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## The Impacts of International Branch Campuses on Capacity Building in Qatar

Ahmed Baghdady

### Introduction

Qatar is the second largest host of university branch campuses in the Middle East with 12 IBCs, in addition to a large national university (Qatar University) and a large education and research not-for-profit organization (Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development). Although Qatar is a small country, it plays an important role in transnational higher education globally. With several undergraduate and graduate programs, large-scale research funding and a technology park, Qatar provides unique education opportunities to its citizens and residents, and is attracting and hopes to retain talent from around the world.

The establishment and growth of IBCs in Qatar had a significant impact not only on higher education but also on K-12 education, science and research, and capacity building in the government and private

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A. Baghdady (✉)

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development,  
Doha, Qatar

sectors. This impact is clear in the several large-scale reform efforts in the education sector and developments in other sectors in the state over the past two decades. The establishment of a new local university and a research-funding agency, the reform of the school education system and the country's only national university, and the significant development in human capacity are examples of how IBCs can serve as a change agent in a country.

## Context

### Qatar's Education System

Formal education in Qatar started in the 1950s with a small number of schools. Since then, the education sector has grown remarkably with the expansion of public schools, the introduction of private and community schools that serve the expatriate populations, and the establishment of the College of Education in the early 1970s which later became the first college of Qatar University (Al-Misnad 2007). As of November 2018, Qatar had 602 private and community schools and 303 public schools with student enrolments of 205,409 and 121,248 respectively (MOEHE 2019).

### Qatar's Education Reform

Two major education reform projects were implemented in Qatar over the last two and a half decades driven primarily by the need to move from a carbon-based economy to a knowledge-based one in which graduates have the knowledge, skills and competencies to compete globally (Baghdady 2016). An early effort at reforming education started in 1995 when Qatar's former Emir and his Consort established Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) to offer world-class education at both K-12 and university levels (QF 2019a). The first educational institution established within QF was Qatar Academy, a modern co-educational K-12 school offering the International

Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum and adopting English as the medium of instruction. Over the course of the following two decades, QF has become the host of several more institutions in its Education City including eight branches of world-class universities such as Georgetown University, Texas A&M University, Carnegie Mellon University and University College London (see the next section for further details on these campuses).

In 2002, Qatar embarked on “Education for a New Era” - a major reform of its public school system - and introduced the government-funded, independently operated schools. This followed the Charter School model from the US with a few adaptations to fit the local context including a more appealing name, the Independent Schools (Brewer et al. 2007). Some aspects of this reform included improving the quality of teaching to raise student achievement, introducing curriculum standards and enhancing teacher and leadership professional development. The main objective of this reform was to help Qatari students succeed along international, and particularly Western, benchmarks (Nasser 2017). The concept behind this reform was to transform the education system from a traditional centralised to a decentralised and results-based model (Brewer et al. 2007). The Education for New Era reform transformed all public schools into Independent schools over the course of seven years. By 2010, all government schools became independent (Romanowski and Amatullah 2014) in the sense that many decisions can be made at the school level including hiring of teachers, development of curricula, and design of extra-curricular activities.

## **Establishing International University Branch Campuses (IBCs)**

Starting in 1998, the leadership of QF decided to invite reputable universities to establish International Branch Campuses (IBCs) in Qatar and offer the programs they are well-known for in Qatar’s Education City (Stasz et al. 2007). This decision came at a time when the branch campus phenomenon emerged in the Middle East, especially in the GCC region (Naidoo 2009; Lane and Kinser 2009). Khodr (2011: 514) states that the main drivers behind the creation of Education City were

...the region-specific tradition to import ‘best practice’, regional and global competition, local education reform and policies, national liberalisation initiatives, and globalisation, internationalisation of education, and trans-national education.

Qatar Foundation adopted a model that ensures financial viability of the IBCs, thus addressing the universities’ main concern of and driver for internationalising. The Foundation covers all costs of the campuses including the infrastructure, equipment, and operational costs and provided a legal status for them under the Education City entity of the Foundation. The IBCs are responsible for providing the agreed-upon programs and hiring faculty from their home universities or from the region who meet the quality standards of the home universities. To date, all campuses have been growing in terms of student numbers, graduates and as programme offerings. Furthermore, all have renewed their 10-year contracts with QF, with the exception of University College London which plans to leave Education City in 2020 when its first ten-year agreement ends (Sarwar 2016).

