

**Establishing International Branch Campuses in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:
Exploring Students' Experiences and Understanding
their Expectations to Draw Success Strategies
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Abstract:

International branch campuses (IBCs) represent the most common form of transnational education, but Saudi Arabia's higher education sector has not yet announced a strategic plan to implement them. This research project explores the influence of challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies in the United States on deciding whether to study at IBCs once this type of education is established in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The study further aimed to shed light on students' criteria for choosing IBCs as a new destination in the future to help policymakers in developing successful strategies. The study population consisted of all male and female Saudi students at Western Michigan University. A random sampling method was utilized to determine the respondents for this study, and a total of 219 students participated. The results of the analyses indicated a negative relationship between the level of challenges faced by the Saudi students and their criteria for studying at IBCs ($p = -0.372$). The findings also suggested that only 13.9% of the total variation in the criteria could be explained by these challenges, and there were three significant dimensions of challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies in the United States that influenced their criteria for considering IBCs. These dimensions included language proficiency, discrimination, and identity challenges. The results indicated that the means for the challenges faced by the Saudi students were all equal in relation to gender, age, discipline, and degree. However, there was a significant difference in these challenges in relation to marital status. In contrast, the results indicated no statistical significant difference in the criteria concerning studying at IBCs in relation to age, marital status, and discipline. As for gender and degree, the results showed that there are significant differences in the criteria for studying at IBCs in relation to both variables. The results of this study are especially relevant to developing strategic plans for higher education and crafting specific strategies targeting the establishment of IBCs, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: International branch campuses, Scholarship Students experiences, Success strategies, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

إنشاء فروع الجامعات الدولية في المملكة العربية السعودية: استكشاف خبرات الطلاب

وفهم توقعاتهم من أجل رسم استراتيجيات النجاح

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كلية التربية في جامعة الباحة

الملخص:

تعد فروع الجامعات الدولية أكثر أشكال التعليم العابر للحدود شيوعًا، إلا إن التعليم العالي في المملكة العربية السعودية لم يُعلن بعد عن خطة استراتيجية لبدء هذا النوع من التعليم العابر للحدود. هذا المشروع البحثي يستكشف تأثير التحديات التي تواجه الطلبة السعوديون خلال دراستهم في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية على معايير قراراتهم للدراسة في فروع الجامعات الدولية عند وجود افتتاح لهذا النوع من التعليم في المملكة العربية السعودية؛ أيضًا هدفت الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على معايير الطلاب نحو هذه الفروع كوجهة جديدة في المستقبل لمساعدة واضعي السياسات في رسم استراتيجيات النجاح. تكون مجتمع الدراسة من جميع الطلبة السعوديين الذكور والإناث في جامعة غرب ميشيغان، وتم استخدام طريقة المعاينة العشوائية لتحديد عينة الدراسة؛ وبلغ أفرادها ٢١٩ طالبًا وطالبة. تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى وجود علاقة سلبية ($P=0.372$) بين مستوى التحديات التي يواجهها الطلبة السعوديون ومستوى المعايير التي يأخذونها بعين الاعتبار لاتخاذ قرار الدراسة في فروع الجامعات الدولية مستقبلاً، كما تشير النتائج إلى أن ما نسبته ١٣.٩٪ من إجمالي التباين في مستوى المعايير يمكن تفسيره من خلال التحديات التي تواجه الطلبة، وأن هناك ثلاثة أبعاد دالة من التحديات التي يواجهها الطلبة السعوديون خلال دراستهم في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية تؤثر على معايير قراراتهم نحو الدراسة في فروع الجامعات الدولية. هذه الأبعاد تشمل تحديات إجادة اللغة، التمييز العنصري، والهوية. وتشير النتائج إلى تساوي المتوسطات للتحديات التي يواجهها الطلبة السعوديون فيما يتعلق بالجنس والعمر والتخصص والدرجة العلمية؛ وفي المقابل هناك فروق دالة إحصائية فيما يتعلق بالحالة الاجتماعية. من ناحية أخرى، تشير النتائج إلى عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في المعايير التي تؤخذ بعين الاعتبار للدراسة في فروع الجامعات الدولية فيما يتعلق بالعمر والحالة الاجتماعية والتخصص؛ أما بالنسبة لنوع الجنس والدرجة، فقد أظهرت النتائج فروقًا ذات دلالة إحصائية في المعايير المعتمدة نحو الدراسة في تلك الفروع تبعًا لكلا المتغيرين. نتائج هذه الدراسة ذات أهمية خاصة لوضع خطط استراتيجية للتعليم العالي ووضع استراتيجيات محددة تستهدف إنشاء فروع الجامعات الدولية، وخاصة في المملكة العربية السعودية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فروع الجامعات الدولية؛ تجارب الطلبة المبتعثين؛ استراتيجيات النجاح؛ المملكة العربية السعودية.

INTRODUCTION:

Over the past decade, Saudi Arabia has been experiencing a great evolution of higher education. Much of this evolution has been attributed to the adoption of a new vision of education, the assigned huge budgets for higher education each year and the effective relationships between the Saudi government and other governments of developed large countries. Given the increasing demand for higher education in the KSA and the diversified developmental orientations of government, the cross-border Saudi student mobility around the world has been a revolution in recent years.

The United States is considered the most essential country for the Saudi government and has strong relationships in various fields. Accordingly, many of the collaborations grew out of agreements between the two countries. For instance, Marklein (2016) indicated that the Saudi scholarships grew out of an agreement in 2005 between King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz and President George W. Bush As a way to strengthen ties. According to the Mena Report of 2016, the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (KASP) has led Saudi Arabia to become the fourth-biggest provider of students in US higher education. As a result, the inflow of Saudi students in the United States has increased significantly, with more than 120,000 now studying in various degree-granting levels and English programmes, according to the most recent data from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) in 2016. The study in the United States is a thrilling for Saudi students. However, in the light of the recent changes in the Saudi scholarship programmes that have sent so many students to the USA and many challenges that naturally appear in a new country and academic environment, the question that needs a lot of attention is "Do international branch campuses (IBCs) as the most common form of transnational education (TNE) is the most appropriate alternative to overcome those challenges and achieve Saudi students' ambition?".

Transnational education, the partnership in which an institution in one nation provide academic credentials to foreign students, has occurred due to the increased necessity of certain degrees not offered in the students' home

countries (Lane, 2011b). Predominantly focusing on higher education, transnational education allows students to pursue degrees for which they otherwise would have to relocate (Altbach, 2013a). Several transnational programs exist. Some offer joint degree programs in addition to founding remote campuses (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011b). One example of the remote campuses is IBCs. These are growing in popularity. IBCs are physical educational establishments formed by one or more parent institutions in a separate country in order to augment global outreach by fostering the ease of student exchange (Wilkins, 2016). IBCs have been deemed a competitive innovation in transnational education because they provide universities with a unique opportunity allowing them direct involvement in the education of foreign students. For instance, the parent institution's involvement includes selecting competent faculty, as this is the basis of delivering high quality education (Lane, 2011b). Interestingly, the majority of students prefer the IBC model over other forms of transnational education, in part because they can receive accreditation from the university of their choice. Such institutions provide both undergraduate and graduate programs. Depending on the agreement between the parent and host institutions, students may receive degrees from one or from all the partnering institutions.

It's vital that both parent and host countries examine the details of IBCs before and after their establishment, as there are several systems of IBCs. Institutions can choose the system that best fits their existing conditions (Normand-Marconnet, 2015). Only by thoroughly studying the related issues can institutions ensure that they establish IBCs in the manner most suitable for their specific circumstances. Additionally, this research and the resulting discussion assist the sending and host countries as they come up with ideal locations for IBCs. For example, these establishments must be founded in areas with high demand for the chosen degree programs high.

Several factors lead parent universities and host countries to establish IBCs. The first motivating factor is that these institutions have a chance to expand their global reach (Ahmad &

Buchanan, 2015). Although the prime motivation of host countries to establish IBCs is to expand access to education for their own citizens, the institutions bring in new knowledge and skills to other nations (Wilkins, 2015). They also generate more income via attracting foreign students who could not otherwise have been able to attend the parent institution (Kinser & Lane, 2014). Revenue for the countries is also generated following the taxation of IBCs. However, there are several factors that dissuade universities from founding IBCs. To begin with, their establishment and operation require countless resources (Wilkins, 2015). Secondly, it is complex to exactly align the programs offered by the parent institutions with those offered by the IBCs. Thus, many host countries are concerned about the consequences of IBCs, with the major concern being how they will alter the former standards of education within that particular country (Kinser & Lane, 2014). This concern comes from the fact that IBCs primarily use the strategies and standards employed by their parent institutions.

