Transnational higher education: offshore campuses in the Middle East

Cynthia Miller-Idriss[a]; Elizabeth Hanauer[a]

[a] Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University, New York, USA

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Cynthia Miller-Idriss* and Elizabeth Hanauer

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, New York University, New York, USA

This paper maps the landscape of transnational higher education in the Middle East, focusing in particular on the recent expansion of satellite, branch, and offshore educational institutions and programs that foreign institutions have set up in the region. Of the estimated 100 branch campuses currently operating worldwide, over one-third are in the Arab region and the majority have opened within the last decade; two dozen additional transnational programs and universities exist in the region as well. Very little research has been conducted on these new institutions, however, raising many questions for scholars in education. This paper traces reasons for the rapid growth of the transnational higher education model in the Arab states and discusses the explanatory power for this phenomenon of the two major prevailing theories in comparative and international education. We argue that neither neoinstitutional theories about global norm diffusion nor culturalist theories about the local politics of educational borrowing and transfer sufficiently explain this phenomenon, and call instead for a regional approach. We also raise questions for further inquiry.

Introduction

Since their inception, universities across the globe have operated relatively autonomously within individual nation-states. There have been historical patterns of 'borrowing' between universities – including the imitation and modelling of foreign university structures, curriculum, teaching practices, or other approaches – across national and continental borders. Early American universities were created in the image of English colleges like Cambridge and Oxford (Rudolph 1990; Thelen 2004), for example, while the later development of the research university copied the German research model (Rudolph 1990). In the Middle East, the American University of Cairo, Beirut, and others were created in the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century as mirror images of American-style liberal arts education. However, such models were typically absorbed into existing university frameworks and did not fundamentally alter the nature of higher education within any given nation-state. To the extent that university partnerships existed across national borders, they were typically fostered or financed by international organisations, private foundations, or development aid. Other programmes which brought individual scholars together across borders, such as the Fulbright exchange programmes, did not extend into more sustained partnerships at the university level.

As the Internet age dawned, the pace and diversity of internationalisation initiatives expanded rapidly. Increasingly, higher education became 'cross-border' in

*Corresponding author. Email: cmi1@nyu.edu

nature, meaning, as UNESCO and the OECD explain, that teachers, students, institutions, or course materials 'cross national jurisdictional borders'.[1] While some cross-border education takes place through study abroad and on-line exchange programmes,[2] a newer form of cross-border education has developed in which fully-functioning campuses and programmes are established in overseas locations quite remote from their host institutions. Of the estimated 100 such campuses and programmes currently operating world-wide (McBurnie and Ziguras 2007, 28), over one third are in the Arab region and the majority have opened within the last decade; two dozen additional transnational programmes and universities exist in the region as well. This paper focuses on the recent explosion of these transnational offshore educational programmes and institutions in the Middle East.

Very little is known about this phenomenon (see Willoughby 2008). As Rumbley and Altbach (2007, 1) argue, '[T]here is no comprehensive analysis of this theme anywhere and no reliable statistics concerning the extent of the phenomenon' (also see IIE Open Doors 2007, 31). This paper addresses this gap in the literature and attempts to establish baseline definitions, a description of trends, and an analysis of the phenomenon within the theoretical frameworks of neoinstitutionalism and educational transfer. We call for a regional approach, arguing that the classic debate between global and local explanations for educational reforms does not do justice to the regional nature of the transnational offshore educational phenomenon in the Middle East today.

Data and methods

The primary methodology for this paper was document- and media-based analysis. We reviewed publicly-available information from satellite and branch campuses and programmes in the Arab region, including websites, mission statements, presidential and royal political speeches, and promotional videos. We also examined statistical data available from UNESCO and the Institute of International Education (IIE), and observed public sessions on satellite campuses and education in the Middle East in New York and Washington, DC. By Arab region, we refer to the accredited members of the League of Arab States: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, The United Arab Emirates and Yemen.[3] This paper primarily focuses on Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The institutions we include in this analysis were located through references in press, trade and scholarly journals, policy reports, and web searches. Our figures are based on publicly available data as of December 2009 (also see Willoughby 2008). We do not include information on sites that are in progress or still in the negotiation phase, although several are anticipated to be opening in the coming years, including the University of Nevada, Las Vegas – Ras al Khaimah in the UAE and The Egyptian–Chinese University/Confucius Institute in Egypt. Data were collected for all 57 institutions and programmes in the region on the following variables: Host Country and City, Foreign Affiliate Country, Foreign Affiliate Institution, Local Affiliate (Institution or Conglomerate such as Education City), Primary Academic Focus, Degrees Offered and Year Opened. Additional research was conducted on the institutions' scope and governance systems in order to create a typology of institutions in the region and classify each one accordingly (see Table 1 and Appendix A).

Table 1. Offshore institutions and programmes: typology and criteria.[a]

Type	Criteria	Examples	Existing sites
Replica campus	• Full-scale research university and liberal arts and science college (offers both undergraduate & graduate programmes and research institutes) set up abroad • Governed through foreign affiliate institution • Grants foreign affiliate institution degrees • Teaches foreign affiliate institution curricula • Primarily foreign affiliate institution faculty	NYU Abu Dhabi	1
Branch campus	• Physical branch (one arm) of foreign affiliate institution set up abroad • Specialised in one or a few academic or professional fields • Governed through foreign affiliate institution • Grants foreign affiliate institution degrees • Uses foreign affiliate institution curricula • Primarily foreign affiliate institution faculty	Cornell Medical, Northwestern Journalism, Georgetown Foreign Service	34
Old turnkey–foreign style independent institutions	• Based on foreign model of higher education • Originally founded with foreign affiliation or by foreign individuals but no longer affiliated • Accredited in foreign affiliate country – grants degrees recognised in that country	AUC, AUB	2
New turnkey–foreign style independent (affiliated) institutions	• Based on the foreign model of higher education • Affiliated with or founded in collaboration or consultation with foreign institutions • Accredited (or in the process) in the foreign affiliate country – grants degrees recognised in that country	American University of Sharjah, American University of Kuwait (MOU w/ Dartmouth)	9
Offshore/transnational programmes	• Foreign degree or study programmes offered in collaboration with host country institution • Uses foreign affiliate institution curricula • Primarily foreign affiliate institution faculty • Physically located at host institution	DePaul Business School & Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance	6

Table 1. (*Continued*).

