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**CROSS-BORDER INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIP AND
COLLABORATION FOR PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT MOBILITY**

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Abstract

This paper aims to review the benefits of cross-border institutional partnerships as an instrument to support international student mobility in higher education institutions, along with strategies to maximize these benefits and potential challenges and solutions. The push for internationalization in higher education globally has led to an increase in the international student population and a focus on developing strategies to increase the global market share of universities. Current strategies have shifted towards more economically driven approaches, involving multi-dimensional institutional partnerships to enhance brand value and promote global mobility. However, one-sided partnerships can lead to challenges, thus, partnerships should be structured to include mutual benefits and address potential challenges. Based on research findings, cross-border institutional partnerships and collaborations can positively impact on international student mobility by offering the following benefits: increased access to valuable resources, exposure to diverse perspectives, expanded recruitment networks, enhanced reputation, and streamlined pathways for international students. The scope of this paper does not include short-term exchange programs, but rather focuses on long-term international student mobility.

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1. Introduction

Global economic, educational, and political variables all have an impact on the movement of international students (Shen et al., 2022). According to the OECD, there will be 8 million international students studying abroad by 2025, which is a staggering increase from the 2 million who were registered in 1998. There is little doubt that the growing number of students studying abroad benefits their host nations. International students contribute to local economies, foster cross-cultural relationships on the campuses where they study, and frequently fill labor market gaps by staying on as highly skilled workers after graduating (Yerezhepekova & Torebekova, 2019).

The increase in Turkey's international student population aligns with the global trend. Prior to 2009, the Ministry of Education handled international student recruitment under the "Great Student Project" (BÖP), but with a low success rate in recruiting and retaining international students. During that period, Turkey sent more students abroad than it recruited from other countries. However, since 2011, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and the newly constituted diaspora presidency, Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), have worked together to supervise the recruitment of international students. YTB has utilized public diplomacy efforts and branded scholarships to attract more international students, particularly from Balkans, Middle Asia, and Africa, as part of its soft power agenda. Meanwhile, YÖK has restructured the internationalization process of universities to improve standards for international students who wish to apply to programs either independently or through agencies. Additionally, Turkey's bid for EU membership has included adjustments for the Bologna Process, which aims to standardize university systems across Europe. These adjustment processes have contributed to international students choosing Turkey as an optimal country for higher education, particularly if they seek to pursue further educational and occupational goals in Europe. Therefore, the country significantly improved the pulling strategies of international student recruitment. As a result, data published by Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu (2022) indicates that the international student population in Turkey has increased significantly, from 16,000 in 2001 to over 220,000 in 2022.

Many nations have begun to think about how they might put into practice or reinforce their strategic approaches to international recruitment in light of the rising market rivalry and shifting mobility patterns. Importantly, there are a number of factors to which nations appear to be paying closer attention in an effort to maintain or improve their competitiveness. For instance, international graduate and student visa programs are increasingly used as key components of recruitment strategies in accordance with their perceived strategic importance (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007).

2. The Advantages and Prospects of Cross-Border Institutional Partnerships and Collaborations and Their Role in Promoting International Student Mobility

Currently, many international education initiatives are being carried out by universities rather than governments. Universities are becoming actors on a global scale, sometimes going beyond the national level and establishing direct relationships with international organizations. In this context, internationalization in universities goes beyond academic interest and becomes a strategic process of

developing institutional capacity and adaptation in the face of global developments (Knight, 2003; Yılmaz, 2016).

As presented at Table-1, there has been a significant expansion of the availability of study programs and degrees in other nations, sometimes under the complete control of the country of origin and other times based on partnership between institutions and individuals from the country of origin and the country of delivery. They want to provide non-mobile students with educational options that are comparable to those offered abroad. Numerous terms are used to describe the arrangements, such as "collaborative transnational education," "foreign-based universities," "branch campuses," "franchised programs," and "international program," each of which expresses links and mixtures as well as modes of control vs. cooperation (Knight, 2006; Knight & Mcnamara, 2017; Teichler, 2017).