Furthermore, students sometimes have reservations regarding the quality of IBCs. Although students in the host nations may have confidence in the home campuses, they may remain doubtful about the abilities of an IBC to deliver equally high quality degree programs. For this reason, these institutions often experience difficulty in convincing students to pursue their programs. IBCs generally lack the vast resources that are at the disposal of home campuses, which further intensifies doubts of potential students. In addition to this issue, there is the potential for cultural clashes within IBCs as IBCs attract a more diversified student body than do parent institutions. IBCs also find it extremely difficult to hire and maintain good staff (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015). Most members of faculty in home campuses are simply not willing to relocate (Wilkins, 2015), especially to a university having the above listed disadvantages. Lastly, geographical barriers make it hard to coordinate activities between IBCs and parent campuses.

In order to counteract the doubts of students, it is also important to understand their expectations in order for IBCs to strategize appropriately. Students are obviously the most important stakeholders in this endeavor;

therefore, their needs and expectations must come first for a learning institution to be successful (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011b). Conversely, failure by an IBC to meet their requirements would be disastrous, because it could cause many of the learners to leave (Healey, 2015). Moreover, it would damage the institution's reputation, preventing future students from enrolling not only in the IBC but even in the home campuses.

Having understood student expectations, parent nations use a variety of stratagem to recruit students. One central strategy is to demonstrate institutional attractions, especially in the non-academic areas, that students can enjoy while studying at IBCs. Such attractions would go a long way towards ensuring the success of these institutions in that they secure student enrollment (Altbach, 2013b). Some of the more effective attraction factors include extra-curricular activities and amenities (Tierney & Lanford, 2014). Extra-curricular activities, such as sports, cultural competitions, and art classes, attract students. Amenities include facilities having gyms, swimming pools, and ball fields. These are a start, and IBCs need to continue to come up with creative ways to achieve student expectations not only academically but also socially and culturally. This paper aims, therefore, to make an original contribution that will identify student preferences as well as provide a valuable insight into student choices according to their experiences, which can benefit strategic decision-makers in crafting an appropriate national strategy to establish IBCs in Saudi Arabia.

BACKGROUND

Globalization and internationalization of higher education

Globalization has seen significant increase in all aspects of life due to the desire of both individual persons and companies to increase their profit and economic value. This phenomenon has also affected higher education, as institutions are driven in part by the necessity of financial gain. Globalization, though difficult to specify, has been defined as a process leading to the exchange of numerous things, both tangible and intangible, over previously separated areas; it spreads the use of tangible things such as people, cultures and products, as

well as intangibles like values and knowledge (Stromquist, 2007).

In higher education, globalization allows knowledge and innovation to permeate previous boundaries (Odin & Manicas, 2004). Several improvements have allowed the development of globalization in education. Reliable transportation of all forms has increased mobility, the development of technology has allowed intangibles to cross boundaries in an instant, and a general state of peace and harmony among nations has increased the likeliness of nations to share information. These improvements allow students and teachers to study or teach abroad as well as have convenient access to necessary information. This differs from the internationalization of education, which, according to Knight (2015), is defined as the method whereby a country balances the effects of globalization with respect for its own individuality. Internationalization of higher education integrates dimensions at national, international, and global levels into educational objectives (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Internationalization and globalization are primarily different in that the former concentrates on relationships between such aspects as cultures or systems, whereas the latter stresses the widespread sharing of technology, knowledge, and culture (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). Internationalization in education must be supported due to the intense transformation it has caused. Thus, the rise of innovative technology, connected global markets and multi-national corporations which encourage education have all led to educational systems that connect the world in a borderless system (Hussain, 2007). The difficulty comes in that the need for internationalization has outstripped the ability for most countries to provide it adequately. They struggle to meet the increasing demand for education, resulting in their need to internationalize or globalize it, an idea they consider an effect solution (Altbach, 2015a). To provide a solution, universities are able to connect programs such as these to either a university in their own country or those in other countries. In the transformation, the programs retain their autonomy while sharing the reputation of the partnering institution (Hussain, 2007).

One such transformation is called transnational education. In this method, students learn in nations different from the institutions providing the educational program or service (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). In other words, TNE are involved in the process of an institution providing degrees or certificates to students in another country (Huang, 2007). In general, TNE allows students the two-fold benefit of avoiding the costs and barriers of moving to a foreign country as well as earning credentials identical to those attending that institution. Such programs may be linked to the education system of a country different from the country in which it operates, or otherwise, it may work autonomously of any national education system. This approach is significantly supported by the development of communication and information technologies, raise in global markets of borderless higher education, and the growth of corporate educational mandate by multi-national corporations (Hussain, 2007).

Thus, TNE hold intense interest for institutes of higher education around the world, resulting from the integration of institutions, providing the instruction and increasing enrollment (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). It provided a solution for the increasing demand of continuing education in countries which were unable to meet the need. Each country had its own unique circumstances, leading to in diverse practices, various forms of delivering the information, and modifications in educational ordinances. These changes generated different forms of TNE, which includes:

First, franchise universities occur when a university (the franchiser) offers its programs to another university (the franchisee) in another country, allowing replication of its model (Huang, 2007). Unlike this first form, the next three involve both universities providing materials. In joint degree programs, various nations establish and utilize programs to mutual benefit (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). Academic partnership programs similarly allow institutions from other countries to share their curriculum and resources, using the power of creative synergy to improve both programs (Huang, 2007). The name of the fourth, internationally co-developed, describes its approach.

Unfortunately, the host countries rarely provide this with accreditation.

The fifth and sixth forms, in which students generally study at the parent university following initial study elsewhere, expect students to transfer credits. Twinning programs occur when two institutions support credit transfer, allowing students to commence their programs at one, followed by a transfer to the other (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2006). In distance education programs, students are provided with course resources in order to study from home, utilizing e-learning and web-based education. The training and assessment are all provided online. CITE

Finally, International Branch Campuses are the most common form of TNE, having evolved from the earlier forms. IBCs involve the purposeful establishment of an institution from a sending country to the host country. Though it begins as solely a presence in the host country, the objective is that it will bring about independence and sustainable growth (Becker, 2010).

IBCs as a competitive revolution of TNE

Throughout the world, the number of IBCs has been increasing. Lane (2011a) defined them as “an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; engages in at least some face-to-face teaching, and provides access to an entire academic programme that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider” (p. 5). Likewise, Wilkins and Huisman (2012) describe them as institutions owned either in part or in whole by a foreign (parent) institution, operating under the name of the said institution in order to permit students to achieve credentials from the parent institution after completing direct instruction in their own country.

IBCs are hardly a new discovery. IBCs first actually began several centuries ago, having developed from the method of past university operations. Miller-Idriss and Hanauer (2011) reveal that past universities would replicate foreign universities by borrowing their models. However, the major difference was that they remained separate entities, not joining as partners. According to Lane (2011a), not until the mid 20th century did IBCs as we know them surface, following the founding of John Hopkins

University's first campus in Italy. That began a revolution of TNE, causing IBCs to appear on every continent, due in large part to the increased internet technology (Miller-Idriss & Hanauer, 2011). Thus, nowadays IBCs are a vital part of worldwide education.

Yet, one must not think that IBCs are equally spread throughout the world. Rather, a focus group of parent countries and host countries have the majority. For the sending countries, the United States has over eighty IBCs, ranking first in the world. Coming in next are those with at least ten: United Kingdom, Australia, France, and India (Becker, 2010). For those under ten, Russia, China, Netherlands, Canada, and Germany come in their respective orders (Knight, 2011). Among the host countries, most of which are located in the Middle East and Asia, the United Arab Emirates holds the prize, hosting over forty IBCs. Others containing the majority of IBCs include China, Singapore, Qatar, Malaysia, South Korea, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and South Africa, ranked from highest to lowest numbers (Becker, 2010). These are the countries in which the greater part of IBCs have originated and now reside.