Type	Criteria	Examples	Existing sites
Foreign style	• Independent institutions modelled on and/or presented as a foreign system but not affiliated in any way with foreign institutions	American University in Dubai	2
Virtual branch campus	• Branch of an online/virtual university • Physical presence is usually an office	University of Phoenix	3

Note: [a] This typology and criteria are based on data from 57 institutions for which we currently have a website and therefore sufficient information (also see Willoughby 2008).

Definitions

There is little agreement on definitions in existing research on the transnational educational phenomenon. Terms are used sloppily and synonymously throughout the literature. We therefore develop here a typology and criteria for each category (see Table 1) as a first attempt to clarify terms and encourage more specificity in the use of these various terms. It is worth noting that because the largest single grouping (40%) of the transnational arrangements in the region are American-affiliated, the criteria we develop here are very much based on trends in the American university presence/model in the region. Further research will address how models differ across foreign-affiliated institutions.

In addition to the definitions discussed below related to the typology of institutions and programmes being created in the Middle East, we use the term *foreign affiliate university/institution* to refer to the 'sending' institution – i.e. the foreign universities who are establishing their branch campuses or programmes in the Middle East. We use the term *host university/institution* or *host country* to refer to the 'receiving' institution or country in the Middle East.

As Table 1 explains, there are at least seven categories of institutions and programmes that can be categorised as transnational educational relationships. Of the 57 such arrangements we studied in the Middle East, over half (34) are categorised as *branch campuses*, which means that they are an extension (one arm or 'branch') of a foreign affiliate institution set up in a separate geographic location.[4] Campuses are self-contained and fully-functioning, but the 'home' university retains full autonomy to run the satellite campus. Local administrators, for example, are employees of the foreign affiliate university. Students are primarily local (McBurnie and Ziguras 2007, 28). Such branch campuses typically specialise in a limited number of academic or professional fields. They are governed through the foreign affiliate institution, use foreign affiliate institution policies and curricula, primarily use foreign affiliate institution faculty, and grant foreign affiliate institution degrees. The terms *satellite campus* and *offshore campus* are synonymous with branch campus.

There is currently only one *replica campus* in the region (New York University Abu Dhabi), which opened in the fall of 2010. A replica campus is a full-scale research university and liberal arts and science college, offering both undergraduate and graduate programmes and research institutes, which is set up abroad. It is governed entirely through the foreign affiliate institution, uses foreign affiliate institution faculty, teaches foreign affiliate institution curricula, and grants foreign affiliate institution degrees. It is designed to fully replicate the educational experience of the foreign affiliate campus, including, to some extent, in non-academic arenas such as student dormitories, clubs, and activities. In the case of NYU Abu Dhabi, the administrative vision is that the replica campus will be an equal to its Washington Square peer (Gravois 2009a, 2009b).

Old and *new turnkey foreign-style institutions* are universities which are founded in affiliation or consultation with a foreign affiliate institution. The university is typically developed by or in consultation with an outside contractor (i.e. a foreign university), but once developed, the university is turned over to local authorities to administer. They are designed to follow a foreign model of higher education and are accredited in the foreign affiliate country (or are in the process of achieving accreditation). They grant degrees that are recognised in the foreign affiliate institution's country. There are two old turnkey institutions in the region (the American University

of Beirut and the American University of Cairo); there are nine new turnkey institutions in the region (examples include the American University of Sharjah and the American University of Kuwait).

Offshore transnational programmes are foreign degree or study programmes offered in collaboration with a host country institution. Such programmes may be housed in branch or satellite campuses but may also be integrated into local universities and technical institutes. There are six such programmes currently operating in the region. They primarily use foreign affiliate institution faculty, use foreign affiliate institution curricula, and are physically located at the host institution, but are not autonomous campuses or institutions. An example is the DePaul Business School and Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance.

Foreign-style institutions are independent institutions that are modelled after and/or presented as a foreign system but are not affiliated in any way with foreign institutions. There are many of these mostly new institutions in the region; an example is the American University in Dubai.

Finally, there are at least three *virtual branch campuses* currently operating in the Middle East. These campuses are branches of an online/virtual university, and their physical presence is usually limited to an office. An example is the University of Phoenix.

Trends

There are no reliable data on the total number of satellite, offshore, and branch universities and programmes operating throughout the world, however it is apparent that a large number of these are located in the Middle East (see Table 2).

At least a third of existing branch campuses (34 of approximately 100 worldwide) are located in the Middle East, and there are an additional 23 institutions or programmes in the Middle East region that fall under the category of transnational educational arrangements, such as turnkey institutions or replica offshore institutions. Thus the total number of institutions or programmes we consider under the heading 'transnational' is 57.

Table 2.   Geographic distribution of offshore institutions by host country.[a]

Host country	Number of foreign institutions/programmes	%
Bahrain	2	4
Egypt	4	7
Jordan	2	4
Kuwait	4	7
Lebanon	1	2
Qatar	8	14
Saudi Arabia	1	2
UAE	35	61
Total (*N*)	57	

Note: [a] *N* is based on the number of institutions and programmes (all types) recorded to date. They are at various stages of development and may represent additional typologies that we have not yet been able to identify.

Table 3.   Geographic distribution of offshore institutions by foreign affiliate country.

Foreign affiliate country	Number of offshore institutions/programmes	%
Australia	5	9
Belgium	1	2
Canada	3	5
France	2	4
Germany	1	2
India	5	9
Iran	1	2
Multiple	1	2
Pakistan	1	2
Republic of Seychelles	1	2
Russia	1	2
Singapore	2	4
Sri Lanka	1	2
Syria	1	2
United Kingdom	5	9
USA	23	40
No affiliate	3	5
Total (*N*)	57	100

Of these 57 institutions and programmes, 50 are based in the Persian Gulf; 61% are located in the United Arab Emirates, with an additional 14% in Qatar and 7% in Egypt. The remaining institutions are spread between Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. The United States is home to nearly half (40%, or 23 institutions) of the foreign affiliate universities in the Middle East. The remaining foreign affiliate universities are spread out across an additional 10 countries (see Table 3).