In addition to the IBCs inside Education City, Qatar established branch campuses of colleges and universities to serve specific human resource needs in such areas as technical, nursing, and service industries. College of the North Atlantic established its campus in Qatar in 2002 to provide Associate Degrees in various technical fields (CNA-Q 2019). In the same year, Stenden University Qatar, a branch campus of Stenden University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands, was established to provide BA programs in Business and Management (C-BERT 2019a). In 2007, the University of Calgary started its campus in Qatar to provide Undergraduate and Graduate programs in Nursing (C-BERT 2019b).

## Methodology

The discussion in this chapter is based on the experience of the author in Qatar and a recent review of documents conducted for another publication (Hartley et al. 2019). The author has been living in Qatar since 2005 and has been involved in the reform of the K-12 education system and

the government scholarship scheme, the establishment of branch campuses, the reform of Qatar University, and the operations of the Qatar National Research Fund. Playing an active role in these efforts, including strategic planning, assessment, and policy analysis, provided the author with first-hand, in-depth knowledge of the impact IBCs had on capacity building in Qatar and how bringing these institutions to the country has helped create a strong and vibrant ecosystem of higher education and research.

A document review, conducted in early 2019 (Hartley et al. 2019), included a review of the following documents:

- Annual reports of one IBC, Qatar University, and Qatar Foundation.
- Strategic plans of one IBC and Qatar University
- Websites of one IBC, Qatar University, and Qatar National Research Fund

The purpose of the review of these documents was to identify data related to how the institutions pursue and achieve excellence in their local contexts and how they serve their local communities. Data identified from the document review were compared and complemented with data gathered through semi-structured interviews with senior leadership and faculty members from the institutions.

## **Findings and Discussion: Impact of IBCs on Capacity Building in Qatar**

Establishing Education City as a hub in Qatar had a strong impact on the education sector. Qatar has become one of the most important destinations for quality Western Higher Education in the region and has provided opportunities for hundreds of students, both from Qatar and neighbouring Arab countries, to join its IBCs. Qatari students who gained admission at any of the campuses were provided full government scholarships. Additionally, full and partial scholarships were offered to

international and regional students in the early years (2000–2007) to encourage them to move to Qatar.

The impact of IBCs was not limited to higher education in Qatar. IBCs had a wider impact across all levels of education and science in Qatar. More specifically, the emergence of IBCs in Qatar influenced (1) the reforms in the K–12 education system; (2) the reforms of the national university; (3) the establishment of a new local university; (4) the government scholarship scheme for higher education; (5) human resources development and capacity building in government and private institutions; and (6) research and research funding.

Below is a description of how each sector was impacted by, and reacted, to the establishment of university branch campuses in Qatar.

## Reforming the School Education System

When the IBCs were established, Qatar's K-12 education system was not producing academically strong students who could meet the rigorous admissions standards of the prestigious university campuses (Stasz et al. 2007). This required a major reform of school education to improve student outcomes and enhance students' abilities in English language, mathematics and science. As mentioned above, the Education for a New Era reform brought about fundamental changes to education in Qatar. This includes introducing curriculum standards for core subjects that are on par with high international standards, a shift from teacher-focused traditional education to a student-centred interactive education, the introduction of English as the medium of instruction for mathematics and science, and the move towards autonomy, accountability, variety and choice in the school system.

This reform seemed to have shaken and disrupted school education as it has introduced radical changes to several aspects of the education system in a short period of time (Alkhater 2016). It was also a conservative society that lacked enough qualified education cadres to lead and implement the reform. This led to strong backlash from society and eventually decisions were made to reverse most reform policies. However, the reform of the K-12 education system helped families to understand the

standards of quality education and how this promotes access to Higher Education. This is manifested in the constantly increasing number of students who apply for and enrol in the branch campuses in Qatar. For example, the student body of Carnegie Mellon University Qatar has grown almost ten times (from 41 to 400) since its inception in 2004 (CMUQ 2019a).

