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Is Employability Displacing Higher Education?

Simon Marginson

Abstract
Employability is becoming embedded in mass higher education with considerable moral authority. Everybody wants a job, and work is seen as a human right. However, higher education is not very effective in direct preparation for work, it cannot create jobs, and the mantra of employability blocks from view its core educational mission, which is student self-formation through immersion in knowledge. This is emerging as an existential crisis for the sector.

Recently in these pages Dirk van Damme, former head of the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, questioned the expansion of participation in higher education. "There are pressing signs that high levels of university attainment do not have only positive effects on societies and economies," Dirk van Damme stated, noting "graduate underemployment, overqualification, mismatches, and substitution effects." More promising, he said, is "the rapidly expanding interest in short programs and nontraditional certifications such as microcredentials."

Van Damme's OECD colleague Andreas Schleicher, OECD director for education and skills, agrees. Microcredentials "get employers better signals of what people know and can do," he argued in London in March 2023, again comparing them favorably with universities. For universities, life is "actually very comfortable," he said. "You bundle content, delivery, accreditation—you can get quite a nice monopoly rent." Shifting to microcredentials would mean that provider status no longer matters. It seems that microcredentials are the new route to equity.

It is hard to believe that combining degrees for the middle class with microcredentials for the masses is going to create social equity, but evidence is mounting that economically inclined policy makers are losing patience with higher education as we know it.

The United Kingdom's Teaching Excellence Framework compares the quality of student learning in different institutions and disciplines on the basis of graduate salaries. It has stigmatized some programs as "low value courses" because graduate salaries are below average. In Australia, the national government calls for "job-ready graduates" and has funded the development of programs leading to microcredentials.

In each case the diagnosis of the problem and the solution are the same. Higher education should be primarily (or solely) and directly vocational. The idea of "job-ready graduates" sums this up. But higher education is not fit for this particular purpose. Preparation for work is one of its missions but has never been the core mission. Still less is it the only mission. Higher education is not primarily the formation of "employable" graduates. It is the cultural formation of persons through immersion in discipline-based knowledge. Students are formed—or rather, form themselves—through deep learning in various academic and professional fields. It is knowledge, not employability, that unifies higher education.

It is hard to believe that combining degrees for the middle class with microcredentials for the masses is going to create social equity, but evidence is mounting that economically inclined policy makers are losing patience with higher education as we know it.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Missions

Higher education has multiple missions, as Clark Kerr famously argued in tagging universities as "multiversities." There are two kinds of missions: intrinsic and extrinsic.

The *intrinsic missions*—the classical core of higher education—are the education of students, and the transmission, creation and dissemination of knowledge. These missions shape the internal organization of the sector. Teaching and learning, and scholarship and research, are grounded in epistemic disciplines, study programs and departments/schools. The two intrinsic missions are intertwined. Learning is knowledge-intensive. The nexus between teaching and research/scholarship is a norm of academic identity and work. The value of these intrinsic activities is measured not by policy, markets or social impact but internally, using educational tools like exams, grading, peer review, and academic quality assurance.

There have been several forms of higher education in history. They have differed in many ways but all have shared the same intrinsic core. In China, the Western Zhou dynasty (1047–771 BCE) prepared scholar-officials through deep learning of key texts. In the Library and Mouseion at Alexandria, in Buddhist monasteries in Northern India like Vikramshila and Nalanda, in Mediterranean Islamic scholarship, in medieval European universities beginning with Bologna in 1088 CE, in every iteration of the institution from Kant and von Humboldt to John Henry Newman to the American research university, which started with Johns Hopkins in 1876, all have prepared students through cultural immersion in knowledge and scholarship.

In its intrinsic core, higher education functions as "socialization" and "subjectification," as Gert Biesta put it in 2009. Socialization means the inculcation of social and occupational norms. Subjectification refers to the "individuating" effect of education, whereby students become self-realizing subjects. "Any education worthy of its name should always contribute to processes of subjectification that allow those being educated to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting," states Biesta. In this way higher education prepares students for the whole of life, including work.

Higher education also has *extrinsic missions*, which it carries out in partnership with other social sectors, including government, employers, the professions, and local communities. Biesta refers to the educational function of "qualification," learning how to do things, especially in the workplace. In the extrinsic domain, external agents help to determine the value of the activity. Here, graduate salaries and rates of employment are in play.

However, economic policy often focuses solely on extrinsic preparation for work, as if the other missions do not exist. Microcredentials reduce higher education to qualification and break that up into fragments distributed on a piece-by-piece basis.

Education and Work

If economic policy set out to design higher education from the ground up focused solely on employable graduates, it would not use cultural formation, academic knowledge and the teaching/research nexus as building blocks. But societies want more from higher education.

Studies repeatedly find that most students have multiple objectives in higher education. They want personal development, *and* immersion in disciplinary knowledge, *and* graduate jobs; it is not either/or. During the years of study many students are involved in work as well as education. But we should not blur the distinctions between education and employment. They are different worlds. Agentic positioning, objectives, values, knowledge sets and skills, and required behaviors, are different. Training in skills and employability is more effective in the workplace itself. Accepting the heterogeneity of education and work is the first step in improving the transitions and combinations between education and work.

Even in many occupational courses transition to work is challenging and takes time. Higher education and work are best understood as loosely coupled. The relation between higher education and work is not a linear flow. To press education and work into a single process—either by treating them as essentially the same, or subordinating one to the other—is to violate either work or higher education. No prizes for guessing which is more vulnerable.

Higher education sits between schooling and work. It is more like schooling than work. But economic policy wants it to replicate work and to value it in the same terms as work.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Missions Set Against Each Other

A gulf has opened up between the intrinsic educational function and the vocational expectations of policy and media. It was not necessary to position the intrinsic education as in conflict with the extrinsic contribution, or to present vocational skills and academic knowledge as zero-sum. But policy makers in Australia and the United Kingdom, as well as in some other countries, are making firm attempts to install the human capital imaginary, the extrinsic job preparation mission, not alongside but in place of the intrinsic educational mission.

Employability is becoming embedded in mass higher education with considerable moral authority. Everybody wants a job, and work is seen as a human right. However, higher education is not very effective in direct preparation for work and cannot create jobs—and the mantra of employability blocks from view its core educational mission, which is student self-formation through immersion in knowledge. The idea of "job-ready graduates" also creates unachievable expectations. I think this is emerging as an existential crisis for the sector. ◢

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Complicated but Crucial: Higher Education's Missions for the Labor Market

Philip G. Altbach and Hans de Wit

Abstract
Higher education has many and varied missions and purposes. It has from the beginning been engaged in what we now call "workforce training," including preparing students for the professions. But universities have also provided a broader curriculum in the liberal arts and for critical thinking. Current emphasis on the labor market should not ignore the broader aims of postsecondary education.

Higher education is a multifaceted phenomenon serving many purposes for the individual and for society. But one would never know that from today's political discourse and social media. All we hear about is workforce training, and sometimes attacks on colleges and universities for being hotbeds of wokeism or other purported sins.

The fact is that higher education graduates earn over their lifetimes on average much more than their nongraduate peers, that their institutions have adjusted to the new realities of the workforce, even coping with COVID-19-imposed restrictions, and that enrollments have, with some exceptions, rebounded to prepandemic levels. Yet, about half of the population of the United States has lost confidence in higher education, and one can observe similar trends elsewhere—even though most critics still send their children for postsecondary education, even when graduates from vocational education are in high demand and are well paid.

A Historical View of Workforce Training

Universities have always been involved in what we now call workforce training. The first European university—the University of Bologna, founded in Italy in 1088—educated young men for the Church, the law, and medicine. But it also provided what we now call liberal education (instruction in mathematics, humanities, and logic), as did other universities founded thereafter. Harvard University's founders bemoaned the lack of educated Christian ministers and started their college in 1636, providing training in theology, as well as English-style general studies and soon education in other professional fields.

Later, during the American Civil War, in 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed the Land-Grant Act to "benefit the agricultural and mechanical arts." The new public universities, such as the University of Michigan and the University of Wisconsin, plus a few new private institutions such as Johns Hopkins University and the University of Chicago, devoted themselves to educating the students who powered the United States' emergence as an industrial power, all combining various kinds of liberal education with preparation for employment. France, following Napoleon's 1808 reforms, established the vocationally oriented and prestigious *grandes écoles*, which exist to this day.

When most Latin American countries freed themselves from Spanish colonial rule in the nineteenth century, universities were established that served professional and vocational needs. Coming from a very different intellectual tradition, China established academies in the eighth century to provide education in the Confucian classics and

later to train young men for the imperial civil service, thus providing a form of workforce training.

Research also became a key part of the higher education mission. Research universities were invented in Germany in the nineteenth century when Germany was emerging as a major power. The United States and Japan adapted the research university idea. Elsewhere, such as in France, the Soviet Union, and China, most research was conducted in specialized institutes—and universities were focused on education and vocational training.

Expansion in the Twentieth Century

Thus, the modern university emerged as a powerful and highly successful institution that provided training for increasingly complex economies, scientific research that contributed to both basic knowledge and applied innovations, and, in many instances, a broad education that contributed to an understanding of society and critical thinking.

Different kinds of postsecondary institutions emerged in the twentieth century to serve ever more complex economies and unprecedented numbers of students. Thus, higher education moved from a preserve of the elite to a mass enterprise, increasingly seen as a necessity for social mobility and providing the knowledge needed for success. Academe moved from a small elite sector to a broad and diversified system of institutions serving many societal, economic, and personal needs.

In the United States, community colleges expanded in the mid-twentieth century to serve as "open-door" institutions providing vocational (workplace) training, but at the same time some general education for students. Forty percent of students in the United States attend community colleges. In Europe, professional education served a similar purpose. Globally, academic systems are more successful when they are diversified, with selective research universities, mass access institutions, and vocationally focused schools, often with a mix of public and private institutions.

Twenty-First Century Requirements

Globally, the media and governments are obsessed with "workforce development" or other vocational demands.

Globally, the media and governments are obsessed with "workforce development" or other vocational demands. The fact is that most higher education institutions have always been involved in educating people for jobs—in the professions and elsewhere. In general, they have a combined vocational and professional focus with broader educational goals. In that respect, the divide between research universities and professional schools is a myth. Increasingly, research universities combine the two (see for instance the emergence of one-year professional masters and two-year research masters, and the emergence of professional doctorates next to PhDs). Similarly, in the nonuniversity professional education sector there is a trend toward more attention to research (expressed in the change of name to "universities of applied sciences") and toward doctoral education, even calls to become research universities. In the United States, some community colleges now offer bachelor degrees.

At no time has higher education been more important. Most people these days have more than one job or even more than one specialization over the span of their careers. And with the job market changing at record speed, this almost becomes a necessity. The current focus on artificial intelligence and its possible implication for the future of work and the professions magnifies this reality. Artificial intelligence, globalization, as well as other twenty-first century technological and other developments, will have a dramatic impact—we just do not know the direction of the coming job revolution.

What this means, among other things, is that postsecondary education needs to provide the "soft skills" and broad knowledge likely to be needed for an unknown future. In other words, to do the things that it has always done, but with greater efficiency and understanding of possible future scenarios. Furthermore, this orientation should not be limited to the elite sector of higher education but should be available for everyone. A diverse system is needed, addressing different societal needs as well as the requirements of the labor force. That is particularly true for low- and mid-income countries, where postsecondary education needs to be much further diversified.

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International Branch Campuses: Current Trends and Future Possibilities

Stephen Wilkins

Abstract

In recent years, for every international branch campus that closed, three or four new ones opened. The future success of such campuses will likely depend to a great extent upon the ability of institutions to attract students and funding, match accreditation requirements, and maintain favorable relationships with host country partners. Geopolitics and the desire of countries to host such campuses will also be of high importance.

International branch campuses are now an established form of transnational education. An international branch campus is a satellite bricks-and-mortar entity established by a higher education institution in a foreign country.

Definition Problems

There currently is little consensus on what constitutes an international branch campus in terms of institution size, breadth of program offering, campus facilities, and branch ownership. For example, should an institution be classified as an international branch campus if it has fewer than 100 registered students, operates from a few rooms in an office block, and is actually owned by a host country government or company?

The lack of consensus on a definition for international branch campuses plus the increased diversity among host and source countries makes it very difficult to count how many of these institutions are operating globally. While the Cross Border Education Research Team (C-BERT) puts the number at 333 campuses, the Transedu Research Group claims that there are 487 such institutions operating globally. It is possible that C-BERT has missed some branches that exist, or that Transedu has counted those that do not really deserve to be classified as international branch campuses.

Past Fad—or Not?