Transnational higher education is a very recent phenomenon in the Middle East, and throughout the world. At least 60% of these institutions have opened since the year 2000 (see Table 4).

At most institutions, degree programmes are heavily focused on professional occupations, including business, engineering, technology, and communications, although several universities also offer liberal arts programmes. Over half of the institutions and programmes focus on business, with an additional 25% focusing on information technology. In general, branch campuses tend to offer professional and occupational-type training, while the old- and new-style turnkey universities and the single replica offshore campus focus more on liberal arts training (see Table 5).

The global and the local: cultural diffusion and cultural borrowing

Offshore educational institutions sit at the intersection of two competing theories of transnational education: first, world culture theorists (also called neoinstitutionalists), who help to explain what we call here *cultural diffusion*, and second, theorists of educational borrowing and transfer (also called culturalists), who help to explain what we call *cultural borrowing*.

Table 4.   Opening year of transnational institutions and programmes in the Middle East.

Year opened	Number of institutions/programmes	%
1866	1	2
1919	1	2
1990	1	2
1993	1	2
1995	1	2
1997	1	2
1999	1	2
2000	1	2
2001	3	5
2002	2	4
2003	5	9
2004	3	5
2005	3	5
2006	7	12
2007	4	7
2008	6	11
2009	1	2
No data	15	26
Total (N)	57	

Cultural diffusion and globalisation

World culture theorists posit a growing convergence of educational systems, imagining a world in which schools, and cultures, are gradually moving toward a single uniform model (Anderson-Levitt 2003, 1; Spring 2009, 8). The phenomenon of transnational offshore educational institutions can thus be understood as part of a broader trend toward universalisation (Scholte 2005, 57), in which certain technologies, behaviours, or patterns spread to every part of the world. In this line of thought, the same pattern

Table 5.   Academic focal areas of branch and offshore institutions and programmes.

Primary academic programmes/focus	Number of institutions/programmes	%[a]
Business (including Real Estate & HR)	30	53
Liberal Arts	9	16
Information Technology	15	26
Health Sciences	5	9
Engineering	12	21
Science	3	5
Fashion/Design	6	11
Non-degree professional programmes	3	5
No data	3	5
Total (N)	57	

Note: [a] Percentages total more than 100% because institutions often have more than one focus area (for example, Business and Information Technology).

that is true for the spread of technology or behaviour is also true for the convergence of institutional systems and formal institutions. Thus we see the emergence of a near universal set of educational processes being adopted by educational systems across the globe – what Carnoy and Rhoten (2002, 2) call the 'larger ideological package' of decentralisation, privatisation, choice, accountability, testing, and assessment.

This increasing standardisation of educational reforms across borders – from the expansion of mass education to decentralisation – is attributed to the emergence of a 'world cultural order' (Meyer et al. 1997, 152–153) which creates a global flow of ideas from which national policymakers select reform ideas (Spring 2009, 13). Bennett (1991, 216) argues that 'as societies adopt a progressively more industrial infrastructure, certain determinate processes are set in motion which tend over time to shape social structures, political processes and public policies in the same mould'. In Bennett's understanding, the emergence of transnational offshore educational institutions would be seen as resulting from a combination of the emulation of foreign models of higher education; the networking of a transnational elite; the increasing recognition of the need for cooperation between transnational partners; and the penetration and global reach of multinational business or the world economy which, in turn, drives the privatisation of higher education around the world. In such a view, independently-operating state policymakers (in this case, in the Middle East) interact with or aim to emulate global elite transnational partners (in this case, at higher educational institutions which are overwhelmingly in the West) in response to pressure emerging from the global world economy.

Furthermore, theorists of globalisation see phenomena like transnational offshore educational institutions as a product of broader patterns in globalisation's impact on patterns of deterritoralisation, economic liberalisation, internationalisation, and Westernisation (see Scholte 2000, 2005). First, increasing deterritorialisation, or the 'disembedding of social, economic and political relations from their local–territorial preconditions' (Brenner 1999, 431), is reflected in increasing distance learning programmes and the use of virtual student exchanges, libraries, and schools. Transnational offshore educational institutions often rely heavily on distance learning programming, as faculty at the foreign home institution may lecture from their home base in New York, for example, through the use of interactive videoconferencing with their students overseas. Second, the drive to increase the educational and skill level of domestic populations can be understood in part as a reaction to the pressures of economic liberalisation and globalisation (see Scholte 2005, 56), as governments struggle to attract foreign capital and improve the educational levels of their skill forces (Carnoy and Rhoten 2002, 5).

Third, such institutions may be understood as part of a broader pattern of internationalisation in higher education, as evidenced by increasing student exchange and study abroad programming as well as the push for greater transparency and transferability of degrees across countries. And finally, some would argue that transnational offshore educational institutions should be understood as part of the Westernisation or modernisation aspect of globalisation, as local cultures and traditions are replaced by Western or modern social structures (Scholte 2005, 58).[5] Of primary concern to many local citizens in the Persian Gulf, for example, are issues of homogenisation and Westernisation. The replacement of Arabic instruction with English-language instruction, the reduction or replacement of religious courses and the introduction of new fields of study which may threaten traditional local beliefs are but a few examples. Faculty, mostly recruited from overseas, are largely non-Muslim. Many have had little experience in majority Muslim societies and may have received little or no cultural sensitivity training about

the region or its local, religious, and cultural norms and values. Thus many speak of a fear of 'cultural imperialism' (Tomlinson 1991) as a result of the imported models and structures.