The motivations of home universities and host countries to establish IBCs

Each IBC has a variety of reasons that motivated it to begin. First, IBCs lead to increased finances and reputation, two of every university's primary concerns. Sham and Huisman state that IBCs are established due to the incentive for acquiring income from foreign markets. Additionally, the universities improve their overseas reputations (2012). However, IBCs also lead to several major risks. Lane and Kinser (2013) explain that wholly owned IBCs, the most prevalent form, could suffer financial deficit if their enterprise is unable to at least earn back its cost. As an instance of the problem, after the University of New South Wales attempted to create a host institution in Singapore, the result was a loss of thirty-eight million dollars (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012). Thus, universities must carefully consider the risks of immense financial loss, balancing them with the rewards of prestige and financial gain.

Similarly, host countries face the double sided coin of benefit and risk. Lane and Kinser (2013) explain that economic growth is a

primary cause of governments inviting IBCs. First, the growth of supporting IBCs is caused by keeping them in the home country. This method avoids brain drain, a major source of wasted expenses (Girdzijauskaitė & Radzeviciene, 2014). Additionally, while other TNEs exist, IBCs have an exclusive advantage: not only do they keep the profit of national students in the country, but they also generate income from international students studying on the campuses. Nevertheless, there are risks of hosting. Those who host IBCs put themselves at the risk of the parent institutions influencing students to sometimes undesirable aspects of culture or to values that differ from those of the host country (Sham & Huisman, 2012). Thus, IBCs confer benefits and risks on the host countries as well as the parent.

IBCs' Capabilities to success

Dealing with such risks is a noteworthy source of anxiety for IBCs in host countries. Examples exist both of failed attempts and successes. Wilkins, Balakrishnan, and Huisman (2012) assert that the majority of IBCs do not possess sufficient facilities, the lack of which results in major delays in the attempt to provide an educational experience equal to that of the parent institution. The lack is magnified when seen in the complexity of working with a diverse student body coming from a number of nations, each having differences in cultures and languages. Thus, one can see the ease at which cultural conflicts occur. For instance, research from Wilkins and Huisman (2011a) delves into the differences in organizational cultures and the various teaching methods, either of which may challenge the branch nation's traditional approaches. The differences, therefore, influence IBC extensively.

Hence, Wilkins and Huisman (2011a) ask whether campuses in different nations can cooperate with this disparity. In addition to differing cultures and teaching methods, Altbach (2013a) asserts other challenges: the uncertainty of foreign markets and the variation in students' expectations and university standards. He suggests that IBCs will generally be unable to endure because of these. Lane (2011a) noted a troubling example of this inability to survive in the long run. Of the over thirty American based IBCs in Japan which

existed in the 1980s, Temple University is the sole survivor. Based on this, the probability of IBCs struggling to deal with the above difficulties and ultimately failing is high. The hosts that fail will cause the home universities to reap negative consequences both in their reputation and finances. Unfortunately, this failure is most likely due to their entering the partnership lacking adequate information; they either ignore the potential losses or have an overly idealistic expectation of student numbers and an underestimation of the necessary costs.

Unlike the above examples, Malaysia, Qatar, and the UAE have stories of successful IBCs. The first example, Monash University, comes from Malaysia, where a host university was opened by Australia's Monash University. The university partnered with Sunway Group, a Malaysian property development company. Since its founding in 1998, Monash University has enjoyed the constant expansion caused by its partnership with a local firm. The success went beyond simply creating a thriving campus. It converted the town of Bandar Sunway, a former ghost town, into a lively urban area (Sidhu & Christie, 2014). Furthermore, the expansion of Monash's programs continues, as even a doctorate course is now available in the host institution. Accordingly, the Malaysian IBC has been a successful enterprise.

Besides Malaysia, Qatar has experienced high levels of achievement. The Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar was established in 2001, when the Qatar Foundation partnered with Cornell University, signing an agreement to found a medical school. Though Weill Cornell Medical College had only twenty-five students in 2002, it has shown remarkable success in the following years (Crist, 2015). A decade later, the number of students reached two hundred seventy-three, coming from thirty different countries. This growth led to further accomplishment when the campus was the first foreign institution to offer an American M.D. degree (Hajjar & Gotto, 2013). Its success is due in part to the fact that it has a contract with the government of Qatar, which ensures its right to remain in Educational City (Crist, 2015). The continuing growth of Weill Cornell Medical College shows what is possible for a successful IBC.

A third set of examples comes from the UAE, where the record number of IBCs is hosted. In 1995, the American University in Dubai (AUD) was started, being the first American university in that city. Its objective has been to grant higher education through a replication of the methods, on-campus life, and faculty of an American university. It guarantees quality for the students; consequently, its success has been guaranteed. Another IBC success in the UAE is the American University of Sharjah (AUS). It was established in 1995 by the American University in Washington, D.C. Because the AUD and AUS were the first in the UAE, they prospered from lack of competition. Their success continues, resulting from their ability to adapt American education to the local customs and population. Additionally, they both have profitably combined the difficult balance of local and foreign educational perspectives, which few IBCs have mastered (Franklin & Alzouebi, 2014). Therefore, these two institutions are a representation of the success that is possible for IBCs.

Challenges Faced by the IBCs

As with any business, IBCs exist in competitive environments filled with similar socioeconomic groups. Due to this, they struggle with gaining a desirable position internationally, which in turn results in a number of challenges. The literature review focuses on said challenges. First, IBCs struggle with having proper management. According to Lane, the increased difficulty of managing IBCs compared to traditional universities is caused by the complexity required to establish and operate them (2011a). Girdzijauskaitė and Radzeviciene compare the difficulty of establishing IBCs to the challenge of introducing a business into a new market. For example, the institutions confront such challenges as limited staff and finances as well as product adaptation, the last of which primarily refers to modifying curricula (2014). Similarly, Sham and Huisman argue that the crux of the managerial complexity “is the dilemma of standardization versus local adaptation caused by the institutional distance between the home and the host nation” (Sham & Huisman, 2012).

Second, IBCs also face the complication created through communicating through multiple languages. This leads to fear, both for

students and faculty, that the university may not have an adequate level of language proficiency to handle the curricula. Limited English skills stand as the major language concern. Wilkins, Balakrishnan and Huisman explain that international students want to increase their English language skills, thereby often preferring to attend western institutions. Their preference offers an advantage to IBCs hosted by native English speaking countries, as these attract more students than those for which English is only their second language. In the latter case, the difficulty intensifies when the institutions lack sufficient staff to equip the student with the necessary classes to reach their expected level of language skills. Clearly, language remains a strong aspect of the criteria utilized by international students as they select countries and institutions in which to study (2011a).

Moreover, the IBCs necessitate quality inputs and a high university reputation. International students specifically require proper inputs such as curricula in order to receive employment opportunities in their chosen fields. Regarding IBCs, students’ low assessment on the curriculum’s quality is a major cause of low student enrollment (Wilkins and Huisman, 2011a). Conversely, students enroll in universities with reputations for quality, balancing the aptitude of professors with the cost of programs.

Fourth, the IBCs must submit to the regulations enforced by the governments of the host countries. These often make it difficult for the branch campus to act in accordance with, causing additional challenges, which are multiplied with problems of managing local resources, specifically human inputs.** Furthermore, the policies restrict the rights of faculty and students, limiting them from accessing the entire spectrum of the host campus’ materials. In addition to the civil law, the cultural distance is intensified through differing cultural values and religious beliefs. With all of these restrictions combined, the transmission of information across borders develops into a demanding endeavor (Sham & Huisman, 2012).

Furthermore, IBCs face the challenge of offering multiple courses and electives because of limitations imposed when balancing academic freedom with ethical issues. As the

IBCs tend to offer predominantly business and information systems courses (Altbach, 2015b), the students are not academically free to enroll in other “unfamiliar courses.” Therefore, the branch institutions are perceived as unethical when they allow new courses to be accredited without first seeking their host’s endorsement. Although the IBCs belong to their home campuses, it is not a simply defined relationship: they receive funding partly by the government or other agencies of the host country (Becker, 2010) and partly from through state-approved loans (Verbik, 2015). Thus, it is apparent that many external interventions influence the freedom of IBCs.

Besides the above limitations, there exists the difficulty of the heavy teaching workload. Since IBCs are taught by professionals from both the host and branch countries, the teaching is accomplished either on an individual basis or online. Accordingly, the faculty may experience an overload of teaching because the format necessitates that they be fully involved in the process of education and be committed to transferring the curricula of the institution into the local environment. (Becker, 2010)

Seventh, the relationship between the local universities and the IBCs, which began as cooperation for mutual development, has tended toward competition. For instance, the students enrolling in the international campuses believe they will obtain global employment opportunities. Accordingly, many IBCs currently offer the same courses that local universities do, presenting students with the twofold incentives of more affordable tuition and scholarships. Thus, the relationship between the two institutions has distracted from a relationship of cooperation to one of competition (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011a).