At the time of the global financial crisis in 2007–2008 and again in 2018–2019, several researchers and journalists claimed that the international branch campus fad was over. However, in recent years, for every branch that closed, three or four new branches opened. In fact, the failure rate of international branch campuses is likely around 10–15 percent, which is considerably lower than the average failure rates for international startup businesses across all sectors.

In the last two–three years, the interest in establishing international branch campuses has not decreased as widely predicted; rather, it has increased, both among countries wanting to host such institutions and among universities in the source countries. Several purpose-built hubs have already been established in Egypt, which is keen to host universities from a range of different countries. Even China is making it easier for foreign providers to develop new campuses. Previously, foreign universities could only establish a branch in China with a local partner, but new regulations in Hainan permit foreign institutions to operate a branch independently. If its campus opens on schedule in late 2023, Germany's Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences will be the first foreign university to independently open a campus in mainland China.

Reasons for International Branch Closures

When a new international branch opens, there is usually plenty of publicity, but when a branch closes, it usually disappears with no or very little media coverage. Furthermore, institutions and host country partners rarely comment publicly on branch closures, so the precise reasons for a specific branch's closure are rarely known. The most common reasons suggested for branch campus failures are low student enrollments, failure to satisfy accreditation requirements, problems with partners, and funding issues.

When a new international branch opens, there is usually plenty of publicity, but when a branch closes, it usually disappears with no or very little media coverage.

Institutions are sometimes unsuccessful because they lack a coherent strategy that would be based on achieving a clear set of objectives. Ownership by host country governments or state-controlled companies does not appear to minimize the risks of

closure. Dubai Investments recently closed its two "branch" campuses, the University of Balamand in Dubai and MODUL University Dubai. Both had relatively low student enrollments, and also experienced difficulties fulfilling the accreditation standards of the host or source country.

Current Development and Ownership Trends

As prospective international students were unable or discouraged from traveling abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic, many decided instead to study at a local branch campus. Several of these campuses in the United Arab Emirates reported having record years in terms of student recruitment. During the last two years, international branch campus openings have continued at the rate of almost one a month, and the diversity in host and source countries has increased. For example, not only is India inviting foreign universities to open branches in India, but recent legislation has for the first time also allowed public Indian institutions to operate abroad. In April 2023, India's National Forensic Sciences University became the first public institution to open a campus in Uganda.

International branch campuses are commonly associated with commodification of higher education, meaning that earning revenues and profit are key institution motivations. Not only are many universities behaving more like businesses, motivated by financial and reputational objectives, for-profit companies are also getting involved in the sector. In some cases, for-profit companies provide premises, facilities, and support services, in addition to assuming responsibility for student recruitment, as Navitas does for Lancaster University Leipzig. There are cases of for-profit companies assuming even more control over international branch campuses. For example, the Transnational Academic Group states that it "owns and manages" Curtin University Dubai and Lancaster University Ghana.

Some commentators have suggested that the involvement of for-profit companies in branch campus operations threatens to reduce educational quality. However, there is limited evidence to substantiate such claims. For example, Middlesex University Dubai, which is wholly owned by Amanat Holdings, has achieved the highest five-star rating from the local accreditation body and has grown to be the largest private university in Dubai in terms of student enrollment.

Future Possibilities

It is likely that international branch campuses will continue to both open and close in the future. Institutions that succeed in attracting students or external funding will be the ones that continue to thrive, whereas those that have low student numbers or issues related to academic quality will likely fail if these weaknesses are not overcome. Geopolitics and political changes in host countries will continue to have a strong influence on the sustainability of the branch campus model. Already since 2021, a considerable number of academic staff have left branch campuses in China due to worsening employment conditions.

The future is likely to present both opportunities and threats for institutions wanting to develop new offshore campuses, as well as for the existing branch campuses. The desire of countries such as India and Indonesia to host international branches has the potential to dramatically change the global transnational education landscape over the next decade. In India, Indonesia and the Sultanate of Oman, new legislation has recently been passed to make it easier and more attractive for foreign universities to establish branch campuses. Foreign universities are currently rushing to get a foothold in such countries. Australia's Monash University and Central Queensland University seized the new opportunity and have become the first foreign universities to open branches in Indonesia. Also, Australia-based Deakin University is expected to be the first foreign university to establish a campus in India, which will be located in Gujarat International Finance Tech City. It is scheduled to be operational by mid-2024.

The majority of international branch campuses depend at least to some extent on international partnerships. So, how these partnerships progress over time will have a large impact on what the branch campus sector will look like in the 2030s. In 2021, the National University of Singapore announced that it would end its partnership with Yale University. It is believed that the Singapore-based partner desired a higher level of

independence over academic standards and freedom, while the host country government had increased concerns about the public funding.

It is unclear how long organizations such as the Qatar Foundation and Abu Dhabi government will continue to fully fund campuses of foreign universities. It is possible that at some time in the future, governments may decide to nationalize branch campuses. Already in Qatar, the College of the North Atlantic ceased operations in 2022 and it is now an independent institution named the University of Doha for Science and Technology. ◢

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Decoding Discord: Paradoxes, Misperceptions and Risks in EU–China Higher Education Cooperation

Yuzhuo Cai

Abstract
Geopolitical tensions and shifts in global power dynamics have profoundly influenced the internationalization of higher education, particularly evident in EU–China higher education cooperation. This article examines the emerging challenges in this cooperation, identified as paradoxes in collaboration objectives, mutual misperceptions, and concealed risks to sustained collaboration. Through scrutinizing these elements, the author proposes recommendations for policy makers and practitioners engaged in the field to transform these challenges into potential opportunities for enhanced cooperation.

Geopolitical tensions between China and the West have significantly reshaped global power dynamics, influencing international academic collaboration—an indispensable factor in advancing global scientific knowledge. Initially, these changes manifested in US–China cooperation, but the ripple effects have extended to EU–China relationships. For example, several European countries have published policy guidelines for academic cooperation with China. A growing sense of caution regarding the influence of Confucius Institutes is becoming apparent across Europe. In certain countries, universities are displaying increased hesitancy to accept PhD students funded by the China Scholarship Council (CSC). Moreover, numerous academic cooperation agreements between European and Chinese institutions have not been extended. Concerns have also arisen about European institutions hosting Chinese scholars and doctoral students in the fields of science and technology.

These sudden shifts have thrust the responsibility onto policy makers and practitioners on both sides to tackle complexities in EU–China higher education cooperation. This article delves into the paradoxes, misperception, and risks influencing these dynamics. By identifying the core contributing factors to these challenges, relevant stakeholders can formulate relevant strategies and approaches to navigate the intricate landscape of ongoing EU–China higher education collaboration.

Paradoxes in the European Union's Objectives in Academic Cooperation with China

In addressing the shifting geopolitics of academic collaboration, the European Union employs a more defined strategy compared to China. Both the European Union and its member states broadly agree that while sustaining partnerships with China is crucial, exercising vigilance is equally imperative. On the one hand, the European Union seeks to maintain its cooperation with China, particularly considering China's substantial strides in science and technology. On the other hand, the European Union has introduced more rigorous measures to ensure that collaborations with China do not undermine academic freedom, intellectual property rights, or the security of European institutions.

Nonetheless, the objectives of bolstering collaboration with China and preserving academic freedom and security can sometimes create a paradox, given different actors'

The objectives of bolstering collaboration with China and preserving academic freedom and security can sometimes create a paradox.

disparate interests and motivations. Collaborating with China presents new avenues for academic and scientific innovation, yet it may also expose universities to risks associated with Chinese policies and practices concerning academic freedom and intellectual property. Consequently, those engaged in academic partnerships with China may face challenges in striking a balance between the benefits of collaboration and the need to protect academic freedom and security. This uncertainty leaves academics pondering about the future.

Misperceptions in EU–China Higher Education Cooperation

The current state of higher education cooperation between the European Union and China is marred by mutual misperception. Within the European Union, it is widely believed that China's authoritarian system heavily intertwines political discourse with the practices of its higher education institutions in cooperation with Europe. However, the reality in China tells a different story; while the Chinese government engages in tough dialogues with the European Union, it anticipates that the views expressed in political discourses are loosely linked with the activities related to Chinese universities' collaboration with their European counterparts. Despite this, it is important to acknowledge that Chinese universities are grappling with how to maintain their European partnerships amid the charged atmosphere of geopolitical tensions.

In China, it is assumed that European higher education institutions, owing to their longstanding tradition of academic autonomy, maintain significant independence from political discourses concerning cooperation with China. Yet, the reality within the European Union reveals a different scenario. The attitudes of European higher education institutions toward collaboration with China align with governmental positions. However, the situation is not simply a direct correlation between state policies and university positions; the wider EU–China relations and certain unfortunate experiences with China collaborations have negatively affected the perceptions of individuals at European universities regarding China.

Regrettably, these misperceptions not only cloud the true realities but also result in misguided actions, hindering collaborative progress. China has strategically opted for different approaches when engaging with the European Union and the United States, driven by the need to traverse complex geopolitical challenges. While China is ready for tension in relations with the United States across various sectors, it anticipates that Chinese universities can maintain collaborations with European counterparts, independent of political rhetoric between the European Union and China. However, this expectation is flawed, as European higher education institutions' actions are more congruent with national and EU–level policy discourses than previously understood. Consequently, Chinese universities might encounter unexpected hurdles and confusion in their day-to-day operations within the European Union. For example, cooperation agreements with European partners may not be renewed upon expiration, and new initiatives might receive lukewarm reception from their European counterparts.

In devising strategies for higher education cooperation with China, the European Union and its member states often refer to the practices of the United States and occasionally Australia. They tend to foresee challenges akin to those presented in the United States' academic cooperation with China. However, it is important to note that Chinese higher education institutions face fewer governmental constraints when collaborating with the European Union, in contrast to their dealings with the United States. As a result, the European approach to higher education cooperation with China may have been overly cautious. While security and academic freedom concerns are indeed valid, policy makers and practitioners could be excessively stringent in their interpretation and enforcement of these principles. This might lead to missed opportunities for truly mutually beneficial cooperation, contributions to global sustainability efforts, and the advancement of European interests.

Hidden Risks in EU–China Higher Education Cooperation

Undeniably, current misperceptions between the European Union and China have had adverse impacts on their higher education cooperation. However, it is vital to note that these misinterpretations can catalyze a much deeper and more worrying issue—a vicious

cycle where misunderstandings (and distrust) intensify and cooperation weakens. On the one hand, the lack of mutual understanding exacerbates the challenges inherent in higher education collaboration, forming a barrier to effective communication and the pursuit of shared goals. On the other hand, as cooperation deteriorates, it significantly dampens people's motivation and commitment to learn from and understand each other, further deepening the divide. The emergence of such a destructive cycle is becoming increasingly apparent, and if left unaddressed, it will severely hamper the long-term prospects of EU–China higher education cooperation. Even if both sides develop a desire to strengthen the partnership in the future, it will be extremely challenging to restore the relationship to its former state due to the erosion of trust and capacity.

Suggestions

To address the aforementioned challenges in EU–China higher education cooperation, the following recommendations are made for the involved actors, including policy makers, university leaders/administrators and academics. First, capacities for mutual understanding and cooperative problem-solving, which are essential for breaking the aforementioned vicious cycle, should be continuously improved. Second, both sides should consciously foster an open and transparent environment during collaboration discussions, especially when addressing the impact of current geopolitical challenges. Third, there should be a heightened (self-reflexive) sensitivity toward aligning academic cooperation with the political and economic agendas of the European Union and China. Fourth, sustainable development should be prioritized in collaborations to form a common ground for reconciling diverse interests within the EU–China cooperation context. Lastly, new perspectives should be developed for assessing risks and benefits, particularly regarding what European higher education and the European Union in general can gain from collaboration with China despite the risks. While these recommendations might already have been incorporated to some extent in various practices, given the escalating EU–China competition and tension, they have become more relevant than ever. ◢

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Higher Education Research in Muslim Societies

Yusuf Ikbal Oldac

Abstract

Global research is pluralizing. Muslim societies are now among the fastest-growing science systems in the world, despite a slow start. This article discusses higher education research in Muslim societies regarding their growth, international/domestic research collaborations, citation recognition, and research area focus. The article also highlights several challenges, including relatively low attention to humanities research, to which the rich Muslim culture can contribute significantly, and focusing on short-term wins through double affiliations in some systems.

Global research is expanding at an unprecedented rate. Researchers from diverse countries are increasingly contributing to science worldwide. Among them are researchers in Muslim societies. In modern-day science, where research production is measured by scientific publication numbers, citation influence and other alternative metrics, higher education research in Muslim societies can be best positioned as emerging.