The explanatory power of neoinstitutional and globalisation theories for why Western satellite higher education institutions have emerged as a popular reform strategy within foreign nation-states rests on how and why norms are diffused globally. While this model sheds some light on the phenomenon, there is no place within such a framework for the role of regions or regional influences on local state actors' decision-making practices. These theories lack an adequate explanation for the rapid acceleration in the diffusion of these sets of reform models within particular regions, such as the Middle East, or for the differential rates of adoption of the model within further sub-regions, such as the Persian Gulf. They also do not offer very powerful explanations for the behaviour of local actors who do not adopt global norms – such as why offshore campuses have been far more popular in some parts of the Arab world than in others. The United Arab Emirates alone houses 61% of the transnational educational arrangements in the Middle East region, for example (see Table 3). Explanations for how norms and practices are diffused, in other words, do not necessarily explain how and why they are received, appropriated, rejected, or transformed within new, local settings – in particular, in this case, within regions. In order to better understand the puzzle of why this model has prevailed and assumed such a dominant role in educational reform efforts in the Middle East and Persian Gulf over the past decade, local cultural factors must be taken into account.

Cultural borrowing and localisation

The on-the-ground rationales and actions of local actors are the subject of theoretical scholarship in educational borrowing and transfer, which challenges the neoinstitutionalist use of globalisation as a single explanatory framework in examining transnational education (Steiner-Khamsi 2004). Instead, scholars of educational borrowing and transfer rely on cultural explanations, drawing attention to local motivations and the ways in which local actors appropriate, modify, resist, reject, or transform reform ideas – globally-derived or not – as they are implemented in local settings (Steiner-Khamsi 2004, 5). As Anderson-Levitt (2003, 17) argues, we must pay attention to 'what happens on the ground in particular ministries of education, provincial centers, and local classrooms'. Such culturalists study the local practices and interactions among policymakers, provincial leaders, school principals, administrators, and teachers. By focusing on local motivations, culturalists can explain *how* models are selected.

Such scholars argue not only that educational borrowing can only be understood through a careful analysis of local context (Steiner-Khamsi and Quist 2000; Phillips and Ochs 2003; Schriewer 2003; Steiner-Khamsi 2004), but also that it is the local context of both the '"home" and "target" countries' that must be scrutinised (Phillips and Ochs 2003, 457). Drawing from Luhmann's theory of self-referential social systems, for example, Schriewer (2003) highlights the concept of 'externalisation' in education theory building, specifically in relation to the process of educational transfer. Externalisation, which 'stresses the idiosyncrasy of meaning in specific nations, societies, or civilizations …' (Schriewer and Martinez, cited in Steiner-Khamsi 2004, 33) is one way of honing in on the local context, the socio-cultural, historical and political factors that influence decisions to borrow or lend a particular education policy or model cross-nationally.

In his overview of studies on policy attraction in education, Phillips (2006, 556) argues that a few exceptions aside, 'wholesale adoption of foreign models in education does not often happen'. Therefore the sudden growth of Western and American branch universities in the Arab world at the start of the twenty-first century presents an unusual and puzzling situation. Why have these collaborative projects taken root?

From the Western side, two trends coalesced to make this moment a particularly ripe one for the emergence of sustained transnational partnerships in higher education with the Arab world. First, the parochial orientation of most Western universities had gradually given way to a general desire to internationalise, whether through increasing study abroad opportunities for students, recruiting higher numbers of foreign students, or improving foreign language training.[6] Second, the increasing costs of administering higher education – particularly in the United States – had led university administrators to actively seek large private donors to provide unrestricted endowment funds. This need created a strong interest on the part of American and Western administrators in forging higher education partnerships in the Middle East – especially the Persian Gulf, where local rulers were able to pay tens of millions of dollars in administrative fees and donations to foreign universities. Such donations are in addition to the substantial operating costs of building and administering offshore institutions, which can stretch into the hundreds of millions of dollars. Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar's operating expenses in the first 10 years, for example, are estimated at $750 million.[7] Thus regional wealth, derived from the region's natural resources (oil and natural gas), has played a significant role in explaining why this particular corner of the world adopted this particular reform strategy at this moment in time.

In their study of another 'transfer action', that of the American Hampton–Tuskegee model of vocational education for African Americans to colonial Ghana to be used by the British to educate local blacks, Steiner-Khamsi and Quist (2000, 275) examine the political contexts of both the United States and colonial Ghana and argue that 'there is much to gain from analyzing the reasons policy makers view the import of a global concept […] as a solution to local problems'. However, there is no current research tracing specific local political reasons for the importation of American higher education institutions, nor are there any existing academic accounts of the political motivations for American and other Western institutions to expand to this region at this point in time.

Indeed, scholars of educational borrowing and transfer have not yet addressed the phenomenon of transnational offshore education. Most of the growing literature on educational borrowing, lending and transfer focuses on primary and secondary education in developing countries, such as the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education in South Africa (Spreen, cited in Steiner-Khamsi 2004) or on transfer within one region, such as British policy makers' interest in the German education system (Phillips and Ochs 2003; Phillips, cited in Steiner-Khamsi 2004; Phillips 2006). Local, culturally-focused scholarship has been focused almost exclusively on single national reform efforts, with little to no attention to broader, regional phenomena. Even less has been written about these phenomena at the tertiary level of education, and virtually nothing has been written on the process of educational borrowing in the Middle East region. To date, there have been no localised culturalist accounts of the transnational offshore educational phenomenon.

In sum, theories of cultural borrowing can help to explain local motivations for individual state actors to adopt particular reform strategies, while theories of cultural diffusion help to explain global patterns of norm diffusion that reveal how local

actions may be part of broader global trends and convergences. Neither theory, however, adequately explains why a *regional* pattern of reform has emerged in the Middle East, and especially in the Persian Gulf region. In part this is because of the serious dearth of scholarship that attends to local motivations in the region. Even if there were local culturalist accounts from within any given country in the Middle East, however, we argue that culturalists' local emphasis cannot fully explain the uniformity of the approach by so many different countries in the region. Thus we suggest that an intersection of the two approaches – the local emphasis of the culturalists and the global emphasis of the neoinstitutionalists – could be combined in a regional theoretical framework that could explain both the startling uniformity of the offshore transnational educational phenomenon in the Middle East and the rapidity with which it has expanded throughout the region.