Table 1. Types of cross-border education activities

Type	Main Forms	Examples	Size
1. People			
Students/trainees	Student mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full study abroad for a foreign degree or qualification - Part of academic partnership for home degree or joint degree - Exchange programmes 	Probably the largest share of cross-border education
Professors/trainers	Academic/trainer mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For professional development - As part of an academic partnership - Employment in a foreign university - To teach in a branch institution abroad 	An old tradition in the education sector, which should grow given the emphasis on mobility of professionals and internationalisation of education more generally
2. Programs			
Educational programmes	Academic partnerships E-learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint course or programme with a foreign institution - E-learning programmes - Selling/franchising a course to a foreign institution 	Academic partnerships represent the largest share of these activities E-learning and franchising are small but rapidly growing activities
3. Institutions			
Universities Training centres Companies	Foreign campuses Foreign investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening of a foreign campus - Buying (part of) a foreign educational institution - Creation of an educational provider abroad 	A trend increasing very quickly from a modest starting point

Source: Adapted from Knight (2003) as cited in Vincent-Lancrin (2004)

Institutions can assure a consistent flow of international students by forming alliances with foreign secondary and higher education institutions, governmental bodies, or other groups. Additionally, several institutions encourage their academics to interact with potential international students when they are on international tours, indicating an increasing reliance on academics to promote recruiting (Beech, 2018).

Institutions can organize alumni trips to other countries as a recruitment event to meet with prospective international students. This will provide an opportunity for the candidate students to meet with the faculty members of the visiting institutions. Academician visits to international conferences can also be used as an opportunity to inspire interest in prospective international students and attract them to the institution. Additionally, institutions can organize academic unification events, specifically inviting graduate prospective international students for recruitment purposes. If these events are too costly or not time-effective, online sessions may be organized to introduce programs to prospective international students. Institutions can also encourage and organize international science projects through faculty members to reach out to secondary education students as potential international students.

Cross-border student and scholar mobility makes it easier to establish global networks, which are crucial for the advancement of academic knowledge as well as, more generally, for the development of national innovation systems and global trade. A high-quality and sufficiently-sized post-secondary education system favors the return of a sufficient number of highly skilled emigrants. Partnerships between local and foreign universities in program and institution mobility may induce positive spillovers and can help improve the quality of local provision (Vincent-Lancrin, 2004). For instance, a partnership between a university in the Germany and a university in Turkiye could result in the transfer of knowledge and technology related to new building materials, leading to the development of new and more efficient durable building materyals. And an example to highly skilled emigrant purpose could be partnership between a university in Malaysia and a college in Morocco could result in the development of a long term training program for semiconductors, leading to the development of a highly skilled workforce about the subject in Morocco.

Partnership directors underscored the importance of designing the program so that both institutions benefit, although the nature of their respective benefits may be quite different. For example, the U.S. institution may gain valuable overseas experience, research opportunities for faculty and students, publications, and possibly talented students for its graduate programs. The overseas university often gains improved curriculum, research methods, opportunities for publication in internationally recognized journals, and a better understanding of and ability to conduct outreach activities, especially support to local development (Dye et al., 2004).

Institutions are eager to join networks that allow them to concentrate on certain topics and obtain different viewpoints on those concerns. Networks also give users exposure to and chances for interaction, particularly with nations and institutions that they might not otherwise come into contact with. They enable institutions to access experts from around the world, examine submissions and assign colleagues as reviewers, benchmark work, and suggest best practices (Hénard et al., 2012). They also make it easier for students to communicate ideas and collaborate on research.