This paper discusses the 15 highest-publishing research systems among Muslim societies. These 15 systems published 5.15 percent of all Web of Science (WoS) papers globally in the last three decades (1,702,039 articles out of a global total of 33,026,981), although their combined population represents 14.16 percent of the world's total population. In other words, these research systems had a slow start. However, research in Muslim societies is increasingly picking up pace as some of these systems are now the fastest growing in the world.

There are significant variations among Muslim societies in terms of research productivity. Among the 15 countries, only Turkey and Iran published more papers than the

world average of 206,684, with 483,735 and 408,463 papers, respectively. They are followed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. The latter four systems had a relatively similar number of papers published in the last three decades (ranging between 100,000-200,000). These six systems differentiate themselves from the others in terms of system size, as the others had significantly fewer publications in the last three decades.

Striking Growth Rate

Although Muslim societies are mostly below the world average in terms of system size by research publications, their growth rate is striking.

Although Muslim societies are mostly below the world average in terms of system size by research publications, their growth rate is striking. Some of them, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Iran, have the highest growth rates in the world, as a recent study by Marginson shows. Their growth rates are much beyond that of China, a system repeatedly heralded as fast-growing.

An important indicator to assess the volume of research contributions from societies is research intensity, defined as the total number of publications divided by population. According to this metric, while Muslim-majority systems underpublished till the late 2010s, this trend began to change in the late 2010s, when nine out of the 15 selected Muslim societies started demonstrating research intensity higher than the world average. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, and Turkey were the most research-intensive among Muslim societies in 2020.

This increasing trend, combined with the significant population Muslim societies represent globally (approximately one-fourth of the globe, according to a report by Pew Research Center), paints a promising picture of increased scientific contributions from researchers in Muslim societies to global science.

International and Domestic Research Collaborations

The connectivity of published research, as measured by coauthorships, can also be important in understanding the nature of science systems. Muslim-majority systems tend to demonstrate higher proportions of international research collaborations and lower proportions of domestic research collaborations when compared to the world averages.

There could be two explanations for this. One explanation repeatedly used in the literature is that relatively small and emerging systems collaborate more internationally than domestically because they have fewer authors to collaborate with domestically. To illustrate, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar had respectively 83 percent, 80 percent, and 80 percent of their papers published with international collaboration, while the world average is 27 percent. Supporting this argument, Turkey and Iran, being larger systems, had international research collaborations levels closer to the world average (28 percent and 34 percent, respectively).

Another explanation is that domestic collaborations could be less visible in global science due to language and database coverage matters. Domestic research publications do not have to be in English, and such publications tend to be less visible globally.

Scientific Influence

The quantity of scientific publications can only show part of the picture. Scientific influence, as measured by citation-related data, can provide further perspective on how Muslim-majority systems are faring.

Among the examined Muslim societies, scientific influence is higher in well-funded and smaller systems, such as those in the Gulf region. What they lack in size, they compensate for in citation recognition, as they have more than 40 percent of their publications in the top quartile of journals. Also, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates all have higher-than-world-average percentages of documents with top 10 percent citations, respectively 16 percent, 14 percent and 12 percent.

This finding at the surface level can be considered as a strength. However, discussions in the relevant literature about the distortions caused by global rankings and funding of double affiliations of overseas-productive scholars should also be considered. Such practices happen even in the most established systems; however, the systems in the Gulf area have both the means (they are well-funded compared to others) and the motivation (desire to go up quickly as emerging systems) to do so.

Research Area-Related Analysis

Research area-related analysis of publications can provide a more nuanced picture of the contribution of Muslim societies to global research. The data indicate that Muslim societies have an increased focus on STEM areas, which is congruent with global trends. However, the attention given to humanities research is consistently lower across the top 15 Muslim societies compared to the global average. To illustrate: approximately 4 percent of research worldwide is on humanities, while the average figure for the research conducted in Muslim societies for humanities research is approximately 1 percent in the last three decades, according to WoS data.

There could be two main reasons behind this. First is that humanities research of Muslim-majority systems could be less visible in the international databases because they are not published in English or in the Anglo-American method of sharing research, which is journal articles. This is probably a strong reason; less visible does not mean nonexistent.

The second reason could be linked to the relationship between humanities research and the freedom levels of a research system (see seminal works by Martha Nussbaum). Variation within Muslim-majority countries that can be seen in my data supports this argument to some extent: countries with higher levels of freedom as measured by the Economist Intelligence Unit and Freedom House tend to have relatively higher levels of publications in the humanities category. This latter argument needs further investigation, but the early findings indicate this direction.

Conclusion and Challenges

Muslim-majority research systems are dynamic and largely emerging systems. They are on the rise in terms of the number of scientific publications, even after accounting for the global increase in research publications. Some of these countries have the fastest-growing science systems globally. However, there are certain challenges ahead. These science systems have varying levels of scientific influence as measured by citation recognition. Citation recognition naturally takes time to accumulate. In this regard, a challenge is the tendency to seemingly speed up the development of citation recognition through paid double affiliations, especially by smaller and well-funded systems. As rapidly emerging science systems, Muslim societies should focus on sustainable capacity building (i.e., cultivating talent and system-policy improvements) rather than short-term wins. Also, the subject area analysis indicates a lower proportion of humanities research. Humanities research is arguably the most culturally rich area, and Muslim societies have much to offer to global humanities research. ◢

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Exponential Growth of Higher Education Research and the Challenges for Peer Review

Marco Seeber

Abstract

The higher education research field has grown five-fold in the past twenty years, and higher education journals have become larger and larger. What are the consequences for peer review?

Higher education research production has increased five-fold in the last twenty years, from 630 articles in 2002 to 3,279 articles in 2022. This growth has been underpinned by an equally astonishing growth in the number of submissions. The largest journals in our field now receive thousands of articles to review every year. What does

such a change of scale mean for higher education journals' management and peer review processes?

Greater numbers and complexity pose several intertwined challenges to the professional standards and norms that sustain the peer review process. This article discusses some key trade-offs and possible solutions based on the experience of other fields and insights from research on peer review.

Editorial Process Consistency

One of the well-known issues of peer review is the low level of agreement among peer reviewers: the fate of a manuscript is often determined by the selection of the reviewers, the so-called "luck of the reviewer draw" problem. As some degree of consistency between reviewers' judgment is desirable, it is also desirable that the quality of the peer review process and its timeliness do not vary significantly between different submissions to the same journal. However, while some hundred submissions per year can be handled by a single editor-in-chief with the support of few associate editors, thousands of submissions require many associate editors and often several editors-in-chief. The more editors that are involved, the more difficult it gets to preserve homogeneous editorial standards. Journals should arguably make sure that the rejection rate and the time to publication do not vary systematically from one editor to another.

Special issues potentially pose another challenge to editorial consistency. In the short term, special issues kill two birds with one stone: they attract submissions while not burdening editors with additional workload. However, editors should not completely delegate the management of the review process to guest editors to avoid depleting the journal's reputation over time; they should supervise the peer review process and request independent reviews.

Finding Reviewers

Peer review relies on the principle of volunteering—scientists review others' papers because they somehow enjoy this, on the one hand, and because of a sense of reciprocity and service to their academic community on the other hand. However, the increasing use of performance metrics counting publications and citations discourages activities that are not measured by such metrics. This contributes to why editors struggle to find reviewers. A widening community and larger journals can exacerbate these problems by weakening community principles of voluntarism and reciprocity: the motivation to review is stronger when receiving an invitation from someone whom you know or who may handle your submission in the future in contrast to when it is coming from editors who change every few years.

There is also evidence that a small proportion of scientists do the lion's share of peer review, and increasing scale creates even more opportunities for freeriding.

There is also evidence that a small proportion of scientists do the lion's share of peer review, and increasing scale creates even more opportunities for freeriding. Perhaps sharing peer review data between journals in the field to monitor peer review acceptance can limit this free-rider problem, but doing so can make peer review a sort of obligation and further nurture an instrumental mindset. Introducing monetary or nonmonetary rewards for reviewers has proven hardly effective in attracting reviewers and potentially harmful for the quality of peer review. Asking authors to suggest reviewers should also be done carefully, because such reviewers systematically rate more positively than editor-selected-reviewers.

Scholars are reluctant to review articles of poor quality or articles that do not match their expertise. Editors should therefore be selective, invite reviewers with parsimony, and personalize such invitations. Publishers can develop new tools to identify potential reviewers by exploiting the increasing availability of data and natural language processing techniques. Being a member of an editorial board should not be a merely honorific role; reviewing should be done frequently and systematically. This would contribute to addressing the paucity of reviewers, nurture a sense of community, and help preserve more homogeneous evaluation standards.

Managing Quantity
While editors should be selective and avoid poor manuscripts reaching reviewers, they should refrain from extreme selectivity. Some fields responded to the massive growth of scientific production with an extremely tough and time-consuming peer review process. Extreme selectivity does not necessarily mean better quality and often leads to the rejection of the most innovative contributions. This phenomenon has been observed in fields like medicine, in which elite journals often reject the most cited articles, and in computer sciences, where conferences with a 10-15 percent acceptance rate have lower impact than conferences with a 15-20 percent acceptance rate.

Monitoring Quality
Reviewers have limited access to primary data. Increasing pressure for publication can push more authors to exploit this information asymmetry. New editorial practices are warranted, such as making the data on which a study is based available to reviewers and possibly to readers. Moreover, the pressure for publication creates a growing market for predatory journals, which are not always easy to spot. Such journals pretend to perform a rigorous peer review process while accepting almost any submission in exchange for an "open-access fee." Transparency in peer review—which entails the publication of peer review reports—can help preserve legitimate outlets by showing the quality of their review process.

Finding Editors
Voluntarism is also important for editors. While managing the peer review process of dozens of articles a year is a sound voluntary effort, managing several hundred hardly qualifies as volunteer work. Excessive workload can make the editor's work unattractive, with the risk that only junior scholars will be willing to do it, only for career purposes and for a short period of time, leading to high turnover and lack of experience. Moreover, there is increasing friction between academic editors pursuing quality and some publishers whose profits are increasingly dependent on open-access fees and who have an interest in increasing the sheer mass of publications. Some publishers have solved this friction by removing scholars from editorial roles and assigning these roles to their own employees. In the future, such a shift on a greater scale might represent the biggest threat to the quality and integrity of peer review in our field. ◢

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Academic Freedom in Latin America and the Deceptive Comfort of Autonomy

Andrés Bernasconi

Abstract
Universities in Latin America have long benefited from the explicit juridical protection of their autonomy. While overt attacks on university autonomy have been rare in recent decades, the right-wing Bolsonaro administration in Brazil, which seriously disturbed federal universities and funding agencies for science, illustrates a core weakness in the Latin American concept of autonomy: the secondary and subordinate position it gives to academic freedom.

In *IHE* issues #99 and #105 Marcelo Knobel and Fernanda Leal denounce what has been the most egregious challenge to university autonomy in Latin America since the age of dictatorships: Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro's attacks on federal universities and funding agencies for science. The right-wing Bolsonaro administration (2019–2023) severely cut funding for federal universities, limited support for humanities and social sciences by the federal agencies that fund research and provide scholarships for graduate students, and interfered with the process for appointing university rectors.

Challenges to Academic Freedom

While Bolsonaro was voted out of office in his bid for re-election, and the present threat from his brand of politics is gone, the severity of the challenge his government posed to university autonomy merits reflection in the interest of protecting academic freedom. While we have recently seen similar infringements on academic freedom in mainland China, Hong Kong, Hungary, Poland, Russia, and Turkey, it should be noted that Latin America has the strongest possible form of juridical protection of academic freedom: the autonomy of universities is incorporated into the constitutions of almost all countries in the region. Actually, some of the most far-fetched encroachments that Bolsonaro attempted were blocked on constitutional grounds.

Should we then dismiss this episode in Brazil as a mere political fluke, an ultimately harmless show of the usual neo-conservative illiberal rhetoric and anti-science populism, a once-in-a-long-while period of turmoil interrupting an otherwise *pax romana* of universally heeded university autonomy and academic freedom in Latin America? I do not think so.

The Latin American Lopsided Concept of University Autonomy

The problem is with university autonomy itself, as it has come to be understood, regulated, and defended by the academic community in Latin America since the 1920s. It is an autonomy that is strong in corporate prerogatives for the university as an organization but weak at its core: academic freedom. I will explain.

The idea of university autonomy—a prerogative or privilege of institutions that frees them from political control—is remarkably homogeneous across Latin America. Universities understand that they are obligated to the public welfare and the service of the communities within their sphere of influence. Still, the nature of that service is to be entirely determined by universities themselves, be it individually or collectively through their national associations.

Autonomy comprises the academic freedom to define curricula, enroll students, award degrees, appoint faculty, and set the parameters for tenure and progression in the academic career.