Regionality and transnationalism in the Persian Gulf

In the following section, we suggest that there are four explanations for why such a flurry of identical educational reforms – namely, the rapid establishment of transnational offshore higher education institutions – has taken place in the Middle East. Because 50 of the 57 offshore institutions and programmes in the Middle East Region are based in the Persian Gulf, we focus our analysis on the Gulf region. Each of our four explanations – which relate to the role of regional identity and to economic, educational, and political transformations – hinges on *regional* trends. We thus conclude that a regional theoretical framework is necessary for understanding the phenomenon of transnational offshore education in the Middle East and suggest that any analysis of these phenomena needs to attend to the role and importance of regions (Brenner 1999; Paasi 2002).

Regional identity in the Persian Gulf

The rapid spread of the offshore educational model across the Persian Gulf region may be partly explained by the region's historic cultural, political, and tribal interconnections. The Persian Gulf states – Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates – have deep historical interconnections and interrelations. Politically the states are all rooted in 'family-based fiefdoms which have over a long period of time evolved into independent states' (Ehteshami 2003, 55). Common tribal ancestral traditions and Islam have combined to create a distinct regional culture, referred to as Gulf Arab culture (Weiffen 2008, 2587), which is expressed through a common regional dialect (Gulf Arabic), similar patterns of dress and food, and other cultural commonalities. Economically the states are linked through the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a trade association for the Gulf Arab states (Ehteshami 2003). They share a similar economic backbone of natural resources (oil and natural gas). Political changes in one Gulf state have a tendency to create a '"bandwagon" effect … as the Gulf emirates emulate one another, each adopting some of the features of the others' participatory mechanisms' (Ehteshami 2003, 64). Thus some of the similarities in higher education reform strategies across the region may be attributable to a common regional identity (Paasi 2002) and a tendency for each state to pay close attention to, and emulate, what its peers in the region are doing.

Regional economic and demographic transformations

Economic and demographic transformations in the region offer a second partial explanation for why the Gulf states have pursued the offshore transnational educational model. We suggest that the phenomenon can be understood in part due to a regional shift to post-Fordist ways of organising economic-political power (Harvey 1990). The post-Fordist era is characterised by flexible labour processes, markets, and patterns of consumption and by 'time–space compression', in which 'the time horizons of both private and public decision-making have shrunk, while satellite communication and declining transport costs have made it increasingly possible to spread those decisions immediately over an ever wider and variegated space' (Harvey 1990, 147).

In an era characterised by post-Fordism, training and educational needs shift considerably, away from rote learning and fixed curricula toward an emphasis on learning-by-doing and on-the-job learning. Critical thinking skills, flexibility, and creativity are more highly valued on the labour market than physical strength and other non-technical skills during the shift away from reliance on natural resources and toward an emphasis on human capital.

The emphasis on human capital has been evident on a regional level in the Persian Gulf in several ways. First, regional instability over the past two decades led to a push for improved domestic human capital in order to make the region both competitive in the global economy and less dependent on foreign and regional alliances for security.[8] Second, demographic trends in the broader Middle East region have forced an emphasis on human capital improvement. Almost 65% of the population in the Middle East is under the age of 30;[9] one in every three people in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region is between the ages of 10 and 24.[10] Youth in the MENA region, however, also have the lowest employment rate in the world. Some 20–40% of youth in the region are unemployed, which is double the average rate for the rest of the world.[11] The reason for this high rate of youth employment stems in part from a skills mismatch. The outputs of the educational system, in other words, are not matching countries' and economies' needs.

There is also a high dependency, particularly in the Persian Gulf, on an ex-patriot labour force. Most of the new foreign institutions offer specialised degree programmes in fields such as business, IT and health sciences. They are therefore offering technical skills which are high in demand, but so far lacking in most university graduates in the region. Finally, to compound the problem, the Arab world is faced with an eventual decline in what are currently substantial natural resources (oil and gas reserves). The Persian Gulf currently holds over 40% of the world's total reserves of natural gas, for example, with Qatar and the United Arab Emirates alone accounting for 18% of the world's liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipments.[12] But even the large natural gas fields in the region are ultimately a finite resource, and alternative bases for local economies need to be developed. Qatar's oil reserves, for example, will run out at current production rates in about 14 years.[13] Thus there is a pressing need to focus on human capital and the development of human capital – although it is not yet clear that providing an education in professional fields (such as information technology or business) will alleviate unemployment in the region.

While administrative policy decisions are still made at the state or national level, then, it is clear that the driving forces behind much of the motivation for those decisions is regional, due in part to the region's common struggle with the imminent loss of its natural resources and the concomitant need to equip citizens with the

skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a post-Fordist era labour market (see Harvey 1990).

Regional inadequacies in higher education

The third major regional trend that partially explains the phenomenon of transnational offshore educational institutions is rooted in the systems of higher education throughout the Arab world and in the Persian Gulf in particular. Traditionally, the Arab higher education landscape has been dominated by large, public universities that prepare graduates for high-status, stable public sector jobs. There is an acknowledged problem with the poor quality of many institutions, and their ability to prepare the region's growing youth population for the twenty-first century knowledge economy and work force has been called into question, primarily due to the fact that future employment projections indicate that most jobs will be in the private sector. The Brookings Institution (Dhillon 2008) finds that as students in the region continue to enrol primarily in traditional social science and humanities programmes, which they view as the best route towards public sector employment, they graduate without the skills necessary for private sector employment. A World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/ The World Bank 2008, 3) report on education reform in the Middle East and North Africa reiterates this point, suggesting that countries need to work on 'closing the gap between the supply of educated individuals and labor demand'. More specifically the report finds that,

> The combination of free education at the secondary and higher levels and a policy of guaranteed employment in the public sector has had negative side effects: a demand for higher education that does not correspond to real economic needs and a lowering of demand for technical education because of the nontechnical nature of guaranteed jobs in government. (2008, 14)

The higher education system more generally, throughout the region, is challenged by a high degree of centralisation, a lack of incentives for improvement, and limited mechanisms for reform or for evaluating reforms (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2008). There are also significant problems with 'brain drain' – there is no local capacity for training in some fields, which exacerbates brain drain.