Although it seems that salary and hours worked would be high on the list of challenges, the issues concerning wages is nominal because the institution hires a manageable number of staff, many of whom are local. Additionally, IBCs offer flexible working hours. With these two remaining stable, the institutions have been able to meet health and safety standards. Additionally, their cases concerning harassment or abuse have been minimal compared to typical

universities (Girdzijauskaitė & Radzeviciene, 2014).

Importantly, the factors leading students to attend IBCs include the following: the IBCs’ reputation, the quality and expertise of its staff, the institution’s recognition of students’ previous qualifications, and the recognition of the IBCs qualifications by employers (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011a).

Challenges Faced by the Saudi Students in the USA

The internationalization of education has increased over the past decade as interests of students change due to varying needs in the international communities. The number of academic institutions admitting international students mainly from China, Australia, Africa, and Saudi Arabia has increased significantly in the United States. As expected, the relocation of students to the U.S. comes with certain challenges, some of which prove unbearable for these young and enthusiastic people. The Saudi students have been no exception. They often face multiple challenges, ranging from economic constraints, social variances, language barrier, academic challenges, and discrimination. Despite various interventions by the U.S. government and specific institutions to minimize the turmoil, the situation still remains dire.

Social issues are among the main challenges Saudi students face in the U.S due to the sudden change in cultural norms and expectations. Alhamzi & Nyland (2013) assert that Arabian students get cultural shock when they reach the U.S., particularly; they experience difficulty when adjusting from a gender segregated society to the free and mixed gender environment in the U.S. (Alhamzi & Nyland, 2013). Moreover, students describe the new experience as strange, scary, and horrible (Alhamzi & Nyland, 2013). The male Arab students find attending classes with women a new experience while their female counterparts struggle to adapt to staying in the same class and adjacent to foreign males (Alhamzi & Nyland, 2013).

Many of these learners face challenges fitting into the new social norms, as gender seclusion is not only mandated by their governments, but also prescribed in the holy book, the Quran

(Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013). The unrestricted interaction between the male and female youth in America often appears as a form of transgression against Allah, and thus, an uncomfortable reality to live in (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013). Furthermore, Lee (2010) notes that international Arabian students face difficulty acclimatizing in free societies due to social isolation. Accordingly, these students find it problematic adapting to the new social environment as they receive minimal support from U.S. citizens and take time before creating meaningful friendships (Lee, 2010). Therefore, cultural differences might hinder Saudi students from successfully fitting into the U.S. system.

Saudi students in the United States also encounter language barrier problems. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2009) explain that Arabian students report having difficulties adjusting to using English only. Most of them are accustomed to speaking and writing in Arabic as their first language, and as a result, they have to contend with learning to read, write, and converse in a totally new language (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). According to Liu (2012), adapting to new environments has been problematic to Arabian students due to their strange Arabic accents and English incapability (Liu, 2012). Moreover, Abukhattala (2013) postulates that Arabian students struggle to adapt to the new examination models in the U.S. due to language incompatibility. Since most Arabian students are not completely proficient in the English, understanding and taking new exams becomes extremely problematic.

Saudi students as international students in the U.S. also face academic challenges in their transition. Taleblou and Bin Bak (2013) explain that these students experience hardship adapting to the new teaching methodologies, the new academic system, having a faculty supervisor, and new lecturers. The teaching model used in Arabian countries mostly focuses on theoretical learning, therefore, students face challenges adapting to the more practical and research-based mode of learning used in the U.S. Besides, Cardona and Milian (2012) explain that these students face academic isolation in most learning institutions. Most American students avoid pairing up with Arabian students in group

projects and in classes, leading to the academic segregation.

Discrimination challenges are perhaps the main impediments to successful settlement of students from the East in USA. Charles-Toussaint & Crowson (2010) observe that international students from Arabic and Asian backgrounds face prejudice in the United States due to social dominance. The stereotype stems from the perception that students from Muslim backgrounds are generally hostile and represent a potential threat to their colleagues in the U.S. (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). In addition, Heyn (2013) reports that racism and prejudice towards Arabian students in universities is rampant. Accordingly, Arabian students are shunned by American students in class and some refuse to join groups that comprise of Arabian students (Heyn, 2013). Furthermore, Haynie (2015) states that Arabic students face discrimination based on their race and religion, as most American students associate them with terrorism. Therefore, their self-identity contradicts to the one which is viewed by Americans. Such perceptions and misconceptions cause great problems to Saudi students as they try to fit into their new academic environments.

The last but not the least is economic threat. When entering a new country, Arabian students have to find a proper place to live, banks to withdraw money from and other numerous challenges that are associated with survival in a new country. Therefore, there is a need for support system which is absent in the U.S.

Overall, students from Saudi Arabia and other Arabia countries continue experiencing difficulties settling in the U.S. in the quest for further education. Despite the ever-increasing international student population in the U.S., the challenges they face in this foreign nation are equally as colossal. Arabian students, in particular, face even worse challenges, ranging from discrimination, academic disillusionment, language barrier, abuse, and social variances among other inconceivable predicaments.

STUDY PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore how the challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies in the USA influenced the criteria of their decisions to study at IBCs when there is an establishment of these IBCs in the KSA. In

the present research, we argue that challenges faced by students will likely make a change in the priority level which affects the criteria of their decisions toward studying at IBCs. That means the high criteria towards acceptance of the study at IBCs will decline, given the experiences of living and studying in the USA, which is filled with a lot of challenges and obstacles. We can be sure of this speculation through addressing the following questions and hypotheses:

Questions

From the perspectives of Saudi students who study at Western Michigan University (WMU):

1. What are the type and the level of challenges facing them during their studies in the USA?

2. If there is an establishment of IBCs in the KSA, what are the criteria that are considered regarding studying at these IBCs if they intend to undertake further study?

Hypotheses

H1: There is no statistically significant difference ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) among Saudi students' perceptions regarding the level of the challenges facing them due to (a) gender, (b) age, (c) marital status, (d) discipline, and (e) degree.

H2: There is no statistically significant difference ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) among Saudi students' perceptions regarding the criteria that are considered toward studying at these IBCs due to (a) gender, (b) age, (c) marital status, (d) discipline, and (e) degree.

H3: There is a significant relationship between challenges facing Saudi students during their studies in the USA and the level of the criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs in the KSA.

H4: Challenges facing Saudi students during their studies in the USA have a negative influence on the level of the criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs in the KSA.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Measuring Instruments

The researcher conducted two studies to answer the current study questions and test its hypotheses. The first one was a pilot study that was used to develop and assess the instrumentation. The second study was a field investigation of the relationship between the

level of challenges facing students and the level of criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs. Two independent samples were used (one in Study 1 and a second in Study 2). The first sample in Study 1 was used to develop and assess the *Challenges Facing Students* (CFS) scale and the Considered Factors for Making a Decision to Study at IBCs (CFMDSIBC) scale. This sample consisted of 103 Saudi students who study in the USA and are enrolled in the academic programs.

The researcher developed these two scales based on the theoretical literature and the previous studies that were in relation with challenges facing international students (e.g., Lee & Rice, 2007; Ozturgut & Murphy, 2009; Talebloo & Bak, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003) as well as the studies that are in relation with the students' choice factors of universities among higher education institutions (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015; Healey, 2015; Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2011; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011a). The initial version of the CFS scale included 28 items to identify the challenges facing Saudi students during their studies in the USA. These 28 items were grouped according to four main dimensions (academic experience, social environment, language proficiency, and attitudes and sense) at a rate of seven items for each dimension. A sample item was "Feeling that you are not welcome by the citizens." In the initial version of the CFMDSIBC scale, responses were taken from the total of 36 items. These items explored the intrinsic factors that were taken into account by students in their decision-making regarding studying at IBCs. The 36 items were grouped according to six main topics (the university reputation consisting of 8 items, the education quality 6 items, the costs and gains 6 items, the language skills 6 items, the social life 6 items, and the learning facilities 4 items). A sample item was "High rankings of the university worldwide." In both scales, each item was rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 "Never" to 6 "Very Frequently." For the CFS scale, the ranging was from 1 "Not important at all" to 6 "Extremely important" for the CFMDSIBC scale, without a neutral point to prevent respondents from selecting a neutral position.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure was more than 0.775 for both scales, and the Bartlett's statistic is significant ($p < .001$), which means that the pilot study data suits the analysis. To assess both scales (CFS & CFMDSIBC), the researcher first calculated the item-total score correlation and then deleted two items from the CFS scale and three items from the CFMDSIBC because of low item-total score correlation (less than .40). Next, *Principal Component Analysis* and *Varimax* rotation were performed for the CFS scale. These analyses resulted in a five-factor solution with 4 to 7 items loadings between 0.398 and 0.865 on each dimension. Additionally, a series of factor analyses for the CFMDSIBC scale also yielded five extracted components with 6 to 8 items loadings between 0.382 and 0.906 on each factor. To make the scales more suitable for this study's aims and subsequent research, the researcher constructed a 22-item *Challenges Facing Students* scale and 25-item *Considered Factors for Making a Decision to Study at IBCs* scale by selecting four to six items with the highest factor loadings (more than .45) from each factor.