Autonomy comprises the academic freedom to define curricula, enroll students, award degrees, appoint faculty, and set the parameters for tenure and progression in the academic career. The freedoms to teach and research without restriction or coercion are also included here. Because of their independent legal status as decentralized state entities, universities have the legal authority to create their own bylaws and regulations, and choose how their authorities exercise their administrative autonomy. The right of the university to possess its own patrimony, which it is free to manage, to obtain public funding, and to complement it with additional income, is known as financial or economic autonomy.

Over the twentieth century, university autonomy in Latin America developed as a safeguard for universities against the intrusion of governments, which were sometimes autocratic or downright dictatorial, so they could carry out their objectives as they saw fit. The guiding concept is the freedom of the university, which—in the case of public universities—establishes a domain of self-determination within the framework of the state.

In Latin America, each nation's leading universities demanded autonomy from the political system in a process more akin to the conquest of union rights (those of the university as a bureaucratic entity and a social actor) rather than acknowledgment of the freedoms of the spirit. Academic freedom primarily results from institutions' structural right to autonomy.

The university is the prerogative holder and actor under the Latin American conception of university autonomy, not its academic community. Academic freedoms on campuses may be made possible by autonomy but that is not its fundamental benefit. Universities are independent so that they may "speak truth to power." Their position is very political, albeit outside the formal political realm, and autonomy acts as a corporate buffer that protects the university from external political and, nowadays, in times of academic capitalism, economic players. Knowledge appears only as the domain from whence social criticism is exercised.

Existing legislation has therefore created a vast space for university autonomy in Latin America, which is seen in the region as a corporate freedom of the university as an institution, even if one in which the academic freedom of scholars comes as a consequence.

Academic freedom is viewed as an outcome of university autonomy rather than as its primary foundation.

How Is This Relevant to Academic Freedom?

When academic freedom is understood as just another form of university independence, on an equal footing with administrative, organizational, and financial autonomy, academic freedom gets exposed. Elected officials who intend to harass universities may claim that it is the universities' finances they have a problem with, or their structure, or their governance, not the academic operation. Then, university officials are left with the problem of explaining how breaches of the external ring of independence affect the inner core of academic freedom. This is a line of argument that university communities in Latin America are unfamiliar with, as any form of infringement on any of the dimensions of autonomy has traditionally been denounced as equally grave.

When it is not the university as a whole that is under siege or a particular subsector (such as the federal universities in Brazil), but the work of an individual academic, or groups of academics, whose scholarship is annoying for some politicians (think gender studies, for instance), the problem of academic freedom becomes critical. These individualized or targeted challenges may become the most frequent over time, as social-media-wrangling politicians can readily and massively caricature research agendas. They will require a defense where, contrary to the Latin American reflex, it is not the organization that comes first, with academic freedom as a consequence, but academic freedom is instead conceptualized as the core zone of protection, which for its own sake radiates outwards, to the organizational level, creating a ring of protection we call university autonomy. ◢

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The Fight over Science in Mexico

Alma Maldonado-Maldonado

Abstract

Mexico's new General Law on Science has divided the academic community, given its centralized, authoritarian and archaic view of knowledge production. The future of science in Mexico looks grim, as academic communities are not only grappling with a lack of funding but also facing attacks on academic freedom and, in extreme cases, freedom of speech.

A change to Mexico's constitution article dealing with education was promoted by president López Obrador and passed in May 2019. It mandated the approval of three general laws: The General Law on Education (September 2019), the General Law on Higher Education (April 2021), and the General Law on Science (May 2023). For several months, the academic community was divided between those in favor of and those against the proposed General Law on Science, given its centralized, authoritarian, and archaic vision of science and knowledge production.

The new law was passed in both chambers of the Mexican congress under questionable circumstances, and with violations to the congress rules due to human rights abuses by excluding academics working at private higher education institutions and students from CONACYT programs and scholarships. Therefore, a long legal battle over the fairness of the law began.

Shaping Higher Education and Scientific Systems

Historically, governments have sought to control or shape educational and scientific policies, with the latter being more common. Sociologist Robert K. Merton noted that totalitarian regimes view academic freedom as a threat, while democratic regimes provide ideal environments for the development of science.

López Obrador has established several reforms that many in Mexico's academic community have characterized as populist. In basic education, these include curricular

reforms that equate indigenous or community knowledge with scientific knowledge, the cancellation of teaching evaluations, and the elimination of standardized tests. In higher education, policies were designed—at least on paper—to ensure free education and access. Approximately 145 "new universities" were created to cater to low-income students who had limited access to the most prestigious higher education institutions in the country. However, these new universities were established in marginal and remote communities with few resources and no quality assurance mechanisms. Unfortunately, there is not enough public information about them to determine their impact on their communities or to evaluate their curricula, programs, teachers, and staff quality.

The Law: Implications for Science

The recently approved law consolidates the policies implemented by CONACYT during this administration. CONACYT is the National Council of Science and Technology that was created in 1970 and has since then set national policies in this sector. The new law represents an important shift in what Mexico has been doing in terms of research and development. For instance, it has eliminated most scientific programs introduced by previous governments without evaluating their results, restricted private sector participation in innovation and technological development programs and policies, and destroyed institutions perceived as enemies of the regime, such as the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics (CIDE) and the Advisory Forum on Science and Technology (FCCyT). For example, the new director appointed in CIDE against the wishes of the academic community made a number of arbitrary decisions when it comes to hiring and firing faculty, and cut salaries.

This law has established a new organizational system for the scientific sector in the country. Furthermore, it has changed the name of CONACYT into CONAHCYT, adding an *H* (for *humanities*). Here are some of the main changes introduced by this law:

- It forms a directive council that involves fifteen representatives of secretaries of state, including the secretaries of defense and the navy. The council will exclude representatives from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) or the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES), as well as representatives of the states and the private sector. It will include only eight members unaffiliated with the government. One of the council's main responsibilities is to establish a national research agenda, which will receive prioritized financial support from CONACYT.
- It transfers the rights of patents developed with CONACYT financing. While most financial agencies support the creation of knowledge, they do not usually seek ownership of discoveries. The new law eliminates the goal of allocating 1 percent of the gross national product to the sector, and replaces it with the requirement to spend more money than in the previous year, without considering the level of inflation. Thus, if the government increased spending by two pesos (less than one US dollar) the following year, the law would be considered fulfilled.
- The new law excludes the participation of academics and students from private higher education institutions in CONACYT programs unless they provide the necessary resources and sign bilateral agreements with the council. It also increases the centralization of activities in the sector, and reduces the role of states and municipalities, despite Mexico being a federal republic. It limits the autonomy of public research centers by controlling their governance. It modifies their governing bodies and academic evaluation processes, and diminishes their power to make decisions about their governance.

Populism and Science

López Obrador's government has taken an antiscientific position on several issues, including the recent pandemic.

López Obrador's government has taken an antiscientific position on several issues, including the recent pandemic. During the peak months, the president said that "good and honest people" would not contract COVID-19, despite having been infected with the virus three times. He also suggested that carrying a Christian amulet was sufficient protection against the virus.

During López Obrador's presidency, there has been a drastic reduction in public funding for education and science. Moreover, academics have faced disqualifications, being

regarded as an elitist group solely concerned with preserving their privileges instead of addressing the country's social problems.

The recently appointed director of CONACYT, María Elena Álvarez Buylla, has also made controversial comments, such as insinuating that the moon landing was not scientifically relevant, ignoring the fact that infrared ear thermometers, anti-icing systems, firefighter gear, solar energy harnessing, GPS, and LEDs were made possible thanks to US space programs. Furthermore, she has criticized biotechnology and transgenics, categorizing them as "neoliberal science."

Although the director of CONACYT received a scholarship to study for her PhD at the University of California, Berkeley, she has been an accomplice to the government's denigration of the scientific community, particularly of those academics who have studied abroad. López Obrador once said that there are people who have studied at Harvard University who learned how to steal or aid in stealing. He said that it is implied that studying abroad is associated with an elitist, classist, and racist mentality. In his government's first four years, CONACYT scholarships to study abroad decreased by almost 50 percent compared to the previous government's first four years.

Once this populist government ends in 2024, Mexican education and science will be different, but not better. This is not to say that the Mexican scientific sector was performing well in the past, but some of its higher education institutions and research centers have survived and even produced knowledge, despite previous governments' lack of support. However, the future looks grim, as academic communities are not only grappling with a lack of funding but also facing attacks on academic freedom and, in extreme cases, freedom of speech. ◢

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Higher Education in Brazil and the New Administration: What Is at Stake?

Renato H.L. Pedrosa and Marcelo Knobel

Abstract

Science and higher education in Brazil have suffered greatly over the past few years, and the new administration of president Lula has promised to bring back the budgets of federal universities to historical levels and to make a strong effort toward social inclusion in higher education. We highlight the main funding-related issues, and also discuss efforts toward social inclusion, such as affirmative action programs and the revisited 2012 national quota law.

Education in Brazil has suffered a series of setbacks at all levels during the last four years, including the level of graduate education, which had been somewhat immune to the effects of prior critical periods. The COVID-19 pandemic played its part, but the precarious situation was aggravated by complete inaction of the Bolsonaro administration, which had four ministers of education in four years (actually five, but the appointment of one of them was canceled after it had been disclosed that his CV contained false academic credentials). None of these people was seen fit for the mission of leading one of the most important areas of governance.

The incoming administration of president Lula has not only declared an intention to change things but has already started developing new initiatives and programs. The new ministry of education leadership, with Camilo Santana as minister and qualified people in other key posts, has been welcomed by education and policy specialists. The National Institute of Educational Statistics, which is responsible for collecting and publicizing educational data and develops all major educational assessment programs in the country, including participation in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), is being rebuilt after four years of neglect.

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Funding the Federal System of Universities

The most urgent issue concerns financing the federal system of universities, which are responsible for most fundamental sciences programs, a large part of graduate education, and most of the country's scientific output. The system comprises 68 universities, located in all 26 states and in the national capital (Brasilia). After reaching its highest value of 4.3 billion Brazilian reals (about USD 1.8 billion at the time) in 2014, the systems' discretionary budget—i.e., what the universities can use for investments, etc.—fell to 2.6 billion Brazilian reals (about USD 660 million) in 2019 (first year of Bolsonaro's term) and further to 1.6 billion Brazilian reals (about USD 310 million) in 2022. In terms of constant purchasing power parity measured in Brazilian reals, the 2022 discretionary budget was only 38 percent of that of 2014 and 64 percent of that of 2019. Such extreme lack of support for the federal system of universities is unprecedented in recent Brazilian history, and has impacted it negatively in many ways. It is worth mentioning that the federal system underwent considerable expansion between 2008 and 2018 as a result of a federal program called REUNI. The number of undergraduate students enrolled in the system doubled in the period, from 600,000 to 1.32 million.

Decline in Federal Support for Graduate Education and Research

But things worsen further due to the decline in funding for graduate education and science, which is also relevant for state-level education and for a large part of the country's non-profit private institutions. The main federal agency that supports research, CNPq, reduced its expenditures from the 2015–2018 period to the Bolsonaro years (2019–2022) by 43 percent (averages of the two four-year periods). Another relevant agency, CAPES, which mostly provides graduate scholarships, has reported that the expenditures for 2019–2021 were, on average, 21 percent lower than in 2015–2018. The number of doctorates granted by Brazilian higher education institutions in 2020 and 2021 were about 20 percent lower than in 2019, after more than two decades of almost continuous growth. Part of that drop can be attributed to the pandemic, which seems to have caused a delay in finishing dissertations, but the cuts in funds for scholarships and research grants will likely prolong this effect. One long-term problem regarding funding of graduate education is the decade-long budgetary restrictions which have caused a freeze in scholarships indexation since 2013. Scholarships are now at an all-time low in terms of purchasing power, making it more difficult to attract new students.

What the New Administration Is Proposing

Before even looking at other aspects of higher education in Brazil, the new federal administration has already promised to make an all-out effort to bring budgets of federal HEIs and agencies back to historical levels. It will not be an easy task, since there are severe fiscal restrictions. The original budget for federal universities planned for 2023 is still very low—even lower than that of 2022 (corrected for inflation). The new administration has promised to increase the ministry of education's budget by about 12 billion Brazilian reals (equivalent to about USD 4 billion in terms of purchasing power parity), but that is supposed to go not only toward universities' budgets, but also to be spent on the ministry's other activities, including CAPES scholarships, transfers to regional governments for basic education programs and so on.