In some places, the development of satellite and branch campuses has gone hand-in-hand with comprehensive reform of higher education more generally (e.g. in Qatar). For the most part, then, satellite campuses are therefore not replacing local higher educational institutions, but rather appear to be offering specialised professional degrees that have not been offered in existing higher education institutions in the region. The primary exception is for liberal arts programmes, which are aimed at undergraduates and which do exist in direct competition to existing university programmes.

Even where offshore university programmes do not overlap (and thus compete) with local offerings, however, transnational offshore higher educational institutions may provide direct competition to local universities in other ways.[14] Because they can pay higher salaries than local institutions, there is a risk that they would be able to attract the most qualified and talented students, faculty and administrative staff from across the region (although most faculty are recruited from overseas).[15]

It is also significant that many offshore transnational educational institutions in the Persian Gulf recruit students not only locally but regionally. Students in Education

City in Doha, for example, are not only Qatari, but rather come from throughout the Arab region as well as, to a lesser extent, from elsewhere in the world.

Regional political and cultural issues

The final significant regional trend that may offer a partial explanation for the rapid adoption of transnational offshore educational institutions in the Middle East region relates to broader political liberalisation taking place throughout the region over the past 15 years. In the Persian Gulf, such reforms have included the introduction of electoral practices, new rights for women's participation in elections and electoral processes, and sweeping changes in media and press laws (Ehteshami 2003; Murphy 2006; Ehteshami and Wright 2007). Educational reforms are seen by some Arab leaders as a necessary step in ensuring an educated public who can participate in economic and political reforms more generally.

Relatedly, throughout the Middle East, and more recently in the Persian Gulf, there is a general interest in improving the education of women. Increasing numbers of young women are receiving formal education in the region, leading to a demand for high-quality postsecondary opportunities. This is particularly true for young women from families who tend to send their sons to prestigious overseas universities, but do not want their daughters to study in the West.[16] Finally, in the post-9/11 era, international student visas have become increasingly difficult to obtain for young people throughout the Middle East, creating an increased market for alternative elite options that are closer to home.

Conclusion: what would regionally-sensitive research look like?

We have suggested that the explosion of transnational offshore educational institutions resulted from a convergence of interests between the Arab world – particularly in the Persian Gulf – and Western universities. Foreign (predominantly American, but increasingly diverse) universities are eager to expand internationalisation efforts to the Middle East region, where traditional study abroad numbers are low and post-9/11, 2001 political tensions demand increased exchange and dialogue with the region. On the Arab side, economic, political, and cultural shifts in the Persian Gulf region led to a demand for improved local postsecondary educational options and the desire to bring in specialised schools of professional training in key fields, such as business and information technology.

In these developments, we argue that the regional component is critical. Policymakers are concerned about building human capital and technical and intellectual capacity for the new economy within their own states, of course. But their motivations – and the wealth that is financing transnational offshore institutions – is at least partially regionally-derived. Regional identities and regional economic, political, and cultural developments have all played a significant role in the rapid regional development of transnational higher education in the Gulf states. State policymakers are not only motivated by the local or the global, in other words – they are also regionally inspired.

What would it mean for scholars of comparative and international education to be sensitive to the influence of regions? First, local case studies would need to attend to the kinds of regional trends discussed above. Thus, we argue that it is not fully adequate to study the reforms in Education City in Qatar in isolation, for example – rather, we contend that regional identities and regional transformations in the economic, educational, and political spheres must be taken into account in any study

of transnational offshore education in the region more broadly. Theoretically, we call for a 'third way' in comparative and international education theory which can bridge the global focus of neoinstitutionalists and the local focus of culturalists. A regionally-derived theory would examine the ways in which, at a minimum, the four categories discussed here – regional identity and regional trends in economic, political, and cultural development – both draw on global reform ideas and recursively influence and respond to local policymaking decisions.

Empirically, regionally-sensitive research projects will recognise the need to place local developments in the context of rapid regional change. There are several areas where more research is sorely needed and where regional influences would be particularly helpful in developing a more comprehensive understanding of local transformations. First, tracking and classifying of institutions needs to be ongoing and incorporate developments across the Gulf states and throughout the Middle East region. Comparative work involving opinion surveys of students, faculty, and administrators at both offshore campuses and at long-standing local higher educational institutions throughout the region can help investigate general attitudes toward the new campuses, student motivation for enrolling, faculty motivation for accepting positions, and other opinions about the sites. Such research would be particularly useful, for example, in determining the reasons for gendered differences in enrolment and examining those differences in the context of other changes in women's rights and participation throughout the region.

We also need to know more about the foreign faculty and administrators who relocate to the region to teach and manage these institutions. Pre- and post-test surveys with foreign faculty who have accepted teaching positions in the region would indicate whether the experience of teaching in the region has an impact on faculty members' opinions of the region or understandings of Islam and Islamic culture, for example. In addition, we need more research that can share ordinary people's voices and demonstrate the impact that such campuses are having on local culture, identities, and views about local politics, the West, and the role of education in society. What little research and information is available tends to be very elite-centred, consisting of statements from government representatives in the various individual Gulf states. We need to know more about how non-elites in the region are affected by these sweeping changes.

Similarly, we need additional research on the social context in which these institutions are established. There are no data tracing regional variations in whether and how the rights of faculty and students who are religious minorities or who are not heterosexual are being protected in settings where there are no legal protections for these individuals, for example, or on the protection of free speech and academic freedom[17] in environments where there is no independent media or separation of religion and state,[18] or on the protection of labour rights in the physical construction of new campuses.[19]

Finally, we need to know more about the long-term impact of satellite and offshore campuses and programmes on youth unemployment and 'brain drain' throughout the region, as well as on the long-term prospects of offshore educational programmes and campuses more generally. Most offshore educational institutions are primarily if not fully funded by wealth derived from the region's vast natural resources. Thus the future and sustainability of these ventures rests, to some extent, in the uncertain arms of declining oil revenues in the region. Given the current world economic downturn, it is unlikely that American or other foreign affiliates will be able to continue to cover operating costs without the funding currently provided by regional partners. The

recent failure of one satellite campus in the Persian Gulf (Mills 2009) raises the question of whether some Western universities rushed too quickly to build campuses and programmes in the scramble to join what David Arnold, President of American University of Cairo has referred to as the 'gold rush' in higher education.[20]