## Reforming Qatar University

IBCs had a notable impact on Qatar University (QU). QU was established in 1977 as part of a wave of new universities in the GCC region established shortly after independence of these states (Findlow 2008). The University offered a limited number of programs, none of which were internationally accredited. Also postgraduate education was limited to Master's programs in a few subject areas and research activity was not well-developed at QU. The University's academic, administrative, and financial structures were marked by highly centralised decision making processes, overly bureaucratic administrative and financial operations, and teacher-focused pedagogy and traditional program offerings (Moini et al. 2009). The University had no formal faculty appraisal system and staff salaries were low compared to other universities in the region. Employers were not satisfied with the skills and competencies of most QU graduates (ibid).

The reaction of QU's leadership is clearly stated on the University's website:

'Following the establishment of Education City and the Qatar Foundation in 1996, a new era of competitive options for local institutions of higher education began and Qatar University's functions and services were re-evaluated ...' (QU 2019a).

Lane (2010) argues that establishing branch campuses of world-class universities in developing countries has a strong knock-on effect on the local institutions and usually leads to improvement in the whole system.

Knight also argues that by hosting IBCs, countries aim to build local capacity and establish a knowledge economy (Knight 2007, 2013).

After the first few IBCs were established, it was clear that QU cannot continue 'business as usual'. In 2003, QU started an ambitious reform project, mandated by the Emir, to increase the efficiency of its administrative and academic processes. The project started with an in-depth examination of the conditions and resources needed to turn QU into a model national university. The Senior Reform Committee established to lead this effort made several recommendations including establishing university autonomy by forming a Board of Regents to govern QU, modifying the academic structure of the university, instituting a core curriculum and introducing university-wide academic planning (Moini et al. 2009).

The focus on quality was a key feature of this reform effort and was manifested clearly in the policies that governed student admission, enrolment and graduation, as well as staff recruitment, retention, and promotion. The University leadership raised student admissions requirements by introducing a minimum TOEFL score and higher scores on the high school exit exams for direct admission into the university. Prospective students who did not fulfil these admission criteria were required to enrol in a preparatory Foundation Program. Student retention was tied to maintenance of a GPA of 2.0 (previously 1.5 was acceptable). More robust faculty recruitment processes were introduced and the importance of efficiency and productivity was underlined in retention and promotion policies which were linked to a newly developed performance appraisal system.

The QU reform project started to bear fruit in 2005 when the programs offered by the College of Engineering received Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) equivalency. Other programs offered by the University received accreditation in the following years. In a subsequent phase of development, a university-wide strategic plan was launched in 2010 to revisit the University's vision and mission by placing quality education, research and community service at the core, identifying key performance areas that focus on promoting quality education and efficient and effective services, and developing objectives to be achieved within the plan's timeline (QU 2019b).



A more specific example of the direct impact of the IBCs on QU is the support offered to QU by Georgetown University campus (GU-Q) in Qatar in developing its international relations program. Faculty and leadership from GU-Q helped design and plan the new international relations program at QU and taught a number of modules for the first cohort of students. This transfer to expertise and experience from Georgetown University to QU was possible because of the existence of the GU-Q campus which demonstrates the spinoff effect of IBCs in local HE systems.

## Establishing a New University

The impact of establishing branch campuses in Qatar was not limited to the reform of Qatar University. In what seems to be a response to the call for local, home-grown institutions that can capitalise on the presence of the branch campuses, QF established Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) in 2011 as a research and postgraduate programmes university. The HBKU built its foundation upon innovative and unique collaborations with local and international partners. HBKU offers over 30 graduate programmes through its various colleges (Science and Engineering, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law, Public Policy, Health and Life Sciences, and Islamic Studies) in partnership with local IBCs or with other international institutions (HBKU 2019a).