The reliability and validity of the instruments were measured using the pilot study data. The

convergent and discriminant validity were evaluated using factor analysis. Consequently, the instruments possessed both and thus could be used to measure what they were developed to evaluate. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the instruments to verify their reliability. The reliability values of both scales (CFS & CFMDSIBC) as a whole were 0.817 and 0.825, respectively, both of which were acceptable values to confirm the reliability of the instrument. Summary profiles of the factor loadings and reliability statistics for each component are shown in table 1 and table 2.

The final version of current study's questionnaire is comprised of three main sections. The first consists of demographic questions like gender, age, marital status, discipline, and degree. The second part is the *Challenges Facing Students* scale that contains 22 items and aims to measure the challenges facing Saudi students during their studies in the USA. The third part is the *Considered Factors for Making a Decision to Study at IBCs* scale. This is a 25-item instrument that aims to evaluate the intrinsic factors that are taken into account by Saudi students in their decision-making toward study at IBCs in the KSA.

Table 1.
Factor loadings for challenges facing students.

Factor (F) & Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Factor 1: Academic Challenges					
Doing various types of academic assignments.	.865				
Studying a set of general education classes regardless of your major.	.763				
Lack of supportive from faculty and staff.	.676				
Weakness of communication with professors, classmates, and staff.	.587				
Incapacity of accessing research resources.	.555				
Lack of integrated learning environments that supports cooperation in cultural groupings.	.458				
Factor 2: Social Challenges					
Feeling that you are not welcome by the citizens.		.843			
Difficulty of making friendships with domestic students.		.812			
Feeling of loneliness.		.724			
Incapacity of simulation new culture.		.652			
Factor 3: Language Proficiency Challenges					
Difficulty of understanding what is being taught.			.668		
Negative impression from the professors because of a low English proficiency level.			.654		
Obstacles of integration with native students in the class discussions.			.598		
The professors' beliefs that student is not well-prepared for the class.			.535		
Factor 4: Discrimination Challenges					
Sense of insecurity because of racial background reasons.				.812	
Feeling of discrimination.				.788	
American students' negative attitudes toward an international student.				.579	
Treating international students based on negative stereotypes.				.544	
Factor 5: Identity Challenges					
Lack of support by spiritual places (masjids).					.797
International students can obtain opportunities to educate others about their homeland and culture.					.669
Feeling that international students have to hide their identity.					.525
Missing the culture food from their home country.					.477
Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	.83	.85	.81	.78	.80
Number of items (total = 26)	6	4	4	4	4

Table 2.
Factor loadings for determinants that are considered by Saudi student in decision-making toward study at IBCs.

Factor (F) & Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Factor 1: University reputation					
The reputation of the IBC locally and internationally.	.906				
High rankings of the IBC worldwide.	.865				
The marketability of the degree from the IBC both in my home country and internationally.	.843				
An existence of world-leading academic professors.	.652				
The diversity of international students at the IBC.	.579				
High requirements for acceptance.	.561				
Factor 2: Education quality					
Research excellence and increased innovation and creativity.		.666			
Content and quality of the desired program.		.657			
The accreditation of the program by international bodies.		.498			
The ability of the program to prepare students to initiate their future career.		.472			
Factor 3: Costs vs. gains					
Low cost of tuition fees/costs of a degree.			.853		
Low cost of living and housing in the IBCs area.			.768		
The value offered by the program versus the spent money.			.662		
The opportunities to obtain scholarships.			.654		
Factor 4: Language skills					
The role that IBCs have in the improvement of English for students.				.695	
The ability of the program to improve English for students.				.659	
Focusing on hiring native English-speaking lecturers/professors to teach courses.				.558	
The availability of an English-speaking IBC environment that supports English learning.				.459	
Factor 5: Learning facilities and social life					
Providing diverse and rich learning resources.					.798
The availability of good quality and adequate learning facilities.					.763
The effective use of technology.					.699
Providing a counselling service to the students continuously.					.635
Providing a good range of housing accommodations for students.					.574
The availability of attractive and safe living place.					.486
Chances to work part-time in the country.					.451
Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	.84	.79	.82	.78	.75
Number of items (total = 26)	6	4	4	4	7

Sample and Data Collection

The population of the study is represented by Saudi students (both male and female) at Western Michigan University. The participants include undergraduate and graduate students who self-identified as an enrolled student in the academic program that leads to an academic degree. Based on the statistics provided by WMU (2016), the total population number who meets the sample criteria equals 480 individuals during the spring semester for the academic year 2015/2016. The sample size for the target population was selected

according to the statistical tables (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Consequently, the appropriate sample size equals 214 individuals. The respondents were chosen randomly from the university's email list.

Data for this study was collected via an online survey where Kaplowitz, Hadlock, and Levine (2006) emphasized that conducting web survey research is a suitable way since it has a high response rate. Therefore, an official e-mail was sent directly to the office of International Admissions and Services in WMU to ask for their cooperation on my behalf and recruit

the study's participants via students' emails. The survey was administered using an efficient online survey tool called SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). This commercial survey tool is capable of exporting data and results and reporting descriptive statistics back to the user. It is also designed to secure data. Data are anonymous, password protected and accessible only by the user. The survey's starting page informed the prospective subjects that their answers would be anonymous and that the purpose of the survey is to gather information on the challenges facing Saudi students during their studies in the USA. In addition, the study seeks to identify factors that considers by Saudi students to study at IBCs in the KSA if they intended to undertake further study in the future. The initial e-mail invitation was sent to all members of the selected sample population by the end of spring 2016. Two follow-up reminders were sent to those who have still not answered the survey. The first

reminder was sent within 5 days after the initial invitation and the second one was sent to those who still have not responded over 10 days after the main invitation.

The survey was answered by 219 respondents (45.6% response rate). This sample was composed of 54.34% men and 45.66% women and the majority of our respondents (73.9%, n=162/219) were students belonging to the category of (25 – 40) years. This sample was composed of 40.6% single and 59.4% married. With regard to the academic factors, the data indicated that the sample was composed of 53.9% students who were belonging to scientific majors and 46.1% were belonging to humanity majors. Additionally, 61 students were studying for a bachelor's degree, 101 students were studying in Master's programs, and 57 students were Ph.D. students. Table 3 shows the distribution of the sample members according to their demographic characteristics.

Table 3
Summary profile of respondents.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Categories</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Gender	Male	119	54.34
	Female	100	45.66
Age	Less than 25 years	53	24.2
	From 25 to less than 30 years	94	42.9
	From 30 to 40 years	69	31.5
	More than 40 years	3	1.4
Marital status	Single	89	40.6
	Married	130	59.4
Discipline	Humanity	118	53.9
	Scientific	101	46.1
Degree	Bachelors	61	27.9
	Masters	101	46.1
	Doctorate	57	26.0

Note. N = 219

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The approval for this study was obtained from Human Subject Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University. A written description indicating the issues of anonymity and confidentiality was given to all participants through the opening page of the online survey. In addition, the participation in this study was voluntary where each subject was able of deciding whether or not to take part in this study, with the reassurance that their responses

will be anonymous. We believe that there are numerous ethical issues that should be considered during performing research such as honesty, integrity, respect for privacy, openness of intent, and voluntary participation and this is what has been taken into account at all stages of the study.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to explore how the challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies in the USA influenced the criteria

of their decisions to study at IBCs when there is an establishment of these IBCs in the KSA.

