequence, global higher education partnerships - will be impacted by contemporary geopolitical events relating to Brexit, the rise of neo-nationalism as exemplified by the political ambitions of Donald Trump, and restrictions on international travel and exchange due to the Covid-19 pandemic and regressive transatlantic policies.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this special issue hopes to catalyze discussion about global higher education partnerships and push subsequent scholarly investigations beyond examinations of their logistical

operations and institutional benefits. Each of this issue's papers make a concerted and compelling argument that successful global partnerships are not those which solely contribute to an institution's prestige, employ double standards concerning speech and the critical interrogation of accepted beliefs and values, focus on the educational development of students from wealthy backgrounds, or engage in scientific development that is immediately privatized and exploited for financial gain. Instead, the global higher education partnerships of the future should be reciprocally valuable operations that are transparent, inclusive, and socially impactful for meaningful cultural and intellectual exchange.

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