Although HBKU is a new university, it has managed to recruit a good number of students (900 students as of 2019) given the small number of prospective students for postgraduate programmes in Qatar. The HBKU leadership clearly focuses on establishing strong connections and partnerships with the IBCs, other international partners and the local industry and government (HBKU 2019b). A number of research institutions that have been established by QF before the inception of HBKU have been merged into HBKU to strengthen its research capacity and complement its postgraduate programs. As of 2019, the branch campuses in Education City and HBKU combined, offer over sixty degree programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level across a number of subject areas such as technology, engineering, business, information systems, medicine, arts,

international relations, media, communications, archaeology, and translation. These institutions now have a combined enrolment of more than 3000 students and over 4000 graduates (QF 2019b), many of whom now hold positions in various public and private sector organisations in Qatar and the region.

## Reforming the Government Scholarship System

The establishment of IBCs in Qatar has changed the local Higher Education scene remarkably. As some students were academically strong enough to be admitted to the highly competitive IBCs, others struggled to gain admission into these institutions. As an alternative, Qatari students had the option to avail a full government scholarship if they were admitted at a university overseas. The government scholarship scheme, established in the 1970s and managed by the Ministry of Education, did not emphasise on the quality or excellence of overseas academic institutions. Hence Qatari students were able to apply to most universities around the world, irrespective of academic quality and reputation, and receive a scholarship even if admitted to a pre-university language program for one or two years. As result, several students could not graduate and ended up either with an Associate Degree or continued their studies at QU upon their return.

In 2003, a study was commissioned to investigate the weaknesses of the scholarship scheme and provide recommendations for improvement (Augustine and Krop 2008). Qatar's leaders aimed for reforms that will create a scholarship system to meet the following objectives: (1) satisfy workforce needs; (2) develop students' foreign language, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills; (3) prepare future leaders; (4) provide international exposure and establish ties with other countries and (5) meet civic and cultural goals (Augustine and Krop 2008). The study recommended developing a new scholarship scheme for Qatar to complement and promote its national K–12 reforms. This scheme would utilise the expanding high-quality, post-secondary options available in the country, and meet the labour-related, civic, and cultural needs emerging from

Qatar's significant economic and social development (Augustine and Krop 2008).

The new scholarship scheme, launched in 2005, featured a number of scholarship programs that support Qatari students who gain admission at the IBCs in Qatar and comparable highly selective universities around the world identified in a list of eligible institutions.<sup>1</sup> Through more stringent award criteria, the scheme encouraged students to seek admission at world-class universities in return for generous financial support. One of the main features of the new scheme is that it limited to students who have gained unconditional acceptance at eligible universities, therefore, limiting the awards to students with high academic standards and high potential for graduation. Thus, the quality of university graduates in particular, and human capacity in general, were enhanced.

## Human Resources Development and Capacity Building

Besides offering world-class undergraduate programs, the existence of IBCs in Qatar also provided opportunities for government, semi-government and private-sector organisations to interact with, and benefit from the expertise of IBC faculty members. Although previously organisations used to contract faculty members and experts from around the world to provide short-term consulting and professional training services, longer-term interaction with IBC faculty members living in Qatar seems to have proved more valuable to these organisations. After a number of individual engagements of faculty and leadership members of IBCs in consulting and training efforts in the early 2000s, several organisations in Qatar currently have long-term agreements with one or more IBC to provide such services on an on-going basis.

Examples of these agreements include the partnership between Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (the entity in charge of organising the FIFA 2022 World Cup in Qatar) and Georgetown University campus in founding Josoor (Arabic for Bridges) Institute in 2013. The purpose of these was building the capabilities of the sports and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/ServicesCenter/Pages/Supported-Universities.aspx>

events industries in Qatar and the MENA region through education, training, professional certification, consultancy and research (Josoor Institute 2019). Another example is the long-term partnership between Al-Jazeera Media Network and North-Western University in Qatar (NU-Q) that provides mutual benefits for both entities in the form of consulting, student internships, and guest lectures. Similarly, NU-Q has a long-standing partnership with the Doha Film Institute (DFI) featuring collaborations on research projects, workshops, film screenings, master-classes, internships and conferences (NU-Q 2019). Texas A&M University At Qatar (TAMUQ) collaborates with over 15 organisations in Qatar (including some international organisations with operations in Qatar) in areas related to its engineering programs including Qatar Petroleum, ConocoPhillips, Maersk Oil Qatar, British Petroleum, and Qatar Shell (TAMUQ 2019). Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar (CMU-Q) has similar partnerships with several local organisations (CMU-Q 2019b).

