

International Student Experience

Title

Indian voices – Foreign study – More than just the post graduate programme.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the fact that whilst transnational education might address some of the Indian government's higher education expansion plans and may support the internationalisation strategies of several UK higher education institutions, we must not lose sight of the fact that many post graduate students may still prefer to study abroad. It appears that studying away from the home country provides more than just an improvement in the development of human capital, a view highlighted by the responses of Indian nationals studying on a post graduate business programme in London.

Background

It is suggested that internationalisation of higher education (HE), which is seen as a response to globalisation, has two components, the first related to institutional home based activities, which aim to develop students' awareness of different cultures, the second, transnational education which is linked to activities abroad; i.e. the mobility of international students; or the delivery of programmes abroad; or the direct investment in education in a foreign country (Knight, 2008; Knight, 2011; McBurnie and Ziguras, 2007; Wildavsky, 2010).

One country influenced by the effects of globalisation, where the economy has grown rapidly, is India. This growth has resulted in a middle class, which some suggest emerged from British colonial days and which, although difficult to define (Saxena, 2010), is predicted to reach in '*excess of 500 million people by 2025*' (Varma, 2007, pxx; McKinsey, 2007). This growing Indian middle class demands access to quality higher education institutions for the development of their skills and to gain credentials, recognition and status (Brown *et al*, 2011; Fernandez, 2006), and is considered one of the influences which has resulted in '*38,500*' (HESA, 2012, p1), Indian international students enrolling in UK institutions in 2009/2010.

These Indian students may be motivated to travel to the UK for higher education due to a lack of supply in India, but this may not be the only reason. In 2008, India was reported as having 434 universities and over 20,000 colleges servicing

approximately 13 million students, for 12% of the age group, and considered by some to be over regulated and often of poor quality due to lack of government funding (Altbach, 2010; Brown *et al*, 2011; QAA, 2009). The growth of private institutions to address demand in India has also been criticised, as there is limited regulation of some of the unscrupulous owners, who offer low quality provision (Altbach, 2010; Levy, 2012), and the hollow promises of good jobs. The result is, that despite several high quality Institutes, e.g. the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), and the Indian institute of Technology (IIT), and the Indian School of Business (ISB), India does not have a 'world-class university' to compete with other global universities (Altbach, 2012).

Following debates on lost revenue to foreign institutions abroad, and the legislation of foreign providers in India (Altbach, 2010), the Indian government plans to increase provision of universities and higher education colleges, from a current market estimated of '\$20bn', which is '*forecast to grow to \$100bn by the end of the decade*' (Sannam, S4, 2011). In 2008, the UK-Indian Education Research Initiative (UKIER), noted that there were '*161 international universities*' mostly UK and US, '*offering 641 collaborative programmes in India*' (Mishra, 2012, p30), and in an attempt to expand foreign providers, the Indian government in 2010, proposed The Foreign Educational Institutions Bill (FEIB), to approve Foreign Education Providers (FEP). The bill which was delayed due to political debate was finally agreed in June 2012, with a further proposal that only the top 500 globally ranked universities, as ranked by the Times Higher Education or the Shanghai Jiatong, should be the institutions to partner with leading Indian universities. Other legislation to enable the establishment of branch campuses, is still awaiting agreement by parliament (Kisch, 2011; Mishra, 2012).

However, some of the findings from the author's qualitative research study suggest, that whilst it may appear that foreign collaborations and branch campuses may increase supply and quality of HE in India, these may not meet all of the expectations and outcomes expressed by some Indian international postgraduate business students and their parents.

Findings from a qualitative research study

The aim of part of this PhD qualitative research study (2009/2010), was to capture the voices of Indian nationals who were studying post graduate business programmes in the UK, e.g. MA Management, in order to provide further insight into their views about the motivations, expectations and outcomes of study abroad. The findings for this part of the study were obtained from fourteen face-to-face

interviews and the results highlight that Indian students are motivated to travel abroad for post graduate education for several reasons, some of which have been identified by other researchers as *'push and pull factors'* (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p82). However, the findings from this PhD study suggest that in addition to some of these push and pull factors, there are other reasons which UK institutions should also be aware of.

The findings from the sample of Indian respondents in this PhD research study, indicated that one of the strongest motivators for Indian students to study abroad, was the fulfilment of the expectations of their middle class parents, especially their fathers, who had not had the opportunity to study abroad and which may, in some cases, be regarded as an example of parental proxy, where the off-spring studies abroad to fulfil the ambitions of the parent. Other reasons for foreign study include easier access to programmes, 'exposure' to new environments, independence and added status. The following quotations from the respondents highlight some of these findings:

Study Abroad – Indian Male Respondent from a UK Institution:

'Yes my Dad always wanted to send me abroad because it's a better experience for the person and they never got a chance when they were young so they said if you have a chance you better go.'

Some respondents highlighted that entry requirements in the UK are not as difficult or as competitive as India. The following quotation highlights this view:

Access – Indian Female Respondent from a UK Institution:

'To be very frank, to get into a good college in India for masters is very, very tough, it is very tough, it is very easy over here. (UK) I mean if you score like a decent 65/70 in India then you can easily come here, over there it is neck throat cut, it is too much competition and even if you get a 99 percentile you will not get through so... that's why.'

'Exposure' to a foreign environment is also a requirement for many students and is an opportunity for 'independence' and especially so for female post graduate Indian students:

Exposure – Indian Female Respondent from a UK Institution

'My mother was very keen she always wanted me since 12th grade, she has been telling me to go out for undergrad.. but I wasn't prepared to come out for undergrad but she really wanted me to go and get 'exposure' and go on to do post graduate, masters.'

Exposure – Indian Male Respondent from a UK institution

'I was involved with my business for last one year. But also, my father forced me..... he just wanted me to have a complete exposure from London....yes.... He preferred London,,,,, because we have our cousins there, so easy to live in place and London is like hip now in India, if you are in London you meet more and more of people.'

Independence – Indian Female Respondent in A UK institution

'because I wanted to experience the whole independent life. In India we are very close knit family, so when you move out of the house you get about five calls from your mother saying come back home, come back home, who are you with?'

Independence – Indian Female Respondent in A UK institution

'I was more or less interested in going abroad, and just I wanted to be on my own. I wanted to be independent, like, in India it's totally different culture you.. er... For whole life, you are with your family only rather than.... hmm.... taking example of US or UK students they live separately with their family... so I just wanted to take life independently for a year or so to enjoy independency.'

Increased status for the student was also highlighted by the following responses:

Expectations of Improvement in status – Indian Male Respondent

'It will add to my career, career development. And yeah and as I am into there, the value of abroad education will also lead to beautify your profile, when... if you sit in a surroundings with a number of people and they know you have come from abroad they will see you from different eyes.'

Indian Female respondent:

'Well, if you go abroad your prospects and ideas are picked up by people here in India, then if you learn good English and other things you can have social benefits from having those things. It brings to you into a better society and better people etc. And if you choose to study abroad it shows people that you have money and then people treat you better in a higher society, you get more respect because you are better off and in a higher class basically. They know you have more money and are form a better class or society.'

Conclusion

Development of collaborative partnerships and foreign branch campuses in India will increase supply and increase the chances for Indian nationals to study quality globally recognised programmes in their home market, but, this may not satisfy the desires of many middle class parents and may result in a loss of the additional benefits that some students acquire from studying abroad.

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