All of this research, as well as other topics yet to be determined, need to be attentive to regional developments and identities and the influence that regions may have on local policymaking decisions.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. See: *Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education*. http://www.unesco.org/iau/internationalization/index.html.
2. See, for example, Soliya (www.soliya.org).
3. See http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/News17/text11.html (Mazawi 2009).
4. While branch campuses can exist within the same country (for example, the Penn State University branch campus system in the United States), for these purposes, we refer to branch campuses that are set up in a different country from the one which houses the foreign affiliate institution.
5. Eisenstadt (2000) refutes the institutionalist view of nation-state-centred convergence and argues that norm or policy diffusion does not necessarily imply convergence towards a Western conception of modernity. He argues that the 'trends of globalization show nothing so clearly as the continual reinterpretation of the cultural program of modernity; the construction of multiple modernities; attempts by various groups and movements to reappropriate and redefine the discourse of modernity in their own new terms' (2000, 24). Eisenstadt argues that globalisation and modernity should not be equated with homogenisation or Westernisation.
6. See the results of the Social Science Research Council's project, *The production of knowledge on world regions: internationalization, inter-disciplinarity and boundary crossing in Middle East, Russia/Eurasia and South Asia Studies on US campuses*.
7. See http://www.nyp.org/news/hospital/cornell-medical-qatar.html (accessed 1 December 2008).
8. See International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank (2008).
9. See http://www.brookings.edu/speeches/2008/0522_middle_east_youth_dhillon.aspx (Dhillon 2009).
10. Statistics referenced at the Population Reference Bureau, http://www.prb.org/Publications/PopulationBulletins/2007/ChallengesOpportunitiesinMENA.aspx (accessed 9 December 2008).
11. See http://www.brookings.edu/speeches/2008/0522_middle_east_youth_dhillon.aspx (Dhillon 2009); and http://www.unaoc.org/repository/thematic_youth.pdf (accessed 9 December 2008).
12. Statistics from the United States Energy Information Administration, http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Persian_Gulf/NaturalGas.html (accessed 9 December 2008).
13. See the article by Helen Power, Qatar: small state with a big fund buys British, in *The Telegraph*.
14. It is worth noting that local policymakers often see this as a significant problem, as offshore institutions may inadvertently create a further decline in quality of local higher educational institutions.

15. An added challenge is that because each offshore campus and programme has its own administrative policies to follow, new national administrative structures are needed to provide national policy oversight.
16. See http://www.iacee.org/iacee3/dmdocuments/EXPORTING_AMERICAN_HIGHER_EDUCATION.doc.
17. Both the American Association of University Professors and the Canadian Association of University Teachers have expressed concerns over the opening of branch campuses in the Middle East region, citing concerns over money as the driving force behind these new expansions and thus potential disregard for issues of academic freedom. See http://oncampus.macleans.ca/education/2008/06/19/offshore-campuses-should-respect-academic-freedom-caut/ (accessed 30 March 2009).
18. Furthermore, incidents such as a foreign lecturer who was dismissed for showing the infamous Danish cartoon depicting the Prophet Mohammed are raising concern. See http://nymag.com/news/features/46000/index3.html (accessed 30 March 2009).
19. See http://fairlabornyu.wordpress.com/, for more information on the controversy surrounding NYU Abu Dhabi construction (accessed 1 December 2008). Specifically in the oil-rich Gulf States where migrant labour has become the norm, Human Rights Watch and other international NGOs have documented abuses of migrant workers' rights – such as withholding of pay, passports, hazardous work conditions, deportation for protests, and so on.
20. See http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/08/31/nyu (accessed 30 March 2009), David Arnold speaking at The Brookings Institution on 21 November 2008.

Notes on contributors

Dr Cynthia Miller-Idriss is Associate Professor of International Education and Educational Sociology in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University (USA). Her research focuses on nationalism, extremism, youth, and the commercialization of identity.

Elizabeth Hanauer is a doctoral candidate in International Education in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University (USA). Her research interests include immigration, national and ethnic identity, and diversity in curriculum and classrooms. Email: ehanauer@nyu.edu

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Appendix A

Table A1.   List of institutions by type.

University	Local affiliate	Foreign affiliate	Primary academic focus	Degrees offered
Branch campus				
BITS Pilani-Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Birla Institute of Technology & Science (BITS) Pilani (India)	Engineering	BE
Boston University Institute for Dental Research and Education Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	No affiliate	Boston University (USA)	Health Sciences	No data
Box Hill College Kuwait (Abu Halifa, Kuwait)	No affiliate	Box Hill Institute TAFE (Australia)	Business, IT, Arts & Design, English	No data
Carnegie Mellon University Qatar (Doha, Qatar)	Education City	Carnegie Mellon University (USA)	Business, Technology	BS
College of the North Atlantic (Doha, Qatar)	No affiliate	College of the North Atlantic (Canada)	Business Studies, Health Sciences, Engineering Technology	Certificates
EHSAL Dubai Regional Branch (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	EHSAL European University College Brussels (Belgium)	Business	BBA, MBA
French Fashion University Esmod (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	ESMOD International Fashion University Group (France)	Fashion	BA
Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar (Doha, Qatar)	Education City	Georgetown University (USA)	Liberal Arts	BS
Harvard Medical School Dubai Center (Dubai, UAE)	No affiliate	Harvard University (USA)	Health Sciences	Continuing and post-graduate programmes
Heriot-Watt University Dubai Campus (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Heriot-Watt University (UK)	Accounting, Business, Engineering, Management	BA, MS
Hult International Business School (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Hult Business School (USA)	Business	MBA

Table A1.   (*Continued*).