Another aspect of the impact IBCs have on capacity building in Qatar is the community classes these institutions offer to the public. Most IBCs within and outside of Education City offer classes to the community in areas related to the Undergraduate programs they offer. For example, Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar (VCU-Q) offers a wide range of design and art classes to the public, including ones that target children and high school students (VCU-Q 2019). CMU-Q offers a number of summer training programs and competitions for middle and high school students which improve their academic performance in school and enhance their critical thinking skills (CMU-Q 2019c). Although the primary objective of these classes is to boost recruitment of well-qualified applicants to its undergraduate programs, CMU-Q's programs are also very useful for students when they enrol in other universities.

In the area of professional and executive training and development, HEC Paris in Qatar offers staff and leadership of organisations in Qatar various opportunities to receive high-quality executive and customised training programs that improve local capacity and enhance performance. In addition to its specialised Master's and Executive MBA programs, HEC Paris offers several executive certificates and short and custom

programs in disciplines such as aerospace and aviation, entrepreneurship and innovation, global business management and marketing and sales among others (HEC Paris-Qatar 2019).

Although local organisations clearly benefit from these partnerships, IBCs' efforts to support these organisations seem to be driven by mutual goals and benefits. There has been some criticism that IBCs in some countries are disconnected from the local societies they are supposed to serve, especially when they represent elite institutions operating in developing countries (Baghdady 2017). In contrast, IBCs in Qatar seem to be conscious of the ramifications of poor connections with the society, and thus, are making intentional efforts to engage with and support local organisations and the society.

## Establishing a Research Funding Agency

The growth of IBCs in Qatar and the reform of QU, with its emphasis on research and scholarship, warranted the creation of a national research funding agency to strengthen the research eco-system in Qatar and encourage local capacity building in research, technology and innovation. The Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) was conceived as the main vehicle for driving research in Qatar by providing competitive research funding for institutions in Qatar to conduct research in collaboration with universities around the world (QNRF 2019a). The National Priorities Research Program (NPRP) is the QNRF's flagship program, launched in 2006. To this date, NPRP has provided up to 3 million US dollars of funding for competitively selected research proposals in four main areas: science, engineering and technology, physical and life sciences, medicine and humanities, social sciences and the arts. After the development of the Qatar National Research Strategy in 2012 these areas were later revisited to be aligned with the Strategy's pillars of energy and environment, computer sciences and ICT, health and life sciences, and social sciences, arts and humanities (QNRF 2019b).

QNRF has encouraged faculty in the IBCs, QU and other organisations in Qatar to develop their research capacity. Since its inception, QNRF has focused on supporting the development of local research

capacity building and enforced a policy that ensures research teams include a minimum percentage of members based in Qatar and a minimum threshold for expenditure of the research grant funds in Qatar. The grants include covering the tuition for graduate programs of research assistants and other project team members, travel for conference attendance and presentation, training on the use of lab equipment and statistical packages and the procurement of equipment and materials for research projects.

In a subsequent phase of development, QNRF introduced funding programs specifically targeting promising graduate students and recent doctoral graduates both from within Qatar and internationally. The Graduate Studies Research Award (GSRA) provided funding for graduate students to be enrolled at universities and IBCs in Qatar. Also the Post-Doctoral Research Award (PDRA) provided funding for post-doctoral fellows to work at these institutions for a number of years. These programmes have attracted a large number of applicants and seem to have encouraged many international applicants to move to Qatar and contribute to research outputs and capacity development, thus, enhancing research and human capacity in the country.

## Conclusion

The strong impact of IBCs on capacity building in Qatar is undeniable. The introduction of IBCs has turned Qatar into a regional study destination and offered opportunities to students, university faculty and professionals in many fields to improve their capacity and contribute to building a knowledge economy. If carefully planned and executed, IBC development can be a catalyst for change in developing countries where the education and professional development sectors need improvement. However, attracting universities to establish IBCs requires strong financial and leadership support. Qatar has so far provided the necessary support to ensure IBCs are successful. Other countries interested in establishing IBCs should consider the benefits and costs of this endeavour at both the short and long term.

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