3. Managerial implications of Cross Border Institutional Partnership

Vincent-Lancrin (2004) emphasizes the distinction between the traditional mutual understanding approach versus newer approaches to the international partnership and student mobility matter. Political, cultural, academic, and development aid objectives are all included in the classic mutual approach. Through scholarship and academic exchange programs, it permits and encourages the mobility of both

local and international students and employees, and it supports intellectual collaborations across educational institutions. The three other techniques have a stronger economic focus even if they have the same goals as the first strategy. Two of them mostly involve export strategies. The skilled migration approach prioritizes the hiring of selected international students more than the mutual understanding approach and seeks to draw talented students to work in the host nation's knowledge economy or make its higher education and research sectors more competitive. The revenue-generating strategy combines the goals of the skilled collaboration and

In their research study, Sanders and Wong (2021) utilized the Resource-based Theory (RBT) commonly employed in the business sector to analyze international partnering among various higher education institutions (HEIs). The study explored how HEIs can access knowledge and capabilities, develop their own resources, and gain a competitive advantage by partnering with institutions possessing specific technical, managerial, or intangible resources. RBT suggests that firms collaborate to a) access knowledge and capabilities, b) develop their own resources and c) gain a competitive advantage in the market. Thus, competition and access to resources drive collaboration. According to the theory, partnerships are pursued when they offer access to strategic resources at lower costs, institutional learning, and resulting gains in competitive advantage. Such rationales are often prominent in overseas institutions looking to partner with local providers to enter new markets (Sanders & Wong, 2021).

Hénard et al. (2012) studied institutional partnership under the term network and claim that network typically function well when there is a synergy between practical interests and benefits for day-to-day activities of academics (research and/or education) and the wider policy aims of institutional representatives. Questions to be asked when partnering may follow:

- i. Does the network enable co-operation or does it trigger competition?
- ii. Will partnership be enhanced or will commercialisation be developed?
- iii. Does the network favour exchange or sales?
- iv. How to balance the mutual benefit with self interest in belonging to networks?
- v. Will the joining of the networks foster the institutional capacity building or its brand-building?
- vi. Will the networks increase transparency or could it turn into a new ranking?

In successful examples of developing partnerships between institutions, it is observed that there is an Academic Council that can act independently in addition to the founding team. This is an important factor in preventing dualism. In successful branch campus examples, it is seen that branches that can respond to local needs are more successful. For example, the Fashion University opened by France in various European countries meets a need in those countries. Furthermore, as seen in the example of Qatar, the strategy of complementing deficiencies instead of competing is an important factor in success (Boz et al., 2012).

4. Complexities of Cross-Border Institutional Partnerships: Issues, Challenges, and Resolving Strategies Offered

Teichler (2017) challenges the common assumption that the mainstream trends of internationalization in higher education are widely realized. In contrast to the traditional emphasis on the academic and cultural benefit of higher education's internationality, many observers have noticed a

growing emphasis on "competition" rather than "cooperation" and on the economic and political significance of higher education. Similar to this, many observers note that internationalization policies are becoming more nationalistic or even imperialistic; one expert even created the term "hegemonic internationalization."

Furthermore, one of the most "political" subjects in higher education is undoubtedly international mobility and cooperation. Whether partnerships are more likely to be realized with some nations or less likely to be realized with others, whether discussions and activities focus on developing aid or competition between advanced nations, whether "international understanding" or "knowledge society" are emphasized, whether political efforts to promote "convergence" of higher education play a minor or major role, and whether acceptance of other cultures is viewed as desirable. These become particularly evident during times of crisis and conflicts. For example, due to the ongoing trade and security conflicts between the US and China, academic collaborations between institutions in the two countries are now under heightened scrutiny, resulting in some US universities being mandated to disclose their partnerships with Chinese institutions. Similarly, after the 9/11 crisis, cultural and religious biases caused some institutions in the West to refrain from taking new initiatives for cross-border partnerships with universities in muslim nations. Governments also canceled or limited student visas for students from muslim countries. Convergence could also overshadow cross-border institutional partnerships, shifting the focus from partnering for knowledge and student exchange to partnering for political influence and using it as a form of soft power. For instance, cross border partnering between Russian higher education institutions and corresponding institutions of former Soviet Union countries.