University	Local affiliate	Foreign affiliate	Primary academic focus	Degrees offered
Institute of Management Technology Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Institute of Management Technology (India)	Business	MBA
Islamic Azad University (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Islamic Azad University (Iran)	Business, English, Architecture, Engineering	BS
Mahatma Gandhi University (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Mahatma Gandhi University (India)	Business, Math, English	BA, BS, MBA
MAHE, Manipal-Dubai Campus (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Manipal University (India)	Business, Engineering, IT, Media, Fashion	BA, BS, BBA
Manchester Business School Worldwide (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Manchester Business School (UK)	Business	MBA
Michigan State University Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Michigan State University (USA)	Professional Programmes	BA, MA, Certificate
Middlesex University, Dubai Campus (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Middlesex University (UK)	No data	No data
Murdoch University International Study Centre Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Murdoch University (Australia)	Business, Media	MBA
Northwestern University (Dubai, UAE)	Education City	Northwestern University (USA)	Liberal Arts	BS
PIM International Center (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	University of Sri Jayewardenepra (Sri Lanka)	Business	MBA
Preston University (Ajman, UAE)	No affiliate	Preston University (USA)	Business, Islamic Studies, Fashion, IT	BA, MBA
SP Jain Center of Management (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	SP Jain Center of Management (Singapore)	Business	MBA
SAE Institute Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	SAE Institute (Australia)	Film, Media, Audio	diplomas

Table A1.   (*Continued*).

University	Local affiliate	Foreign affiliate	Primary academic focus	Degrees offered
Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (Pakistan)	Business	MBA, MPM
Texas A&M University at Qatar (Doha, Qatar)	Education City	Texas A&M University (USA)	Engineering, Liberal Arts	BS
The University of Wollongong in Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	The University of Wollongong (Australia)	Business, Finance, Marketing, IT, English	BA, MBA
University of Calgary Nursing School (Doha, Qatar)	No affiliate	University of Calgary (Canada)	Health Sciences	BN
Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (Doha, Qatar)	Education City	Virginia Commonwealth University (USA)	Design	BA
Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar (Doha, Qatar)	Education City	Cornell University (USA)	Health Sciences	MD
Western Reserve University (Kuwait)	No affiliate	(Republic of Seychelle)	No data	No data
Cambridge College International Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Cambridge College (Australia)	English, vocational programmes	No degrees?
JSS Education Foundation (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	JSS Education Foundation (India)	Professional training	No degrees?
Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics (Russia)	Engineering, Economics	No data
Foreign style				
American University in Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	No affiliate	No affiliate	Business, Technology	No data
American University in the Emirates (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	No affiliate	Business, IT, Design, Health Sciences, Engineering	BA, MA, MBA

Table A1.   (*Continued*).

University	Local affiliate	Foreign affiliate	Primary academic focus	Degrees offered
New turnkey				
American University of Kuwait (Safat, Kuwait)	No affiliate	Dartmouth College (USA)	Liberal Arts	BA, BS
American University of Sharjah (Sharjah, UAE)	University City, Sharjah	Various (USA)	Liberal Arts	BA, BS, MA, MBA, MPA
American University of the Middle East (Al-Sharq, Kuwait)	No affiliate	Purdue University? (USA)	Liberal Arts	BS, BA
Canadian University of Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	No affiliate	University of New Brunswick (Canada)	Business, Technology, Science, Engineering, Health Sciences	BA, MBA
German University in Cairo (Cairo, Egypt)	No affiliate	University of Ulm, University of Stuttgart (Germany)	Science, Engineering	BS, MS, MBA PhD
l'Université Senghor (Alexandria, Egypt)	Egyptian Universities of Cairo, Mansourah and Ain Shams	Paris 1, Bordeaux 3, Tunis, Rabat, le Collège de France, Université du Québec à Montréal et Université du Québec à Chicoutimi (France, Tunisia, Canada)	Development	MA
Prince Sultan University (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia)	No affiliate	University of Arizona, UNESCO (USA)	Business, Computer Science	BS
The British University in Dubai (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Various UK universities	Business, Education, Engineering	MA, MS, PhD
Université française d'Egypte (Cairo, Egypt)	No affiliate	Université de Paris III & VI, Université de Nantes, Université de Corse, ENSISA (France)	Languages, Business, IT, Engineering	BA, MA

Table A1.   (*Continued*).

University	Local affiliate	Foreign affiliate	Primary academic focus	Degrees offered
Offshore programme				
DePaul University Kellstadt Graduate School of Business (Manama, Baharain)	Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance	DePaul University (USA)	Business	MBA, MS
DePaul University Kellstadt Graduate School of Business (Amman, Jordan)	Al-Balqa' Applied University	DePaul University (USA)	Real Estate	MS
New York Institute of Technology (Amman, Jordan)	Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST)	New York Institute of Technology (USA)	Business, Technology	BA, MA, MBA
New York Institute of Technology (Adiya, Bahrain)	No affiliate	New York Institute of Technology (USA)	Business, Technology	BA, MA, MBA
New York Institute of Technology (Abu-Dhabi, UAE)	No affiliate	New York Institute of Technology (USA)	Business, Technology	BA, MA, MBA
The University of Exeter (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	The University of Exeter (UK)	Education	EdD
Old turnkey				
American University of Beirut (Beirut, Lebanon)	No affiliate	No affiliate	Liberal Arts	BA, BAR, BBA, BEN, BGD, BS, BSA, BSN, DIPL, MA, MAFE, MAR, MBA, MEM, MEN, MMB, MPH, MS, MSES, MSN, MUD, MUP, MD, PhD, RN, TD
American University of Cairo (Cairo, Egypt)	No affiliate	No affiliate	Liberal Arts	BA, BS, BBA, BAC, MA, non-degree programmes

Table A1. (*Continued*).

University	Local affiliate	Foreign affiliate	Primary academic focus	Degrees offered
Replica campus				
NYU Abu Dhabi (Abu-Dhabi)	No affiliate	New York University (USA)	Liberal Arts	BA, BS
Virtual branch campus				
Syrian Virtual University (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Syrian Virtual University (Syria)	Business, IT	No data
Universitas 21 Global (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	Universitas 21 Global (Singapore)	Business, IT	No data
University of Phoenix (Dubai, UAE)	Dubai International Academic City	University of Phoenix (USA)	No data	No data