Social Inclusion

Another relevant issue is that of social inclusion in higher education, a topic which has been at the forefront of Brazilian politics since the turn of the century. Over the last two decades, Brazilian public universities have developed—either voluntarily or under regulatory requirements—various affirmative action initiatives, including quotas for graduates of public high schools, for those who self-identify as Black, special admission procedures for students of indigenous backgrounds and so on. The new administration is—in stark contrast to the outgoing one—a strong supporter of such programs, which also include scholarships and subsidized loans for poor students at private HEIs. There is much to be done, especially regarding retention of and support for the newly admitted groups, many of whom are first-generation students. The 2012 national quota law is up to revision by congress soon (it was scheduled for 2022 but has been delayed), and there are

calls to remove the color/race criteria from its provisions. Since such a revision would affect the federal system, the federal government will certainly have a say on this issue.

The Pandemic and Basic Education

Another topic related to admissions and social inclusion in higher education is basic education. Basic education has in many ways taken a huge hit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the public sector, including secondary schools. There are already studies showing not only a drop in the secondary education attainment rate, but also reporting lower levels of proficiency students in the last year of secondary school. It may be too early to assess all impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the country's educational system, but they have certainly been negative, and some of them will have a long-lasting effect with repercussions in higher education as students go through various levels of education. The previous federal administration did little to help, claiming that basic education was the responsibility of states and municipalities (which is true). The new minister of education, Camilo Santana, is former governor of the northeastern state of Ceará, which has shown better results in basic education than most other states. The minister has promised that the federal government will do all it can to help states and municipalities mitigate any deficiencies as soon as they are identified.

Admissions and the Expansion of Distance Learning

One of the immediate effects of problems in secondary education related to admissions to higher education is the steep decline in participation in the national test (known as ENEM) used for admissions to federal and other universities. In 2014 and 2016, over eight million students registered for the test, but in 2022, only 3.4 million did, and less than 2.5 million actually took the test. This has not only immediate causes, but also structural ones. There has been a vertiginous increase in the number of low-cost distance-learning programs offered by for-profit higher education institutions, which now account for over 50 percent of all new enrollments and which do not require ENEM score for admission. There is also the so-called self-exclusion process, meaning that students graduating from public high schools may consider themselves not competitive enough for the more selective public universities. There is data showing a decline in participation in the national admission test by those from lower socioeconomic strata, which includes graduates of public schools and the majority of the country's Black population.

What to Expect?

The new administration faces the challenge of reversing the previous administration's severe cuts to higher education and research funding, ensuring social inclusion in higher education, supporting affirmative action initiatives, and deciding on regulatory and quality assessment issues caused by the rapid expansion of distance learning in Brazilian higher education. Additionally, there are fiscal restrictions that may restrain the government from expanding the ministry of education's budget. Whether the ministry manages to deliver in all areas, remains to be seen, but expectations are very high, as education was one of the main electoral points in Lula's campaign and in his criticism of Bolsonaro's record. ◢

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Transforming Higher Education in Latin America: What Stakeholders Say

Liz Reisberg

Abstract
Latin American higher education is in urgent need of transformation as traditional paradigms still dominate. With the resumption of the annual conference on innovation in higher education in Monterrey, Mexico, educators from institutions throughout the region discovered and discussed new ideas and new technologies.

The CIEE (International Conference on Educational Innovation) is held annually on the campus of the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (known as Tecnológico de Monterrey), Mexico. The event resumed in January 2023 after being paused for several years by the pandemic. Hundreds of educators from more than 30 countries attended in person, while thousands attended online. It is a good place to "take the pulse" of the region by observing the titles and subjects of keynotes and sessions and eavesdropping on conversations among attendees. Interest in new technologies was particularly palpable.

New Technology: Friend or Foe?

There was much concern expressed about ChatGPT. Among speakers and participants, chatbots are currently seen more as a threat than a tool for teaching. There was much discussion about artificial intelligence (AI) and what artificial intelligence at all levels will mean for the future of higher education. Everyone recognizes the growth of AI but few understand it. There are more questions than answers.

One could not help but register the plethora of for-profit vendors participating as exhibitors, sponsors, or offering sessions that were a mix of useful data and self-promotion. Innovation in higher education is often conflated with the use of new technologies. In addition to that, there is an ever-growing business sector prepared to sell universities technology of all kinds, from learning management platforms to software and gadgets that will expand one's reach into new realities. Participants crowded around exhibitors' booths each time there was a demonstration. Clearly there is interest in learning more about what these new programs can offer. While it is easy to be cynical about the growth of the commercial sector, new technologies will open important opportunities for universities worldwide.

One could not help but register the plethora of for-profit vendors participating as exhibitors, sponsors, or offering sessions that were a mix of useful data and self-promotion.

Keynote speakers emphasized that technology alone will not improve the quality of higher education, but it does introduce some very exciting possibilities. The Tecnológico de Monterrey has been on the forefront of technological innovation for decades and continues to lead the region, if not the hemisphere. Imagine having Isabel Allende as a guest speaker in a class in Monterrey without requiring her to leave her home in San Francisco. The Tecnológico de Monterrey's experiment with holograms made this possible. Not only was her image present in Mexico, but she could make eye contact and interact personally with individual students. This technology would allow Ms. Allende to be present in multiple classrooms in multiple countries at the same time, potentially providing institutions with access to talent and expertise around the world with a fraction of the investment necessary to fund travel.

Transformation, Yes: But What and How?

It was clear that trends and issues discussed elsewhere in the world preoccupy educators in Latin America. The vocabulary of "active learning," "adaptive learning," "competency-based education," etc., is familiar to everyone. There is a growing awareness of the potential of micro-credentials to bridge the gap between higher education and the labor market. The region is certainly aware of current and critical issues for higher education. The looming question is how to get from the status quo to where higher education needs to be.

The traditional model of higher education—preparing university students with specific knowledge for a specific career—is less useful than in the past, yet it is still the dominant paradigm. The rigidity of the systems and lack of differentiation among institutions, regardless of whether they are in the private or public sector, hampers innovation. There were occasional references to micro-credentials and new short-term education cycles, but the discussions didn't go very deep.

Transformation is urgent, yet it inevitably takes place over time. It most certainly requires leadership with a vision to the future, but the process must be bottom-up as well as top-down. Faculty are a critical element in the change that is needed, but very few university teachers are currently prepared to address the trends that are weighing on the sector. The Tecnológico de Monterrey could be an important case study and reference for how transformation takes place. Support for change is available at multiple levels—workshops, mentors, funds for redesigning courses and pedagogy, and importantly, recognition in performance reviews for the willingness to try out new ideas. Grants encourage experimentation with innovative teaching strategies or technology. Progress and outcomes are measured. Successes are shared throughout the institution's multiple campuses and published in peer-reviewed journals. Meanwhile, the institution's leadership continues to visit campuses throughout the world to benchmark against global standards and trends. International experience is adapted to the unique circumstances and mission of the Tecnológico de Monterrey to ensure that change remains relevant to the public the institution serves. An important lesson here is that the goal is not to imitate what other countries are doing but rather to use the experience of others as a reference.

Transforming the higher education sector will be an enormous challenge for a multitude of reasons. Not least among these reasons is limited resources. Inflation continues to plague much of Latin America and (for the most part) new technologies must be purchased from the Global North in dollars or euros. While the Tecnológico de Monterrey and several other institutions in the region are forging ahead, resources to invest in technology, infrastructure, and professional development are mostly limited in both private and public sectors. While the ubiquity of the internet helped Latin America to connect with other regions, further and significant investment in technology will be needed in the short-term for more significant innovation and progress going forward.

Resources will remain a challenge but strategic partnerships with international universities and private enterprise may help to mediate the cost of new investment. The labor market depends on the output of higher education, and the private sector has made very little investment in the sector until now. Relationships with industry must be cultivated, and mutual interests identified and pursued. And then, there are all those for-profit vendors out there who should be interested in cultivating future customers; they would be well served to build market share by helping institutions with the initial purchase of their products. ◢

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Shifting Study-Abroad Patterns of South Korean Students

Kyuseok Kim and Edward Choi

Abstract
Fewer Koreans are now studying overseas than in the past. Behind this trend are such factors as the shrinking youth population, the COVID-19 pandemic, rising global nationalist and xenophobic sentiments, and improvements in domestic higher education. Moreover, some of these factors explain evolving patterns of outbound flows and suggest emerging markets as attractive education destinations for Korean educational consumers. The full implications of these changes remain to be fully understood.

A recent report from South Korea's ministry of education draws attention to a thought-provoking trend relating to the number of Korean students studying at foreign universities. Korean students are no longer internationally mobile in strong numbers. The drop in outbound mobility to such popular education destinations as China, Japan and the United States reflects global and domestic sociocultural and political developments that have a myriad of implications for stakeholders in the Korean government, educational consumers, and others involved in or affected by student mobility.

Chasing Excellence

Korean history of study abroad began in the late 1980s when the government relaxed travel restrictions and restrictions on receiving foreign higher education degrees. For a long time studying abroad has been the next best option for many students who for various reasons could not attend the handful of elite institutions, otherwise known as "SKY" (Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University).

For these people, attending a foreign university is perceived to be beneficial in terms of career opportunities, either international or domestic. There are also students who quit the domestic system and chase comparatively more prestigious international credentials. Aspirations to attend such universities as Harvard University in the United States, Tohoku University in Japan, or Tsinghua University in China still run high among some young Koreans with strong academic backgrounds and financial resources. Such students may return to the Korean market with a competitive advantage, at least in some sectors of the labor market. It is a well-known fact that high-ranking government officials and other figures of success within Korean society hold foreign degrees.

The pursuit of foreign degrees can be explained by an "education fever" that has gripped the nation for centuries, dating back to premodern Korea (1300–1900s) or perhaps even earlier. It is thus not surprising that Korea is—alongside China and India—one of the world's top sending countries, with major destinations for Korean students being China, Japan, and the United States. According to South Korea's ministry of education, as many as 124,000 Korean postsecondary students were studying abroad in 2022. This is roughly twice more than in such countries as France, Iran, Malaysia, the United States, and Vietnam.

Dwindling Figures

The nearly fivefold increase in outbound flows of Korean students between 1991 and 2011 has reversed in recent years.

The nearly fivefold increase in outbound flows of Korean students between 1991 and 2011 has reversed in recent years. In fact, the drop has been precipitous. Korea witnessed a nearly 53 percent reduction in total outbound student mobility at postsecondary level between 2011 and 2022, and once popular education destinations are no longer hosting as many Korean students as before. The United States, for instance, observed a 46 percent decline from 73,351 in 2010–2011 to 39,491 in 2020–2021. The numbers for other popular destinations are equally and, in some cases, more dramatic: A 77 percent drop in China from 73,240 in 2017 to 16,968 in 2022; a 72 percent decline in the United Kingdom from 17,310 in 2011 to 4,798 in 2022; and a decrease of 45 percent over the same time period in Japan.

Evolving Domestic and Global Circumstances

Declining outbound student mobility is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by various factors. One reason may be the shrinking youth population, which has been ongoing since the 1990s. We can observe a correlation between the parallel decline in outbound mobility by 53 percent and the overall shrinkage of the population aged six to 21 by 24 percent over the same decade. In other words, there might be proportional decreases in the number of students interested in overseas credits or degrees in relation to the decline of the entire college-bound population. And considering the falling fertility rate (as of 2022, the world's lowest at 0.76), in years to come we might observe an even stronger relationship between outbound mobility and the demographic downturn.

Other explanations—many interrelated—involve the COVID-19 pandemic, rising nationalist and xenophobic sentiments globally, emergent online education platforms like K-MOOC and the Minerva University MOOC, international branch campuses, safety concerns (e.g., mass shootings in the case of the United States), geopolitical tensions involving, for example, the United States and China, and government efforts to improve domestic higher education competence and capacity. These factors not only explain disruptions to traditional patterns of outbound student mobility, but also some underpin shifts in mobility trends. For example, factors of growing concern regarding safety issues in the United States, coupled with rising higher education costs and restrictive immigration policies introduced by the previous administration of the United States ("Trump Effect"), are likely pushing foreign students to alternative English-speaking destinations such as Australia and Canada, or even to European nations such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands. These European countries were among the top study abroad destinations for Koreans in 2022.

Future Outlook

South Korea's suppressed demand for foreign higher education over the past three years will likely rebound in the postpandemic era. Early indications of this are already visible. The number of Korean students in, for instance, the United States has recovered from 39,491 in 2020–2021 to 40,755 in 2021–2022. We believe that the rebound is less suggestive of a return to enduring patterns of rising outbound mobility than reflective of "jumping back" from a temporary setback relating to COVID-19. In the future, outbound mobility flows might still fluctuate due to the aforementioned factors.

In particular, scholars have already seen that the Korean government's efforts to improve higher education quality in the country have helped dampen brain drain. These efforts, increasingly integrated into national internationalization agendas aimed at building a knowledge-based economy, have been growing in scope (more initiatives) and size (more funding) in recent years. Examples of such initiatives include Brain Korea 21 (BK21) and World Class University (WCU) project, as well as the more recent "Study Korea 3.0" plan, aimed at recruiting 300,000 foreign students over the next decade, and the Glocal University Project, primarily aimed at boosting the country's competitiveness at regional level.