1. Results Related to the Study Questions:

Challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies in the USA: To determine the level of challenges faced by the Saudi students who study in the USA, it necessitates one to obtain the total ratings on the survey 1 (Data Related to

Challenges Faced by the Saudi students) and ratings for each dimension. In this case, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) are used to determine the level of challenges faced by the Saudi students who study in the USA. These values are reported in table 4.

Table 4.
Challenges faced by the Saudi students in the USA

Dimension / Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Academic Challenges	2.73	1.3
1 Doing various types of academic assignments.	3.46	1.3
2 Studying a set of general education classes regardless of your major.	3.06	1.2
3 Lack of support from faculty and staff.	2.52	1.3
4 Poor communication with professors, classmates, and staff.	2.52	1.3
5 Incapacity of accessing research resources.	1.72	1.1
6 Lack of integrated learning environments that support cooperation in cultural groupings.	2.77	1.3
Social Challenges	2.98	1.4
7 Feeling that you are not welcome by the citizens.	2.87	1.4
8 Difficulty making friendships with domestic students.	3.36	1.5
9 Feeling of loneliness.	2.98	1.5
10 Incapacity of assimilation to the new culture.	2.7	1.3
Language Proficiency Challenges	2.94	1.5
11 Difficulty understanding what is being taught.	3.09	1.3
12 The negative impression from the professors because of a low English proficiency level.	2.69	1.7
13 Obstacles of integration with native students in the class discussions.	3.20	1.4
14 The professors' beliefs that Saudi students are not well-prepared for classes.	2.77	1.6
Discrimination Challenges	2.59	1.5
15 The sense of insecurity because of racial background.	2.95	1.5
16 Feeling of discrimination.	2.53	1.4
17 American students' negative attitudes toward Saudi students.	2.20	1.3
18 Treating Muslim students based on negative stereotypes.	2.70	1.5
Identity Challenges	3.45	1.6
19 Lack of support by spiritual places (masjids).	3.89	1.4
20 Limited opportunities by professors for Saudi students to express their homeland and culture.	2.97	1.4
21 Feeling that Muslim students have to hide their identity.	2.86	1.7
22 Missing the customs and cultures of Saudi society in the USA.	4.09	1.4
Overall	2.92	1.5

From the table above, it is clear that the level of challenges faced by the Saudi students who study in the USA is moderate, as the value of the arithmetic average reaches 2.92. Regarding the five dimensions of the challenges, identity challenges have the highest mean of 3.45 hence categorize as average challenge by the five-point Likert scale. Discrimination challenge has the lowest mean of 2.59 hence categorize as low challenge by the five-point Likert scale. The descriptive statistics reported that the main challenges facing Saudi students during their

studies in the USA were: missing the customs and cultures of Saudi society ($M= 4.09$), lack of support by spiritual places ($M= 3.89$), doing various types of academic assignments ($M= 3.46$), difficulty making friendships with domestic students ($M= 3.36$) and obstacles of integration with native students in the class discussions ($M= 3.20$).

On the other hand, the study sample participants reported that the item 22 "missing the customs and cultures of Saudi society in the USA" and the item 21 "feeling that Muslim

students have to hide their identity" have the highest mean and standard deviation respectively. Both of which are categorized as high challenge dimension by the five-point Likert scale while the item 5 "incapacity of accessing research resources" has both the lowest mean and standard deviation hence categorized as a very low challenge dimension by the five-point Likert scale.

The considered criteria in decision-making toward studying at IBCs: To determine the

considered criteria in decision-making for Saudi students to study at IBCs if they intend to undertake further study, it necessitates one to obtain the total ratings on the survey 2 (Data Related to Considered Factors for Making a Decision to Study at IBCs) and ratings for each dimension. In this case, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) are utilized to determine the motivating factors for students to study at IBCs. These values are reported in table 5.

Table 5.

The considered criteria in decision-making toward studying at IBC

Dimension / Item		M	SD
<i>University reputation</i>		4.14	1.8
1	The reputation of the IBC locally and internationally.	4.48	1.5
2	High ranking of the IBC worldwide.	4.23	1.5
3	The marketability of the degree from the IBC both in my home country and internationally.	3.98	1.7
4	An existence of world-leading academic professors.	3.83	1.5
5	The diversity of international students at the IBC.	3.31	2.0
6	High requirements for acceptance.	3.94	1.7
<i>Education quality</i>		4.67	0.9
7	Research excellence and increased innovation and creativity.	4.27	1.7
8	Content and quality of the desired program.	4.46	1.6
9	The accreditation of the program by international bodies.	4.14	1.7
10	The ability of the program to prepare students to initiate their future career.	4.09	1.6
<i>Costs vs. gains</i>		3.69	1.6
11	Low cost of tuition fees/costs of a degree.	3.68	1.3
12	Low cost of living and housing in the IBCs area.	3.41	1.5
13	The value offered by the program versus the spent money.	4.22	1.5
14	The opportunities to obtain scholarships.	3.36	1.6
<i>Language skills</i>		4.19	0.7
15	The role that IBCs have in the improvement of English for students.	4.19	1.6
16	The ability of the program to improve English for students.	4.03	1.8
17	Focusing on hiring native English-speaking lecturers/professors to teach courses.	3.76	1.9
18	The availability of an English-speaking IBC environment that supports English learning.	4.18	1.8
<i>Learning facilities and social life</i>		3.87	1.7
19	Providing diverse and rich learning resources.	4.58	1.1
20	The availability of good quality and adequate learning facilities.	4.08	1.4
21	The effective use of technology.	4.06	1.7
22	Providing a counselling service to the students continuously.	4.23	1.2
23	Providing a good range of housing accommodations for students.	4.32	0.8
24	The availability of attractive and safe living place.	4.54	0.9
25	Chances to work part-time in the country.	3.73	1.3

From the table above, the descriptive statistics exposed that the main reasons motivating Saudi students to study at IBCs were: providing diverse and rich learning resources ($M= 4.58$), availability of attractive and safe living place ($M= 4.54$), internationally ranking for the international branch campus ($M= 4.48$), content and quality of the desired

program ($M= 4.46$), research excellence and increased innovation and creativity ($M= 4.27$) and providing a good range of housing accommodations for students ($M= 4.32$). Furthermore, the study sample participants reported that the item 5 "the diversity of international students at the IBC" and the item 23 "providing a good range of housing

accommodations for students" have the lowest mean and standard deviation respectively. Regarding the five dimensions of considered criteria in decision-making for studying at IBCs, education quality has the highest mean of 4.67 hence categorize as very high considered criteria by the five-point Likert scale. The dimension of costs versus gains has the lowest mean of 3.69 hence categorize as high considered criteria by the five-point Likert scale.

2. Results Related to the Study Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 was included in this study to test whether there are any statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) among Saudi students' perceptions regarding the level of the challenges facing them due to (a) gender, (b) age, (c) marital status, (d) discipline, and (e) degree.

(a) Gender

The Levene's test indicates that equal variances are not assumed ($F=35.473, P < 0.05$). The independent T-test suggest that there is no a significant difference in challenges faced by the Saudi students in relation to gender ($t(210) = -0.943, P= 0.347$).

(b) Age

One-Way analysis was used to analyze whether the Saudi students differ regarding the level of the challenges faced by them when looking at their ages. The findings suggest that all the means for the challenge faced the Saudi students are equal in relation to age ($F(3, 215) = 1.267, P > 0.05$).

(c) Marital status

The Levene's test indicate that equal variances are assumed in identity challenges dimension ($F=1.449, P > 0.05$). The independent T-test suggest that there is significant difference in challenges faced by the Saudi students in relation to marital status for academic challenges, social challenges, language proficiency challenge, discrimination challenges, and identity challenges ($P < 0.05$).

(d) Discipline

The Levene's test indicate that equal variances are assumed ($F=0.593, P > 0.05$). There is no statistical significant difference in challenges faced by the Saudi students in relation to discipline ($t(217) = -0.127, p= 0.899$).

(e) Degree

One-Way analysis was used to analyze whether the Saudi students differ regarding the level of the challenges faced by them when looking at their degrees. Results indicate that the means for the challenges faced by the Saudi students are all equal in relation to degree.

Hypothesis 2 was included in this study to test whether there are any statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) among Saudi students' perceptions regarding the criteria that are considered toward studying at these IBCs due to (a) gender, (b) age, (c) marital status, (d) discipline, and (e) degree.

