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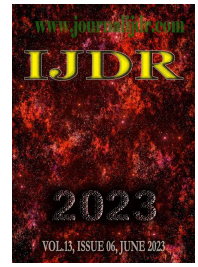
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THE INTERNATIONAL BRANCH CAMPUS MODEL: CURRENT DEBATES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the controversies surrounding the international branch campus (IBC) model. After outlining the research purpose, theoretical framework, and methodology, the paper tackles the stated myths of IBCs and offers evidence-based facts. Evidence is offered to support a critique of the myths that are interestingly advanced through research. This review establishes that (1) recent IBC developments on the provider side help to mitigate the risk of post-colonialism; (2) IBC continues to experience dramatic growth, albeit in different and increasingly changing formats, motivations, and targets; (3) virtual programs do not necessarily impede the growth of other forms of higher education; and (4) the majority of IBC programs are of acceptable quality due to high levels of regulation and student engagement.

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## INTRODUCTION

Transnational higher education (TNHE) has become a prominent type of internationalization in universities. TNHE refers to any higher education study programs or educational services when the learners are in a different (receiving) nation than the granting institution in a sending nation (Guimon, 2016). Cross-border, offshore, and borderless higher education are academic terms for TNHE (Knight, 2016). Together, these four concepts have generated a new thematic area of study that encompasses approximately two thousand contributions, which explore both the merits and drawbacks/weaknesses of TNHE (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016). Over the last two decades, International Branch Campuses (IBCs) have evolved as a prominent phenomenon in global higher education, mostly begun by established institutions in the industrialized North and West and placed in developing or less developed nations (Clarke, 2021). The purpose of this article is to look at some of the most significant current debates surrounding the international branch campus (IBC) model, which is the most common kind of transnational higher education (TNHE).

**Theoretical Framework:** The concepts of IBC and TNHE can best be understood applying the theories of internationalization, as they are constructions of the globalization and internationalization phenomenon (Knight, 2016).

**Network Theory of Internationalization:** Network theory suggests that organizations do not internationalize gradually (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988). They employ supply, distribution, customer, and other networks to learn about international markets and They leverage international relationships to access new markets (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988).

## METHODS

Articles examining the area of interest using diverse methodologies were studied and included for the current review of consequential research.

**Data Sources:** The articles were found using several methods including electronic database searches such as ERIC.

## RESULTS

Much of TNHE's IBCs discourse is mere speculation and based on old assumptions (Healey, 2015). IBC myths abound. These myths stem from home and host country interests. Many claims seem logical

individually but contradict each other. This section examines the myths' assumptions in the following sections. IBC's success and effectiveness are socially constructed, and we offer evidence-based alternatives.

**IBCs and Post-Colonialism:** Some researchers suggest that IBC's branch campuses act as neocolonialism by widening the gap between the developed and developing worlds (Altbach, 2014; Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). It is argued that unidirectional knowledge production and consumption between source and host countries benefits Western institutions and marginalizes smaller and emerging economies, and that other nations cannot catch up due to social and economic reasons. Recent evidence doesn't support such arguments because IBC patterns are evolving in ways most commentators didn't predict. Western countries no longer dominate IBC. By 2016, Russia, India, and China were major IBC providers (Annabi & Wilkins, 2016).

**International Branch Campuses Are Declining:** By 2000, brick-and-mortar IBC was accepted and branch campuses overcame novelty factor liability. This prompted overseas campuses. Many institutions have found that overseas branches are complex and often unprofitable. 10% of later-founded branch campuses closed (Lane & Kinser, 2014). Due to this failure rate, industry journalists and market intelligence organizations predicted a downturn in branch campus development (ICEF, 2015). Poor planning and inability to break even cause most international branch campuses to fail (Wilkins, 2017). Recent developments indicate more international branch campuses will open in the next decade, but their forms, motives, and markets are changing. New branch campuses should have more organizational diversity. Many top institutions prefer international partnerships. Second, host countries will choose campus-based IBC providers. Emerging economies that want to expand higher education, knowledge creation, and innovation are new branch campus markets. Emerging countries may attract (and fund) medical schools and energy/industry institutions. Fourth, African institutions are interested in non-profit branch campuses (Wilkins & Urbanovi, 2014).

**IBCs and Virtual Learning:** Distance learning is claimed to threaten IBCs. Distance/online programs flourished during the early 1990s Internet bubble. Many commentators argue that massive open online courses (MOOCs) could affect college enrolments. Some institutions have many enrollees and for-profit providers exist. Some institutions hoped MOOCs would take off but few students could complete programs, and MOOCs did not deliver as expected. Besides, online degrees are not quite as respected as campus-delivered programs, and most students want to interact with faculty and peers (Marginson, 2004). Second, they're expensive and cumbersome (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2011). Fourth, although many online programs like MOOCs are free, students must often pay for tutor assessments and/or certification (Daniel et al., 2015). Students may avoid online higher education if they see for-profit programs on MOOC platforms. MOOC providers will not expand and threaten other IBCs/ IBC unless they can cover their costs.

**IBCs and Quality Standards:** Many critics say IBC programs, especially online/distance/MOOCs, lack knowledge of instructional design principles and learning theories (Healey, 2016; Margaryan et al., 2015). IBC rarely has comparable curriculum, academic staff or student quality, physical environment, learning resources, and social facilities (Altbach, 2010). Local institutions with autonomy over curricula, assessment, faculty and student recruitment can struggle to maintain quality standards, leading to ethical and academic integrity issues (Wilkins, 2017). Most IBC hosts have regulatory bodies and quality assurance procedures. Low-quality institutions closed in several countries (Lane & Kinser, 2014).

Much IBC must meet domestic standards. Both host and home country agencies accept most IBC. Learning quality and student achievement are not related to home and host country experiences. IBC's quality assurance program is well-established (Altbach, 2010).

**IBCs and Student Satisfaction:** There is ambiguity around IBC and student satisfaction. Most IBC operators argue online/distance students get same program/education. IBC programs delivered in a few teaching and administrative rooms will not be the same as a full-fledged campus. Education hubs have mixed student satisfaction. Academic, administrative, and facility services disappoint students (Bhuiyan, 2016). Branch campuses lack student service. IBCs on the other hand satisfies students, parents, and employers (Pieper & Beall, 2014). IBC is flexible and improves career prospects (Pieper & Beall, 2014). International competition and regulatory demands from host country quality assurance agencies have encouraged IBC providers to improve quality, boosting student satisfaction.

**Significance of the Study:** This paper offers evidence dispelling myths on IBCs. The IBC field is becoming more sophisticated, but it remains complex due to the variety of stakeholders in home and host countries and their changing expectations. Few IBC studies have addressed various stakeholders, contributing to article myths. Bolton and Nie (2010) urge a critical understanding of sustainable IBC models, including value proposition interests. The author suggests empirical studies on IBC from the perspectives of governments, students, employers, institution employees (managers, faculty, and staff), and wider communities in home and host countries.

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