What is more certain is the emergence of education destinations with stronger appeal for Koreans amid evolving global circumstances. Korean students and their families are increasingly looking at alternative locations in Australia, Canada, Germany, France, and the Netherlands, as well as at Asian countries like Singapore, which already hosts many more Korean students than before. Will these countries remain popular education destinations in the long term? Many push and pull factors are involved, so only time will tell. Moreover, there might be further developments, such growing cross-national academic collaborations as a result of increased contact and exchanges with new and different cultures.

The scope (in terms of countries affected) and longevity of the downturn in outbound mobility are yet to be fully understood. Global circumstances are constantly in flux, and trends observed today might evolve. Also, earlier this year South Korea surpassed a milestone of 200,000 foreigners studying in the country. This number is expected to rise thanks to the already mentioned "Study Korean 3.0" plan. What does this mean for South Korea, historically known as a major sending country? Is it one step closer to fulfilling the vision of becoming a regional higher educational hub? There are a lot of questions, but

time will tell whether current outbound and inbound trends will continue, and whether South Korea can diversify its pool of foreign students, most of whom are currently coming from a handful of countries (such as China, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam).

South Korea may be on the brink of a new horizon with opportunities with implications for intraregional student mobility patterns, as well as—to a smaller extent—for foreign markets beyond Asia. While the status of South Korea as a significant source country is likely to stay the same, at least in the short term, it will be interesting to monitor the evolving situation and, more importantly, the relations between the national idea of raising the country's higher education competitiveness, developing global circumstances, and changing consumer attitudes in South Korea toward study abroad. ◢

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Australia: Corruption Scandal and International Students

Anthony Welch

Abstract

Australia's considerable success in attracting substantial numbers of international students has come at a cost. A USD 27 billion industry has grown up, and it is inadequately regulated. Loopholes in the visa system allow corrupt agents to organize a student visa to a reputable university, while simultaneously planning to switch the student to a lower-quality training provider, who offers a higher commission. More regulation of education agents is urgently needed.

Australia has long been among favored destinations for international students. While a modest-sized system compared to many, its location close to Asia, its cultural diversity, well-ranked universities, and status as part of the Anglosphere has proved attractive to many, especially from Asia. At the system level, more than a quarter of total higher education enrollments are international; in many universities, the proportion is much higher, especially among the research-intensive Group of Eight institutions. At several universities, the proportion has reached almost half, and in one case even higher.

But this apparent success ignores the soft underbelly of what has grown into a USD 27 billion industry. Driven by longstanding underfunding of higher education, universities energetically sought to replace missing income by recruiting ever more international students, who pay much higher fees than domestic students. Internationally, Australia is widely seen as adopting a particularly entrepreneurial approach to international student recruitment. This includes the widespread use of education agents who, although responsible for recruiting around three quarters of all international higher education students, remain unregulated.

But this apparent success ignores the soft underbelly of what has grown into a USD 27 billion industry.

A Troubling Example

The problem was highlighted by the recent dramatic rise in enrollments from Nepal, a country with a GDP per capita of little more than USD 1,000, and a modest-sized middle class. The explosive growth of Nepalese tertiary enrollments, from little more than 10,000 in 2015 to over 65,000 in 2019, raised red flags that were ignored by previous education ministers, and the federal department of education, who were made aware of the problem. By 2022, Nepal had become the third largest source of international students, after China and India. The national tertiary education regulator (TEQSA) and universities also failed to address the issue. Sensing an opportunity, the number of agents in Nepal recruiting for Australian institutions leapt from a few hundred to over 3,000. A very high proportion of Nepalese students featured family members as secondary applicants, who were considered vulnerable to exploitative working conditions, and systemic underpayment, at times by their own countrymen, operating small businesses. A 2023 parliamentary inquiry was also told of instances of diasporic communities using social media to contact students abroad, before arrival, to take advantage of their vulnerability.

Overall, thousands of students gained a student visa to take courses at a reputable public university, but then quickly switched their enrollment to a cheaper vocational course with another provider, numbers of whom apparently facilitated the transfer of courses without the student having gained a proper release from the original university. In other cases, general practitioners and counsellors were recruited by corrupt agents to provide medical certificates that allowed an international student to switch to alternative low-quality private providers. The Australian system mandates that international students wishing to swap providers within six months of initial enrollment must be approved for release from their original institution, but illness or distressing events constitute possible grounds for change.

Financial Basis for Corruption

Why were corrupt agents engaged in facilitating the poaching of students from reputable public universities and steering them to low-quality private providers? Such institutions pay a higher commission but are much less concerned with appropriate course offerings. When agents can earn up to 40 percent of the course fee as a commission, financial rewards can easily trump course quality and relevance. International students may be lured with false promises of full-time employment and a path to permanent residency, while at the same time the corrupt agents receive large financial incentives from poor-quality private providers.

In many such cases, despite having already paid fees, students did not even pursue the vocational course, but simply blended into the workforce, where other evidence showed they were vulnerable to exploitation and underpayment, sometimes by their own countrymen. The decision to remove limits on the number of hours that international students were allowed to work during the COVID-19 pandemic likely contributed to such exploitation. From July 2023, working hours will be restricted to 48 hours per fortnight, but much more needs to be done to stop the rorting of the system. Evidence was produced of women with low English proficiency being brought to Australia on student visas, but ultimately being forced into the sex industry to pay off substantial debts incurred to their "controllers." Over a dozen education providers were found to be corrupt and complicit in facilitating sex trafficking.

Poachers and Gamekeepers: Regulatory Failure

Such egregious lapses highlight an urgent need for closer regulation of the system. Too often, student visas are being misused as a path towards migration, rather than a basis for higher learning. Too often, too, unscrupulous agents are very willing to take advantage of gaps in the system and profit from the process. Too often, low-quality private providers are offering lucrative inducements to agents willing to steer students to their door. Some agents use system loopholes to procure an offer from a reputable institution (thus enabling a student visa), while simultaneously planning to shift them to a low-quality training provider.

The federal government is yet to release its commissioned *Nixon Report* that is already known to have revealed pervasive corruption in the visa system, and widespread exploitative working conditions and underpayment of international students. This is in significant part due to the failure to regulate education agents, the majority of whom act ethically, but some of whom are corrupt and are far less focused on education outcomes than on potential migration outcomes and the fees generated by switching institutions. The fact remains that, unlike migration agents, education agents are entirely unregulated. As one witness to a recent parliamentary inquiry observed, "my dog could be an agent." The Australian experience can serve as a salutary lesson for other systems that rely on agents for recruitment, but which fail to regulate them adequately.

Adding to the problem of nonregulation of education agents is the inadequate resources deployed to monitor the visa system. The federal department of home affairs employs less than 20 staff to cover more than 5,000 registered training organizations.

What Needs to Be Done?

Clearly a cross-sectoral, whole-of-government approach is urgently needed, involving federal ministries of education, immigration, and home affairs. State governments and universities will also need to be involved, as will regulatory authorities such as the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority (TEQSA), and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). More resources will need to be deployed to fix major delays in processing visas, reduce the more than 100 different visa categories, and ensure that student visas are used for the purpose for which they are intended. Money laundering legislation provisions need to be extended to include migration and education agents, as well as private education providers. The widespread rorting of student visas and the higher education system, as well as the failure to regulate education agents and rid the system of corrupt examples, must end. The exploitation of thousands of vulnerable international students, as well as the undermining of the reputation of the higher education system overall, cannot be allowed to continue. ◢

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COIL as a Way to Enhance Internationalization: Balancing Evidence and Proliferation

Maia Gelashvili and Gerardo Blanco

Abstract

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is a form of virtual exchange that institutions can use to internationalize the curriculum and foster internationalization at home. COIL promises more equitable and inclusive ways to achieve internationalization and global learning for all students. Even though COIL has existed for the last 20 years, it became truly widespread only during the COVID-19 pandemic. To explore its full potential, accurate implementation and more evidence is needed.

In a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) arrangement, faculty and students from higher education institutions across different countries and cultures collaborate to cocreate and implement a course. While a full course can be implemented via COIL, COIL components typically last for five to eight weeks. In a typical COIL module, students share course contents, jointly participate in class discussions, and work on projects together. Working groups intentionally comprise students from different institutions to foster intercultural dialogue and develop students' intercultural competences.

As the design and implementation of COIL rely on technologies and do not require travel by faculty or students, the COIL format is cost-effective, flexible, and less carbon-intensive than traditional student mobility. It can entail both synchronous and asynchronous forms of learning, can be offered for credit or as a cocurricular activity, and can be implemented in any academic discipline both on graduate or undergraduate level.

COIL is highly collaborative and follows a bottom-up approach. It offers an opportunity for students and teachers to compare and contrast local and global knowledge, experiences, and teaching and learning methods, while also enhancing their global awareness. Although there are special administrative offices at some institutions that support professors in creating COIL modules, the faculty members designing and teaching the course are the main actors who work on the course independently yet together with their international counterparts.

Proliferation of COIL

COIL was first initiated by the State University of New York (SUNY) approximately 20 years ago. However, for most of the ensuing period, the practice had not been widespread. Border closures and travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic propelled COIL utilization and increased its significance, but also enabled reinterpretation. An online directory of institutions participating in COIL identifies 258 institutions in 40 different

countries worldwide that offer COIL modules, but this information is likely under-reported. Even though institutions started implementing COIL as early as 2006, approximately two-thirds (160) dived into COIL in 2019 or later.

Despite its potential, COIL largely remains a practice for higher-income contexts. While the aforementioned directory does not use regional labels consistently, some trends are evident. For example, the institutions implementing COIL include 115 in North America and 43 in Europe, while only four in Africa. Latin America presents a counterexample, with 80 institutions, if Central and South America are included. In this region, organizations like the Association of Catholic Universities in Latin America and the Caribbean (ODUCAL) and the Mexican Association for International Education (AMPEI) have promoted cooperation and training on this methodology.

Despite its potential, COIL largely remains a practice for higher-income contexts.

With 92 institutions, the United States has the largest number of COIL programs among the 258 institutions documented. The fact that the United States has the highest number of institutions implementing COIL is not surprising, given that the format originated in that country. These numbers, however, also show that there are very few COIL-implementing institutions in less-resourced regions, which indicates that not all countries and regions have the necessary resources to implement COIL courses.

With the proliferation of COIL courses, the amount of academic literature and analysis of COIL's effectiveness and impact has also increased. Research findings have been generally positive, suggesting that COIL fosters the development of students' intercultural competences. It also seeks to prompt students who did not plan to do so to participate in study abroad or exchange programs. Overall, students assess COIL experience positively and are willing to take more COIL courses. However, it is notable that single case-studies and self-reports constitute a large volume of the research.

COIL and Internationalization of Higher Education

Although COIL is often pursued by individual faculty members, it can also be used more strategically as a form of institutional internationalization. It can be utilized to foster internationalization at home, curricular internationalization, and internationalization for society.

Physical mobility is insufficient from the point of view of promoting internationalization because only a small proportion (about 1 percent) of the student population participates. Even in the United States and the European Union, where the proportion is about 10 percent, students with disabilities, students who have to work to support their study, or those with family obligations cannot develop internationalized learning outcomes if such outcomes can only be achieved via physical mobility. Internationalization at home initiatives, like COIL, can help render internationalization strategies more inclusive for all, even though the benefits of COIL are also unevenly distributed.

By supporting intercultural exchange without the need for travel and by introducing students to more geographically diverse regions, COIL mitigates some environmental impacts. It also helps compensate for the still unequally high flows from the Global South to the Global North, which reestablish the hegemony of the West and of the English language. The technological shift that happened in teaching and learning during the pandemic did not bring about more equality in higher education around the world since different countries and different universities within these countries had unequal access to technology, as well as an unequal level of preparation and readiness for online teaching and learning. The same challenges impact COIL implementation, as COIL also requires adequate financial, time, and professional development resources. Resource-rich countries and institutions are better equipped with the necessary IT infrastructure, digital competencies, as well as financial and human resources, to offer COIL experiences to their students.

A Balancing Act

As some universities rush to resume in-person internationalization, it is important not to abandon promising practices, such as COIL. This approach can give opportunities to a higher number of students and faculty and, more importantly, to a different student population to gain international and intercultural understandings, and help institutions make their internationalization practices more comprehensive and inclusive.