(a) Gender

The variances for the total ratings of the criteria that are considered toward studying at IBCs for the two categories of gender is the same ($F=0.049, P > 0.05$). There is significant difference in the criteria that are considered toward studying at IBCs in relation to gender ($t(217) = -2.768, P = .006$).

(b) Age

One-Way analysis was used to analyze whether the Saudi students differ regarding the criteria that are considered toward studying at IBCs when looking at their ages. The results suggest that all the means for the criteria are equal in relation to age ($F(3, 215) = 2.140, P > 0.05$).

(c) Marital status

The variance for the criteria that are considered toward studying at IBCs for married and single status is the same ($P = 0.515$). A p-value greater than 0.05 in T-test suggests that the null hypothesis (Equal variances) is not rejected. There is no statistically significant difference in the criteria that are considered toward studying at IBCs in relation to marital status ($t(217) = -0.759, P > 0.05$).

(d) Discipline

The total ratings for the criteria that are considered toward studying at IBCs for the two categories of discipline have unequal variance ($F=0.000, P > 0.05$). There is no statistical significant difference in the criteria that are considered toward studying at IBCs in relation to discipline.

(e) Degree

One-Way analysis was used to analyze whether the Saudi students differ regarding the criteria that are considered toward studying at

IBCs when looking at their degrees. The findings indicate that at least one of the means for the criteria for the degree is statistically significant different ($F(2,126) = 3.450, P = 0.033$).

Hypothesis 3 was included in this study to examine the relationship between challenges facing Saudi students during their studies in the USA and the level of the criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs in the KSA.

To determine the relationship between the level of challenges faced by the Saudi students and the level of the criteria that are considered by them regarding studying at IBCs in the KSA, it necessitates one to conduct correlational analysis between the two variables. A correlational analysis is usually performed on ratio data. Table 6 shows the results obtained in a correlational analysis.

Table 6
Summary profile of Correlations.

		Total challenge	Total Criteria
Total challenge	Pearson Correlation	1	-.372**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	219	219
Total Criteria	Pearson Correlation	-.372**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	219	219

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation in the findings above indicates that there is a negative relationship between the level of challenges faced by the Saudi students and the level of the criteria that are considered by them regarding studying at IBCs ($P = -0.372$). A strong correlation is indicated by values greater than 0.5, while a correlation is indicated by a value less than 0.05.

Hypothesis 4 was included in this study to test whether challenges facing Saudi students

during their studies in the USA have actually a negative influence on the level of the criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs in the KSA.

A multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine how challenges facing Saudi students influence the level of the criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs.

Table 7
Model Summary^b

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.372 ^a	.139	.135	13.883	1.825

From table 7, the value of R-square suggests that only 13.9% of the total variation in the level of the criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs can be explained by the challenges facing Saudi students during their

studies in the USA. The Durbin-watson statistic is less than 2. This suggests that there is evidence of positive serial correlation (Chatterjee&Hadi, 2015).

Table 8
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients
	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	223.349***	3.285	
1 Academic challenge	.294	.247	.112
Social challenge	.217	.335	.072
Language proficiency challenge	-.552*	.289	-.205
Discrimination challenge	-1.530***	.364	-.509
Identity challenge	.487*	.264	.155

a. Dependent Variable: Total Criteria, *. $P < 0.05$, **. $P < 0.01$, ***. $P < 0.001$

Table 8 shows that holding other variables constant, an increase in language proficiency challenge results to a negative influence on the

level of the criteria that are considered regarding studying at IBCs in the KSA by 0.552. An increase in discrimination challenge by a score

rating of 1 results to a negative influence in the considered criteria by 1.530. An increase in identity challenge by a score rating of 1 influences the considered criteria by 0.487.

DISCUSSION

Results indicate that Saudi students face a moderate level of academic challenges, particularly in the areas of lack of integrated learning environments, lack of support from faculty and staff, and communication with rest of the members of the campus. This is in line with the observations of Ozturgut & Murphy (2009) that a major area of insecurity for International students is their low self-confidence due to their deficient English language skills. According to them there is a disconnect between the principles that American universities espouse in the area of cultural inclusiveness and what they actually practice, which is perhaps the reason that the item “doing various types of academic assignments” achieved a high mean (3.46) signifying a high level of challenge. These results also confirm previous findings from Abukhattala (2013) who found that educational experiences of Arab students are mediated significantly by differences in culture, language and social systems.

The findings also confirm qualitative results obtained by Heyn (2013), who reported challenges faced by Saudi Arabian international students while pursuing academics in the USA particularly with respect to the use of English. Such students are usually less proficient in the language, leading to poor understanding of the study material as well as poor communication. These observations are reaffirmed by a mean score of 3.09 for the item “difficulty in understanding what is being taught” and a mean score of 3.20 for the item “obstacles in integration” indicating moderate to high levels of challenges. Students also face challenges of racism and prejudice, particularly when they are

from the Middle East, because they often have to learn how to live independently in a culturally different atmosphere. This is underlined by the fact that identity challenge has a high mean value of 3.45 and lack of support by spiritual places has a mean value of 3.89, signifying high levels of challenges for these constructs.

The item for identity challenges also shows consistently high mean values having a composite mean score of 3.45, indicating moderate to high levels of challenges. Identity challenges are closely related to the threat perceptions that Saudi students develop, as well as broader authoritarian dispositions that the federal government displays. As explained by Charles-Toussaint & Crowson (2010), the Integrated Threat Theory can be used to understand the results in terms of four types of threat perceptions of individuals: realistic, symbolic, intergroup anxiety, and symbolic stereotypes. An increase of authoritarianism also contributes to increased perceived symbolic threat and perceived realistic threat, which exacerbates feelings of isolationism among international students. This may be a cause for the very high mean score of 4.09 for the item “missing the customs and cultures of home country in the USA”, indicating a high level of challenge along this dimension as perceived by Saudi students.

There seem to be differences in degrees of challenges faced by international students based on their country or region of origin, with those from predominantly non-white regions consistently reporting greater difficulties and more negative experiences in universities compared to their counterparts from predominantly white regions. These challenges include difficulties in social adjustments perceived lack of fairness and equal treatment from university authorities (Lee, 2010). These observations are borne out by present research because each of the items that have medium-to-

high mean values (moderate to high degrees of challenge) are related to language, identity and discrimination challenges faced by Saudi students.

The analysis indicates that means of the challenges faced by the Saudi students are not differentiated with respect to gender, age, academic discipline, or degree. This is in broad agreement with literature; for example a review by Zhang & Goodson (2011) reported that gender, age and other factors significantly affect the psychosocial adjustment of international students in the USA, but that categorical differences in these variables are not significant differentiators. The challenges arise due to a variety of reasons, such as systematic academic differences between the students' home countries and the USA, an inability to adapt to the new culture, sudden financial or other developments either in the home country or in the USA, and cross-cultural challenges. The nature of these challenges is such that they apply across different age groups and to both genders. In addition international students across disciplines (humanity or the sciences) and pursuing bachelor, masters or degree courses may experience cultural or emotional challenges in an alien atmosphere (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). On the other hand, the categorical variable of marital status was found to be significant binary variable in predicting challenges faced by Saudi students, with different reported means for single and married students. Yusoff & Chelliah suggested that married relationships may act as a buffer for international students because they experience a lower amount of strain while adjusting to an alien culture. Such students have recourse from their families to provide them with social support at home, and do not need to explore other relationships to the extent that single students do (2010). This seems to be a

reasonable explanation for the observations in this research.

Regarding the criteria that are considered by Saudi students for studying at IBCs, results indicate that the dimensions of education quality and university provide the highest levels of motivation in decision-making toward studying at these branches. It has been reported earlier in literature that obtaining a degree from a Western university that offers its courses in English is a major motivator for domestic students across the world. If they later receive positive feedback from their friends and relatives already studying abroad, they consider IBCs as alternatives to domestic campuses (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). This decision pattern is broadly evident from the fact that both university reputation and education quality achieved high mean scores in this study. In particular, the reputation of the IBC locally and internationally with a mean score of 4.48 seems to be an important motivation factor – this is corroborated by a study undertaken by Nguyen & Goh (2016) in which the authors discussed the attitudes and reference groups when choosing an IBC. These results also confirm previous findings that students consider several factors during university selection, important ones being institutional factors such as perceived quality of education and name recognition of that school (Fang & Wang, 2014).