According to the findings of Dye et al. (2004) survey, a small proportion of partnership directors stated that the outcomes of their partnerships fell short of what their institutions or the local government required or expected. The most frequently reported explanation for why planned outputs were not met was a lack of collaborative planning time and inadequate cooperation between the partners in identifying pertinent needs, creating strategies, and defining roles. It appears that a lack of trust and an inability to overcome cultural differences were caused by a lack of mutual cooperation during the planning or execution phase. A number of these collaborations involved institutions or colleges that had never worked together before and lacked the time or resources to hold in-person planning sessions during the creation of the proposal or the initial stages of execution.

Achieving steady growth in the number of international students enrolled is not possible, particularly in the unpredictably globalized environment. Every recruitment technique has its own promises and difficulties, and it produces different results in terms of success. However, schools can improve their foreign student recruiting responsive and effective by putting in place a comprehensive plan focused on technology, collaborations, and research (Choudaha et al., 2013).

5. Conclusion

According to data from OECD in 2022, the number of international students worldwide has surpassed 6 million and is expected to reach 8 million in the near future. Scholars attribute the rise in the number of international students to various factors, including the financial benefits that countries and institutions reap from their presence. Additionally, states have a political motivation to support the

movement as a way of projecting soft power. Finally, international students themselves seek to gain a competitive advantage in the global skilled emigrant market through cross-border education.

In recent years, there has been a decline in the dominance of English-speaking countries in international student recruitment, while emerging countries' institutions have gained a proportional share. Emerging countries like Turkey have taken proactive steps to compete in this market by promoting their higher education. This has been achieved through various measures, including encouraging universities to meet international standards set by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) and fostering internationalization. Moreover, Turkey has established a diaspora presidency in 2011 to coordinate and promote international student mobility as a means of public diplomacy. These efforts have helped Turkey to establish itself as a provider of high-quality education on the global stage, and its institutions are gaining a greater share of the international student market.

Upon review, it is observed that the traditional approach towards attracting foreign students was focused on mutual understanding prior to the 2000s. This approach involved state-supported scholarships, academic projects for knowledge exchange, and intergovernmental higher education protocols to manage international student mobility. However, a profit-oriented approach emerged after 2000 due to intense competition in the international student market. This approach seeks to go beyond traditional functions and maximize financial benefits by encouraging higher education institutions and their alumni to independently seek international partnerships and by promoting international student mobility through better collaboration within global networks.

By collaborating with other institutions around the world, universities can develop institutional standards, gain valuable insights into practices from other regions, and promote innovation and knowledge transfer. In addition, cross-border institutional partnerships in higher education offer significant training opportunities for faculty members and alumni, enabling them to achieve higher self-development goals through collaborations with other institutions. As a result, when international students choose universities for mobilization, they often consider the level and intensity of these cross-border partnerships as a valuable brand value.

While cross-border institutional partnerships in higher education have numerous benefits, they also face challenges. One such challenge is the possibility of one-sided demands from dominating institutions, leading to partnerships that provide unilateral benefits and prioritize competition over solidarity. To tackle the challenges faced by cross-border institutional partnerships in higher education and enhance student mobility, it is crucial to choose suitable partners and set shared goals that adhere to the principle of reciprocity. Partnerships must be planned well and established with trust-based optimization for both institutions. Cultural differences and sensitivities should be taken into account when setting up cross border franchise branch campuses.

In order to establish fruitful cross-border collaborations in higher education, it is crucial to be aware of potential power disparities and take steps to rectify them. This requires promoting open communication, fostering collaboration, and prioritizing mutually beneficial outcomes for all parties involved. Ultimately, sustainable partnerships are those that are established on a foundation of trust and reciprocity, with a shared understanding of goals and a commitment to creating positive outcomes for all involved.

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