While a certain level of overlap between enthusiastic early adopters of COIL and researchers on the topic can be anticipated, it is important to systematically and independently study COIL's effectiveness. As COIL has become very popular, it is important to avoid turning it into a fad or trend, and therefore careful implementation and differentiation from other approaches is important. COIL is grounded in internationalization of the curriculum, but there are other approaches to virtual exchange that do not require being embedded within a course; likewise, other forms of virtual internationalization are gaining attention. COIL cannot replace physical mobility since the latter offers experiences that a single or several COIL courses cannot substitute. Therefore, COIL can be instead combined with in-person mobility to achieve better results. Some examples of hybrid study abroad programs already merge COIL and in-person components and show promising results. ◢

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Evolving Landscape of Virtual Exchange: Findings from the Third Global Survey

Kyle Kastler, Rajika Bhandari and Melquin Ramos

Abstract

Against a backdrop of significant shifts in education and exchange globally, virtually exchange had continued to grow both in scale, scope, and complexity. Based on a third (2022) in a series of annual global virtual exchange surveys by the Stevens Initiative, this article presents key findings about potential growth in global virtual exchange; the context and nuances of virtual exchanges around the world; and implications for program administrators, campus leaders, and decision-makers.

The continued expansion of virtual exchange (VE) programs around the world has been accompanied by important questions about the sustainability of such initiatives, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic wanes and in-person mobility resumes. Building upon two previous iterations, the most recent 2022 Survey of the Virtual Exchange Field—an annual effort from the Stevens Initiative—aims to answer such questions, providing insights into diverse characteristics and models of VE. The 2022 survey includes responses from 126 institutions that shared detailed information about their 2,565 programs which connected 120,714 participants around the world.

A key addition to this year's survey and accompanying report were five case studies that provide a deeper, qualitative understanding of the breadth and complexity of how VE functions around the world. Specifically, this year's report highlights how various "digital divides" impact the delivery of virtual exchange in the Global South (Libya, Mexico, and South Africa) with implications for the role of language, importance of context, and the impact of stratified resources.

Growth and Change in VE

While it is inarguable that VE has proliferated over the past few years, this growth has been complex and non-linear, has varied across different providers, and has—to some extent—been shaped by the ongoing pandemic. On one hand, the pandemic has provided a boost to VE, with 58 percent of respondents indicating that they increased their programming due to the pandemic. Hence, the sharp increase in VE observed in the second survey in 2021 could have been a result of the pandemic, with many organizations and institutions exploring VE programs for the first time since traditional mobility programs were inactive. As in-person mobility programs resumed rapidly in 2022, those providers who had adopted VE merely as a stop-gap measure to fill a void might have pivoted back to earlier programming. In summary, the pandemic perhaps led to a spike in VE and growth that some providers are either not inclined to or have struggled to maintain over time.

Given this mixed picture and a varying group of respondents across surveys, the most reliable assessment of change comes from a subset of 71 VE providers who responded in both 2021 and 2022. Within this group, the total number of VE programs implemented increased by 38 percent from 1,464 programs in 2021 to 2,022 in 2022, while the number of participants grew by 22 percent, from 80,737 to 98,750. It should be noted, however, that most of these 71 providers are either higher education institutions or nonprofits/NGOs that operate in multiple countries, which also suggests that such providers are the most able to consistently report data over time.

Understanding the Context and Diversity of VE

A key takeaway from prior surveys was the need to develop a deeper understanding of how VE around the world functions. To address this gap, the 2022 report features five case studies of VE programs in various geographic locations that reveal the diversity of VE and offer a comparative lens through which one can see a whole variety of issues, such as diversity and access, collaboration (internally and externally), setting and managing expectations across all stakeholders (students, faculty, administrators, leadership, partners), and the role of language and communication.

A recurrent theme is diversity and access in VE, and how this varies across different countries. In the United States, where internationalization efforts at community colleges are often limited, a case study of Gazelle International's CLICK initiative reveals how VE can empower educators to leverage technology to internationalize their classrooms. VE and its potential for internationalization can help attract and recruit more students at the community college level, thereby increasing access to both VE and internationalization for this group of students, who might otherwise be left out of such efforts. When looking in Global South countries, access to VE itself might be limited, as shown in the case study of the Durban University of Technology in South Africa where inadequate infrastructure, including lack of electricity, can often impede VE. A similar theme emerged in the case study of Culturingua in Texas, United States, which reveals the challenges of working in countries such as Libya, where infrastructure and access to technology might be limited outside major cities. Additionally, Culturingua is also working to improve access to VE programs for students who might be left out due to disabilities.

These case studies reveal that as VE providers design and implement programs, it is important to consider the duality of technology, which can, on one hand, be an enabler but at the same time, can also itself create digital divides, since access to technology remains uneven in many parts of the world.

Looking Ahead

The three Surveys of the Virtual Exchange Field (2020—2022) occurred at a time of significant shifts in education and exchange globally. The current survey suggests that VE will continue to grow, albeit in ways that are complex and that require the sort of sustained and nuanced exploration that could be possible thanks to the survey effort. The findings also help institutional leaders and decision-makers assess how VE can be a key component of their broader internationalization goals, particularly in the post-pandemic period, especially as they consider a strategic approach to and investments in different forms of mobility and exchanges that would complement each other rather than compete.

The survey has served as a critical and early effort to raise awareness about the need to capture data on VE programs. However, as with many new and large-scale research efforts, challenges remain and further inquiry is necessary. We have identified the following areas that need more examination: measuring the quality of VE, including how programs ensure quality in terms of delivery of VE, developing a deeper understanding of the role of VE facilitators and educators, especially with a view to supporting their growth and professional development, and building the capacity of providers to gather and report data on virtual programs, especially for smaller organizations with limited resources. ◢

As VE providers design and implement programs, it is important to consider the duality of technology, which can, on one hand, be an enabler but at the same time, can also itself create digital divides.

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The full survey report is available at https://www.stevensinitiative.org/resource/2022-survey-of-the-virtual-exchange-field-report/

Academic Remunerations and Careers in Europe: Challenges in Attracting Talent

Alice Civera, Erik Lehmann, Michele Meoli and Stefano Paleari

Abstract

In 2022, the Conference of Italian University Rectors commissioned a study on the attractiveness of European university systems. The main concern was the lack of competitiveness in terms of academic remuneration in Italy. Four European countries were selected for a comparative analysis: France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Findings revealed that remuneration schemes and levels diverge significantly, and Italy lags far behind the other nations.

Remuneration is the primary means of attraction and retention of talent in academia. However, globally, academic salaries can hardly compete with those in the private sector and have not kept up with inflation. European salaries do not seem to compete well with salaries in the United States of America. An average full professor in the United States makes USD 140,400 a year—1.3 times more than the salary of a full professor in the United Kingdom, which has the highest remuneration level in Europe.

Therefore, an in-depth analysis in the European context is necessary. Our study aimed to compare academic remuneration schemes in four European countries, namely France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Germany and the United Kingdom offer higher salaries, both at entry level and for those at the top of their careers, which is a result of a negotiation process that is allowed only in these two countries. Italy is the only nation in our study where salaries are fixed; with no variable components and no possibility of negotiation, the country's academia is at a great disadvantage.

Our study aimed to compare academic remuneration schemes in four European countries, namely France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

Academic Remuneration in Europe

We focused on net salaries; however, our calculations were fairly challenging. We combined the official national data from each country's ministry of finance with the data from national tax and welfare systems, each with its own rules and specificities. Country singularities were verified through interviews with local reviewers.

Three key points emerged from our analysis. First, there is a large gap in terms of remuneration levels between France and Italy on the one hand, and Germany and the United Kingdom on the other. For example, a full professor in Italy earns around USD 62,420, which is 45 percent and 60 percent less than what their German and British colleagues earn respectively. Unsatisfactory conditions may have led academics away, thereby perpetuating the well-known brain drain phenomenon in Italy. Academic salaries in Italy are not competitive at the national level either. A useful comparative example is the salary at the Bank of Italy, one of the country's most prestigious institutions: it is on average 1.2 times higher than at universities. This makes the academic profession unattractive compared to other sectors in the eyes of young people.

If the salary level is unsatisfactory, one may argue that at least career progression is fast, and considerable salary increases are possible at higher career stages. This leads to the second key point: remuneration at different career stages does not change substantially. This is especially true for France and Italy, where professors earn only 24 percent more than associate professors. However, there is a vast difference between the two countries. In Italy, the average age of an associate professor is 52 years (the highest in Europe), whereas in France it is 34 years. This extremely young age is an outcome of a specific career track that also includes a position that can be seen as an intermediary between that of an assistant and an associate professor. Such a career track in France has considerable benefits in terms of system sustainability and expected future performance.

The third and final driver is the presence of a variable component in the remuneration setting. It can be of three types: geographical, welfare-based, or performance-based. It may be possible to adjust salaries according to average living costs in the areas where people live and/or according to the needs, scientific productivity, and excellence, measured through publications in prestigious academic journals. For example, while a British university can negotiate better salaries to convince young engineers to opt for an academic career, a German university can offer salaries that take into account the cost of living, and a French university can adjust salaries depending on employees' family burdens. None of these opportunities are available at Italian universities.

Concluding Remarks

The relevance of this study lies in identifying the economic aspects of a country's attractiveness, which play a crucial role. However, economic factors alone are insufficient to make a country appealing. Several other aspects, such as the quality of life, work–life balance, academic autonomy, and university prestige, contribute to attracting talented academics. Additionally, inadequate remuneration can deter the best and the brightest from pursuing careers in academia and discourage them from engaging with certain national higher education systems.

Among the countries examined in this study, the Italian university system stands out as the only one without an explicit provision for a "mobility package" aimed at attracting young talent from other European countries. In an era when talent, particularly talent seeking international opportunities, is considered a scarce resource and universities are seen as drivers of development and potential solutions to the limited growth of Western economies, it becomes evident that some European systems are better positioned to enhance their attractiveness. However, there may be a glimmer of hope as the Italian government currently has the opportunity to make improvements through funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, although this will require time and additional resources.

The attractiveness of academia is an exhaustible topic. It would be interesting to study other countries within and outside Europe to gain insight into their remuneration schemes. Policymakers should be aware of the factors that affect academics' career decisions to create attractive options for them. ◢

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Does International Publishing Still Matter for China's Social Sciences Scholars?

Qiang Zha

Abstract

This article argues that the recent changes in China's academic appraisal promote domestic publishing in social sciences, while the current stress on ideological correctness ushers in new barriers for China's social sciences scholars to publish in international journals. As such, more and more of China's social sciences scholars would choose to downplay or give up international publishing in the face of such changes and challenges.

Recent years have witnessed a dramatic turn in China's ideology relating to political and social development—amid rising geopolitical tensions with the West, in particular with the United States—which inevitably impacts scholarly research and knowledge production in social sciences in the country. Specifically, China is now determined to mold an alternative model of modernization in place of the one that has been viewed as Western-centric. China's social sciences are thus now entrusted to tell the Chinese story of progress towards modernization. Furthermore, such storytelling must be versed in Marxist theories and guided by Marxist methodology. This article discusses to what

extent international/English-language publishing still matters to China's social sciences scholars in view of the circumstances sketched above. The first two decades in the twenty-first century witnessed an outbreak of submissions to and publications in international journals by Chinese authors. Will this trend in social sciences continue or will it take a different turn?

Changes in Academic Appraisal

Around 2018, China showcased an almost U-turn in academic appraisal exercises.

Around 2018, China showcased an almost U-turn in academic appraisal exercises, shifting from overtly incentivizing international publishing (with handsome cash and/or professional rewards) to downplaying it along the lines of rectifying excessive emphasis and weight placed on journal articles, professional titles, academic credentials, awards, and projects. One of the major reasons behind this twist is that the growing outputs of scholarly papers did not really translate into innovation strength for the country.

This dilemma raises skepticism over exclusively and excessively seeking for publications, including international publications. They used to be perceived as being of high quality and impact, yet turned out to be increasingly fluctuating in quality and even deteriorating, as well as very costly. This is because a growing number of international journals now see publishing papers from China as a business opportunity, and thus target Chinese authors for revenue without exercising careful quality control. For instance, when being placed on the alert list of the "watered-down journals," one such international journal lost as much as 70 million Chinese yuans (equivalent to over USD 10 million) of its revenues in 2021 alone.

Under the new appraisal scheme, papers are required to stress relevance to China and address issues rooted in Chinese soil. In this context, the changing academic appraisal practices impact social sciences research and publishing even more.