Motivations to study at an IBC have often been divided into two broad categories – internal and external forces or push factors and pull factors. Push factors refer to such intangible and intrinsic needs student needs as their wants and desire. These factors often play an important part at the beginning of a student's decision to undertake study in an IBC (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2015). Examples of push factors are the desire for academic reputation, quality of program, period of study, expectation of good facilities, and employment prospects; in the

present study these factors can be identified with the items “university reputation”, education quality”, and “learning facilities and social life”. On the other hand pull factors are associated with the attractiveness of institutional features or attributes, which are more tangible (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman, 2012). Therefore, pull motivational factors tend to be more external, situational, and cognitive aspects while push factors tend to be more intrinsic and related with internal or emotional aspects of the individual student. In this study pull factors can be identified with the items “costs vs gains” and “language skills”. It is worth noting that the pull factors have somewhat lower mean scores than the push factors, which indicates that intrinsic factors play a greater motivating role than extrinsic factors when it comes to students’ choice of IBCs. Indeed, intangible perceived benefits such as personal enrichment and acquiring cross-cultural competence were also among the motivational factors identified by Normand-Marconnet (2015). In line with these findings, such explanatory factors as “the availability of attractive and safe living place” (learning facilities and social life) and “content and quality of the desired program” (educational quality) achieved high mean scores while pull factors such as “low cost of tuition fees/costs of a degree” (costs vs. gains) and “opportunities to obtain scholarships” (costs vs. gains) achieved comparatively much lower mean scores.

Furthermore, results indicate that levels of the categorical variables age, marital status, and academic discipline are not statistically significant as differentiators with respect to the criteria that drive decisions on IBC choice. However, gender and academic degree were found to be significant variables in terms of the stated criteria. It can be inferred that males and females evaluate the criteria for studying at an IBC differently, while the level of study also plays a significant role in making this

evaluation. The results are in agreement with previous findings – Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2014) for example noted that female students in general prefer to have a secure and welcoming feeling on campus compared to male students, while studies in Canada have shown that study costs and financial aid considerations can be more important for females than males (Drewes & Michael, 2006). The study also revealed that male students are more concerned about future earning potential, which indirectly influences their choice of campus. Gender, therefore, is a differentiating factor while evaluating selection criteria.

The degree level of the student (bachelor, masters or doctorate) is also significant because the level of higher education at which the campus is being evaluated is important for a number of factors such as scope of future studies, career prospects and cost of the education being sought (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015). Bachelor level or masters level studies offered by an IBC allow them to create a positive institutional image, which in terms significantly influences decisions being made by students at different academic levels.

Results indicate that there is a significant moderately negative correlation between challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies in the USA and the level of criteria considered regarding studying at IBCs. According to Wilkins (2015) the environmental, industry and organizational factors involved in studying at IBCs determine to an extent whether the campus will succeed or not. Therefore, it may be argued that the challenges faced by students while studying in a foreign location (such as the USA) are somewhat related to the criteria that can be found in the campuses of these colleges when established in their home countries. The observation is lent further credence by research carried out by Normandt-Marconnet (2015), who found that students

perceive inter-campus exchange (ICE) programs to be a challenging experience. The challenges typically consist of culture shock and the requirement of academic and linguistic adjustments, which is probably the reason why the moderate association value was found in this study. Similarly, Franklin & Alzouebi (2014) noted that some adaptations of ICBs in terms of the host country's social, cultural and educational background need to be made if ICBs are to be developed in a sustainable manner. According to Heyn (2013) the average male Saudi Arabian student has a positive experience while studying in the US, but English language proficiency is the biggest challenge that they face in their academic pursuits. They also experience personal challenges, including a desire to go back home and meet their relatives. These experiences may also be factors that influenced the correlation result in this study. Lee (2010) suggested that students who are from a non-white background often have a perception of discriminatory treatment when studying abroad, but this feeling may not be highly acute in an IBC because the latter would want to avoid conflicts in order to establish itself. Therefore, the correlation between the challenges faced and level of criteria may have been of a more moderate nature instead of being strong in either the positive or negative direction.

The regression model indicates that total criteria can be explained to an extent in terms of academic, social, language proficiency, discrimination, and identity challenges. This observation is in line with literature. For example Ozturgut & Murphy (2009) indicated that international students studying in the US often find a challenging environment in terms of their linguistic abilities and prior academic experiences. They found that lack of English language skills negatively impacted their academics and often led to a stressful personal life. Similarly, Talebloo & Baki (2013) listed a

number of challenges faced by international students that were categorized into social environment, the academic framework, facilities present, and programs offered by the international office of the institutes. It was found that loss of social support and associated cultural factors may contribute to the challenges facing an international student and this makes social challenge a significant variable in the present study also. Prejudices and a discriminatory attitude in the foreign country may pose challenges of a social nature to foreign students (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010). In fact, the first six months can be a period of highest stress because the student has to complete a variety of formalities and adjust to a new culture as well as an academic system during this time. According to Abukhattala (2013) differences in culture can affect student-teacher relationship, adoption to the teaching methodology and appearing for an examination in a foreign language. The transition, however, is facilitated if teachers help students adjust to the new culture and a different learning style, which also helps the latter find their identity in the new surroundings. In a similar finding, Wearing et al. (2015) language, assessment methods and differences in the Western learning style may all pose significant challenges to the foreign student. Results from the regression model conducted in this paper confirm the findings.

TOWARD STRATEGIC PLAN

Contemporary students seek a learning environment that is intellectually and socially inspiring, as well as rich in accessible extracurricular experiences. In this regard, the student experience is a new concept that involves institutionally managed, interconnected activities of an identifiable set (Temple, Collander, Grove, & Kersh, 2016). To this end, strategic planning is one of the main steps that higher education institutions take to respond to

emerging challenges. This study aimed at analyzing Saudi students' expectations and experiences at universities in developed countries to help decision makers in the KSA to build strategic plans for higher education. In conclusion, students' experience is critical to an organization's proposal value and sustainability. If the students' experiences are considered, especially in terms of students who are studying at universities in developed countries, they can be used as the best tool to build strategic plans for higher education institutions. Thus, it is important for the Ministry of Education to develop a purposeful, strategic plan to establish international branch campuses in the KSA and make these branches a destination of preference for both local and international students. A realistic strategic plan will assist a university institution entering this uncharted territory through the development of a framework to produce a solution to emerging challenges.

CONCLUSIONS

International students face several challenges when they decide to undertake studies in a different country. This study was conducted in a part of the world characterized by ethnic diversity, and Saudi students are more likely to face fewer challenges in a more diversified context. However, the findings revealed that Saudi students encountered different challenges in the United States. Regardless of the level of these challenges, some are natural in the sense that every foreign student in a given country will experience them; others are specific, and they depend on characteristics of the country in which students are pursuing their studies. According to the present research, the items that have medium-to-high mean values relate to the language, identity, and discrimination challenges faced by Saudi students. Considering the motivating factors for studying at IBCs identified in the study, it can be observed that students opting for an IBC give primacy to the

educational quality and reputation of the host university, as these qualities meet their intrinsic needs. This factor was followed by such institutes' role in improving students' language skills, as well as the learning opportunities and social life they provide. A cost/benefit analysis comes at the closing stage of the decision to choose an international campus. In the present research, we found that challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies in the United States might make a change in the priority level which affects the criteria for their decisions related to studying at IBCs. This means that the high criteria involved in accepting the possibility of studying at IBCs will decline if a student has experienced living and studying in the United States, as such international study is associated with many challenges and obstacles. This study's findings provide a basis for further investigations of the challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies abroad, as well as the effect of these challenges on their preference for studying at IBCs, which represent the most common form in the continuing evolution of transnational education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. One of the most important practical prescriptions for curbing challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies abroad is establishing international branch campuses in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
2. The findings clearly suggest the importance of a higher education quality from the Saudi students' perspectives, which invite attention to enhance the standards of licensing for IBCs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
3. Current trend invites the attention to achieve the integration between public and higher education towards acquiring students with English language skills as one of the most important requirements of Saudi openness to the outside world.

4. In the light of the importance to establish IBCs, the Saudi public universities should be given a competitive autonomy, so that competition among universities will maximize the level of quality.

5. The officials of higher education in the KSA should be aware that the students' choices for studying at IBC in the future may not reflect its real quality level, where that the students' criteria might be linked to other variables such as challenges of studying abroad.

6. It is suggested that further study should be taken from a larger number of US universities and other countries about the challenges faced by Saudi students during their studies overseas.

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