

The Effect of Transnational Education on Mainstream Internationalisation at the Home Campus

A case of Universities' Foreign Campuses Contributing to the Home Campus Internationalisation Strategy

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Introduction

This paper aims at looking at how internationalization and globalization changes the internal structure of business schools in Europe with particular reference to what is known as academic franchising. The internationalization of business and management education has, for a long time, been accepted as an important and necessary element to provide young graduates with the necessary experience.

International academic franchises have grown considerably over the past few decades to create an international experience for students. At the outset the model was simple – a transfer of academic expertise from franchisor to franchisee in return for financial gain for the franchisor.

However, there appears to be a new emerging model where there seems to be much more benefits that can be perceived locally by both franchisor and franchisee and that the home campus which franchises its academic programmes to foreign partners may benefit from important resources to internationalise its home campus.

Literature review

Since the 1990's international activities, particularly in British universities, have increased through international partnerships (Ayoubi et al., 2007) of which international academic franchising can be considered a part. The reasons for such developments are numerous and can be linked to changes in government policy concerning education, the need to undertake international collaborative research or the development of student and staff mobility (Rudzki, 2000). There is also a need to respond to the globalisation of the corporate world by providing it with well qualified employees with an international perspective instilled during their course of study (Carroll, 1993). Another reason, but by no means less important is that during a time of global economic difficulty, academic franchises can be important sources of funding for the franchisor. Educational organisations are constantly under threat of diminishing budgets and reduction of resources managers need to focus on the bottom line (Barb et al. 2005; Ulhoi, 2005) and the development of international activities can seem attractive. Indeed, the global market for international students has become highly competitive over the past 10 years (Mazzarol et Soutar, 2008).

There is therefore an argument for strategic alliances to be used to bring together complementary skills, to produce competitive advantage through product differentiation and

lowering of costs. Each partner concentrates on parts of the value chain where they are the most competent thus highlighting strengths and reducing weaknesses. Hamel et Doz, (1998) and later Romano and Vinelli (2001) argued that organised and coordinated networks sustain inter-firm collaboration. This in turn, contributes to the competitiveness of the network members, enhancing the companies' capabilities in order to gain access to other companies' resources (Kanter 1994). The use of networking to acquire resources is not confined to large multinational companies but involves all industries within manufacturing, retailing and services industries (Christopher, 1992: Blankenburg et al., 1995). Despite the fact that the above comments were made for the corporate world, they are applicable to institutions of higher education which sell education as a service.

Reflecting on Maringe's (2009) work, the term academic franchise in this paper is used to describe the activity of exporting a programme of one university in one country to another university or institution of higher education in another country. This is defined as:-

“...an international activity where a university or institution of higher education enters into a form of partnership with another institution of higher education in different country in order to deliver, wholly or partially, a specific academic programme to students of that country which leads to an academic award of the franchisor university”.

This activity may be undertaken wholly or partially on the franchisee campus and at any level of study i.e. undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Whilst it is clear that some literature on academic franchises has proliferated (primarily concentrating on the structure and forms of partnerships), little research has been actually carried out on the actual benefits and resources obtained by institutions of higher education. Institutions are looking to gain more benefits from their international activities and have begun to develop strategic plans and develop partnerships which can bring them more benefits and resources. Since academic franchising is part of the international portfolio, it would therefore seem important to consider the development of academic franchising within this context of gaining resources and benefits.

Methodology

Since the aim of this research is to examine the benefits which make them desirable a case study approach was adopted (Yin, 2009). Data from four different franchises in Bulgaria, China, and Morocco was collected via semi-structured interviews. All franchises were in the business and management field (including hospitality management) at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. These franchises were validated and administered by two HEIs (one in France, the other in the United Kingdom). The sample institutions were chosen for pragmatic reasons as one of the authors had been involved in academic franchising in both institutions. This prior contact enabled a level of access and trust which might not have been available in other academic franchises and an auto-ethnographic approach often supports increased depth in qualitative research.

Using a similar approach and for similar reasons as in case one in Sobiah et al. (2011), a limited but expert population to sample from was identified and subsequently analysed using a modified Delphi technique to develop the semi-structured interview topics.

The final themes which were discussed in all of the interviews included the following topics:

- The history of the Franchise
- The programme management
- The programme delivery
- The outcomes and results
- The local market and environment

A total of four semi-structured interviews were then carried out with the persons directly responsible for the franchise on the franchised campus and who were also accountable to the franchisor. This included the third author who was formally interviewed. In all cases, the interviews took place after the successful opening of the franchise. To achieve further depth and validity through a multi-layered perspective approach one interview was also held in each of the two franchisor institutions with a senior member of their collaborative partnership team.

Due to the international context of the research it was necessary to conduct the interviews in either English or French. When data was collected in French, it was translated into English by one of the authors who is fluent in both languages. This allowed for in-depth analysis to be carried out by the other participating researchers.

Once the data was collected and transcribed, the information was analysed and coded to identify the possibility of any recurring benefits mentioned by the participants.

Results

Closely linked to the rationales for setting up academic franchises was the idea of getting a benefit from the franchises. If institutions enter into such partnerships they are not only driven by external forces they also believe they will gain some extra benefit that they do not yet process, which again like will help them achieve sustainability. This idea of gaining benefits is a driving force like the external forces but this time the force driving forward comes from the inside of the institution.

Such benefits obtained were:

- Increased student numbers (including international students)
- Financial Revenue
- Change agent
- Internationalisation
- Prestige
- Quality enhancement and staff development

And thus the following model can be produced:

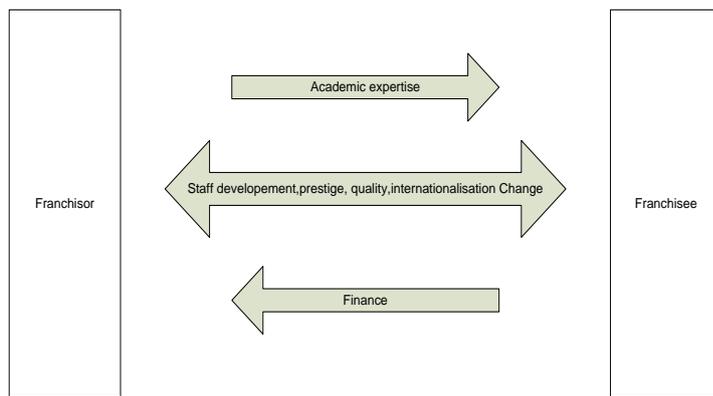


Fig 1 – A New Model for Academic Franchising showing the flow of Benefits

The model illustrates that contrary to former ideas and models of academic franchising there is a greater flow of benefits both to and from each partner and that these benefits can but are certainly not limited to internationalisation.

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