Arguably, research questions and subjects in social sciences tend to be locally contextualized, and thus local relevance and adaptation become a salient trait. As such, China's social sciences researchers are now required to treat domestic and international journals on an equal basis and are encouraged to publish in domestic journals, which is easier and more convenient for local adoption and application. Furthermore, quantification aspects of publications are now downplayed, e.g., the number of SSCI-indexed papers, citations, and journal impact factors; rather, social science scholars are now required to submit their representative pieces for appraisal purposes. At least one-third of such papers have to be published in domestic journals, while there is no equivalent requirement for internationally published papers. In addition, social sciences scholars are now allowed to submit theoretically oriented articles published in major central and/or local media outlets for the appraisal exercise, as well as policy advisory work reports. Should an advisory report be adopted by the government sector or affirmed by a political leader, it could carry more weight than an academic paper of any kind.

Furthermore, now that there are no incentives and supportive services such as English translation, revision, and editing, which used to be provided and covered by some institutions, China's social sciences scholars may be less inclined toward international publishing, if not reluctant. This is because such publications normally take more time and effort, and do not give any extra weight in their academic appraisal and professional development anymore.

Stress on Ideological Correctness

Apart from local relevance and contextual fit, ideological correctness is also stressed in Chinese universities, especially in the field of social sciences research and publications. It is reported that an "Ideology and Politics Index" is being built for higher education institutions, particularly for the key national universities. This means, first and foremost, the requirement to use Marxism as the theoretical guidepost and methodological approach in all social sciences research. China's leader Xi Jinping explicitly stated in 2016 that Marxism must be placed in the guiding position, that is, a Marxist stance, perspective, and method must penetrate the whole spectrum and entire process of social sciences inquiries. He even quoted Confucius to stress Marxism as the exclusive doctrine: "The Way does not like complexity. Complexity quickly becomes too much. Too much leads to

agitation, agitation leads to worry, and worry never solved anything." It is expected that more and more social sciences scholars will align their research with Marxist doctrine.

Social sciences are now required to interpret Chinese practice and experience, and theorize a Chinese model of modernization—all in a positive and affirmative manner. Such a stress on ideological correctness could raise concern over the acceptance of such Chinese papers in Western academia, where critical thinking traditionally dominates social sciences inquiry.

Conclusion

In sum, international publishing increasingly appears to be becoming a burden on social sciences scholars in China, who now need to work on such publications without the once available systemic support and incentives. Without doubt, those who are committed to international exchange and cooperation will continue plowing in international fields—typically those returnees retaining their international networks and those teaching at China's top-tier universities where tenure and promotion processes tend to involve international reviewers. Others (who might grow significantly in number), on the other hand, may choose to give up in the face of such challenges. In the meantime, social sciences are also called on to communicate and deliver the Chinese voice, story and ideas to the international arena, which appears to be somewhat paradoxical. ◢

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Challenges and Difficulties of University Study in Northwestern Syria

Mahdi Alkol

Abstract

The higher education sector in Syria has been greatly affected by the ongoing war. Many problems and challenges facing higher education have emerged. Students in the northwestern regions of Syria in particular face many difficulties, such as nonrecognition of their certificates, the difficulty of securing job opportunities, high costs of study, and irregularities due to their need to work to cover the expenses of their studies.

The ongoing conflict in Syria has entered its thirteenth year. Nearly half of the Syrian population has fled their homes to escape the fighting, within Syria or externally to neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Turkey. The population in 2023 reached about 26.7 million, of which 17 million people are inside the country and 9 million outside. The conflict causes massive destruction and great losses in many areas and sectors. Access to shelter, livelihood opportunities, health, education, water, and sanitation has also severely deteriorated since the beginning of the conflict.

The higher education sector is one of the sectors that have been greatly damaged by the war. It has faced many challenges since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, as many schools, educational centers, and infrastructures were destroyed as a result of displacement, instability, and destruction of educational institutions, and migration of staff. All of this led to the low quality of education. The number of public and private universities in Syria located in the areas controlled by the Syrian regime had reached nearly 30 by 2021, including, for example, Damascus University, University of Aleppo, Al-Baath University, Tishreen University, University of Kalamoon, and Al-Wataniya Private University. In the opposition-dominated northwestern regions of Syria, which arose in 2015, there are about 15 public and private universities, including, among others, Idlib University, Free Aleppo University, Sham University, Al-Shamal Private University, and several branches of Gaziantep University (Turkey). There are approximately 35 thousand students in these universities in total.

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Syria has become divided into several areas of influence and the map of control has remained constant since 2020. First of all, there are areas controlled by the Assad regime; they constitute about 63 percent of the country, and have a population of about 9.6 million people. Then, there are areas under control of the Syrian Democratic Forces; they cover 26 percent of the territory of eastern and northeastern Syria, where about 2.6 million people live. Finally, there are areas controlled by the opposition factions; they make up 11 percent of the country's territory with a population of about 4.3 million, distributed between the interim government in the countryside of northern Aleppo, and the control of the Syrian Salvation Government in and around Idlib.

Difficulties and Challenges of University Study

With the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, a large number of students dropped out of universities, and many cities found themselves facing a gap in the educational sector. In 2015, academics opened a number of universities in northwestern Syria in order to continue education and bridge the gap in the sector. It was clear that action was needed in the education sector due to high drop-out rates related to security concerns and financial reasons, and problems with mobility after the start of the conflict. In view of the presence of thousands of postsecondary students in the region, and the urgent need to save the Syrian youth from ignorance and loss, these universities took it upon themselves to accommodate these young people's needs and provide training and education. Students face many challenges, including the often long distances between home and classroom, the lack of reliable means of transportation, and the consequent large financial burdens that they may not be able to bear, as well as physical fatigue. Students studying in the universities of the northern countryside of Aleppo need to travel frequently for up to 150 kilometers. The students' inability to pay high rent in the areas close to the university forces them to use public transport, which is not always available, or to discontinue their studies.

Among other challenges and difficulties are also high tuition costs and other study-related expenses. In northern Syria, annual fees range between USD 150 and USD 500 at semi-private universities, while some private universities charge up to USD 1800 per year. All universities depend on students as their main and only source of funding.

International Recognition of Degrees

It should be said that the degrees awarded by Syrian universities are currently not recognized internationally, even though these universities strive to provide all standards of quality and academic accreditation by developing new and improving existing teaching plans, attracting relevant specialists, and publishing scientific research, especially in international peer-reviewed journals. Universities also like to obtain membership in various educational networks and to be ranked by different ranking bodies. Syrian universities also strive for memoranda of understanding with Turkish and European universities in order to improve the situation for their graduates and their ranking. Universities in northern Syria see such activities as a pillar for increasing collaboration and for gaining recognition, but universities from other countries are reluctant to partner with Syrian universities because of the ongoing uncertainty and lack of security in Syria.

For thousands of Syrian students, the future is a frightening nightmare due to the many problems of the higher education sector, including this lack of international recognition of their university degrees, as well as the problem of fragmentation of higher education in Syria among many supervisory bodies. ◢

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Access and Privatization of Higher Education in Central Asia

Amina Shaldarbekova

Abstract
Higher education enrollment rates in Central Asia are closely related to the level of privatization. The higher the degree of privatization, the higher the access to higher education. Although public higher education has been partially privatized in the region's four countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have also facilitated access to higher education by permitting private universities, while Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have maintained strict state regulation. The number of tuition-paying students vs. state-funded students is growing, too.

Higher education privatization started rising as a global phenomenon in the 1980s. Central Asian countries are no exception. It was a common policy introduced in the region in the 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union with the goal of reducing dependence on government funding. The shared practices of privatization included partial privatization of educational services in the public sector, such as starting to charge tuition at public universities while retaining state-funded places, and allowing private higher education institutions. This article discusses the varying extent of privatization experienced by the higher education sectors in four Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) and its impact on higher education access.

Context

The fundamental political, economic, and social changes that took place in the 1990s have brought numerous challenges to the higher education systems in the region. Despite historical and geographical ties, the newly independent Central Asian countries chose different approaches regarding higher education reforms, including privatization. All viewed education as a transformational tool for socioeconomic development. However, each country had its own pace of development, and dynamics of change, and processed transformations on its own terms. Yet, what they had in common was their inability to allocate adequate budget funding to education. The search for alternative sources of funding led to the initiation of privatization in higher education, which had previously been state-owned, state-controlled, and state-funded. As a result, the degree of higher education privatization determined the enrollment rate in each country. Access expanded where greater privatization of higher education was allowed. In the early 1990s, the gross enrollment rates in the four Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan (18.5 percent), Kyrgyzstan (12.5 percent), Tajikistan (11.6 percent), and Uzbekistan (14.8 percent)—did not differ significantly, but these rates have changed substantially since then. Thus, according to Martin Trow's concept, Kazakhstan has entered the universal stage, the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have moved to the mass education stage, while higher education in Uzbekistan still remains elite.

The Path of Privatization

In the 2000s, all four Central Asian countries started admitting fee-paying students in public higher education institutions alongside state-funded students. Furthermore, as the data collected from UNICEF and UNESCO databases, and the statistical agencies of these countries shows, tuition has become the primary source of funding for public institutions. The share of self-funded students in public universities has grown, while the share of government funding has decreased. As a consequence, increased access to higher education without involving the public purse is a common feature in the region. Governments now fund only a small percentage of education: approximately 33 percent of students in Uzbekistan are now funded by the state, 27 percent in Kazakhstan, and 21 percent both in the Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Nevertheless, in contrast to Kazakhstan, higher education in the Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan is predominantly public, as the expansion has largely occurred and continues to occur in the public sector.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Public vs. Private Sector Expansion

On the whole, Kazakhstan, where a large-scale three-folded privatization of higher education took place, is an extreme case compared to other countries in the region. It is the only country in the region that legally allows establishing private institutions and

enrollment to public universities on a fee-paying basis. Also, it has fully or partially privatized some state universities inherited from the Soviet era. Therefore, its private higher education sector has a powerful role. Nonstate institutions dominate in numbers there: more than 50 percent of the total 122 higher education institutions in the country were private in 2017. This became possible due to a dramatic proliferation of private institutions in the 1990s and 2000s; they remained high in number despite closures and mergers caused by government regulation. Besides, in the 2000s, 12 state universities were transformed into joint-stock companies. Some became entirely private, while shares of others are co-owned by the state and private entities. Also, more than 50 percent of students in Kazakhstan are enrolled in the private sector. The gross tertiary enrollment rate reached 54.3 percent in 2017 and continues to grow. Thus, not only has the growing number of fee-paying students in the public sector enabled the high enrollment rate in Kazakhstan, but the private sector has also served as a significant driver for growing access to and massification of higher education.

Kyrgyzstan exemplifies dual privatization in the region. It is caused both by the growth of private institutions and by allowing state universities to charge tuition fees.

Kyrgyzstan exemplifies dual privatization in the region. It is caused both by the growth of private institutions and by allowing state universities to charge tuition fees. However, in contrast to Kazakhstan, private higher education in Kyrgyzstan is not as prevalent in terms of institutions and students. Out of 51 higher education institutions in 2017, 16 were private; they accounted for 14 percent of all students in the country. Nevertheless, they also contribute to better access to higher education: the gross enrollment rate in the Kyrgyzstan reached 42.8 percent in 2017.

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan: Privatization of the Public Sector with Limited Access

Uzbekistan is another extreme case in the region, as the state has largely retained a selective access model. Despite the unmet demand for higher education, the public sector remains limited in size. The authorities keep a tight grip on higher education enrollment by limiting the number of both state-funded and fee-paying students at higher education institutions. Moreover, the gross enrollment rate has actually declined since 1991. This made Uzbekistan the most populous country in the region (32.3 million) with a very low participation rate of 9 percent in 2017.

In Tajikistan, too, the state controls both the supply and demand sides of higher education. Similar to Uzbekistan, higher education institutions are fully state-run. The percentage of the relevant age group admitted to universities was 31 percent in 2017. Furthermore, private higher education officially remains nonexistent in Uzbekistan. Although the country initially allowed the emergence of nonstate actors in education in the 1990s. The authorities withdrew the permit soon after. In the 2000s, there were a few attempts to establish private institutions in Tajikistan but only one of them survived state interference. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are examples of countries where foreign universities offer state-recognized degrees. In Uzbekistan, there are seven branches of international universities, and they are permitted to select, admit and educate students on their own. Tajikistan has several branches of Russian universities. In fact, all the four countries have Russian universities or branches of Russian universities established on the basis of intergovernmental agreements.

What to Expect?

Although the region faced a slight decline in the 1990s, the population has been rising since the mid-2000s. By and large, the region's population is growing steadily. Besides, unlike other post-Soviet countries, the demographic profiles of the four Central Asian countries are predominantly young, with the average age of 27.6 years. Moreover, the average age of the population under 14 years was 30.8 percent in 2017. Considering the favorable demographic trends with high birth rates, there will be a great demand for higher education everywhere in the region. However, the participation rate dynamics depends on the country. In the case of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, it is more a question of quality than access to higher education per se, whereas in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, with limited access, the need to expand educational opportunities is a bigger concern.

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