Building a successful partnership in higher education institutions

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Abstract: Educational partnership becomes a common practice in higher education. This study clarifies the practices of educational partnership in higher education institutions. A model of educational partnership has been built to identify its successful factors. The five determinants to the partnership’s success are the following: commitment to partnerships, curriculum and learning, quality and risk management, geographic and economic settings, and change management. This study can be guidance for those higher education institutions seeking and building successful partnership such as study abroad programme.

Keywords: educational innovation; educational partnership; globalisation; study abroad programme; success model, educational outsourcing, change management.


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1 Introduction

Educational partnership becomes a common practice in higher education. Higher education institutions established academic collaboration and partnership with other institutions for reasons of resource sharing, curriculum innovation, and reputation enhancement. The ultimate goals of educational partnership are to cut down college’s operating cost and to gain competitive advantage in higher education’s marketplace.

Colleges in the world have provided various types of study abroad programmes on campuses for enhancing student’s global knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, colleges have established global partnerships for various purposes. This trend is
continuous and we could expect more inventive partnerships to be established among higher education institutions in the world.

Benefits of educational partnership can be successfully achieved through valuable contributors. This paper intends to identify needed determinants that contribute to the success of educational partnership’s practice. A clear understanding of partnership’s success allows colleges to make suitable decision on resources allocations for achieving robust relationship and sustainable partnership with partners. Nowadays, global relationship and partnership are important to institution’s growth and development. Most top-ranked colleges utilise their study abroad programmes as a major selling point to attract potential freshmen. Identifying determinants of successful educational partnership can provide a practical guidance to higher education institutions. We believe this research work does contribute to the field of innovative education.

This paper first provides research background of educational partnership. The practices of educational partnership are discussed in the next section. The next section builds up a success model of educational partnership; five constructs have been generated to illustrate the dynamics of a sustainable partnership. Later, a case study of Yale-NUS partnership programme is provided to illustrate the significance of innovative partnership. The conclusion is included in the last section.

2 Research background

2.1 Educational outsourcing

Educational institutions have recently recognised the need of outsourcing practice.

Bartem and Manning (2001, p.44) suggested that “outsourcing should be seriously considered as an institutional strategy for any product, service, facility, or function that campus engages in, so long as it helps fulfill the institution’s mission”. As implied in the concept of core-competency strategy, outsourcing allows educational institutions to focus on its key mission (such as teaching and learning) rather than on supplementary services [such as information technology (IT) service and food service]. For example, many campuses have successfully outsourced their food service, bookstore operation, and building management to external vendors (Bartem and Manning, 2001). As indicated by Kirp (2011, p.59), a 2001 survey showed that “more than 40 percent of college bookstores are operated by companies such as Barns and Noble or Follett, and more than 60 percent of dining halls are run by firms such as Marriott”.

Another major area of service outsourcing in higher education is IT outsourcing. In a survey conducted by EDICAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR), colleges indicated that the primary reasons of IT outsourcing are operating efficiencies, lack of in-house IT skills, cost savings, and access to innovative services (Kancheva, 2002). Based on institutions’ needs, they can outsource IT function for either supporting educational mission or enhancing operational efficiency. Kancheva (2002) indicated that most common types of IT outsourcing in higher education are e-learning/distance learning, application services, IT infrastructure, application management, business process, processing services, and distributed services.

In addition to auxiliary services, educational institutions also outsourced their classroom teaching to part-time faculty, especially in their extension programmes and online courses offering. Many colleges offer a variety of study abroad programmes that
are new forms of educational outsourcing since their students receiving either short term or long term education from foreign institutions. We will discuss detailed implication about these programmes in a later section.

Although each institution may face diverse situations and causes that concerning outsourcing tasks, the economic downturn and budget constraint in recent years may put more pressure onto institutions for considering outsourcing. The advantages of educational outsourcing are to allowing colleges to redistribute their resources into more challengeable and innovative mission and objectives. New ideas such as global collaboration and partnership programmes could be established for their students’ learning purpose. Sri Lanka experienced its public sector reform and conducted outsourcing at universities. Through careful monitoring and partnership with outsourcing companies, it was found that colleges can reach to improved levels of service and cost saving from outsourcing practice (Herath et al., 2010).

Barnett et al. (2010) proposed that outsourcing-based vendor model should be a type of educational partnership. Vendor model deals with a contracting-based partnership in which the client receives needed services from the vendor to achieve a specific purpose; the vendor receives payment for completing such contracting work. This model encloses “a quid pro quo between the partner organizations which is clear, relatively narrow in scope, agreed upon up-front, and typically for a short period of time” [Barnett et al., (2010), p.24]. After the contract is complete, the client may evaluate the relationship for either terminating or renewing the contract. The next section discusses the implications of educational partnership.

2.2 Educational partnership

Educational partnership is a form of educational outsourcing that has become a mainstream in higher education. Educational institutions, while they cannot accomplish certain ambition alone, may seek partners to fulfil shared goals altogether. The intention of “forming an alliance of resources and expertise between organizations aimed to achieving a mutually desired outcome, one that is not likely to be realized without the involvement of both parties” results in partnerships [Barnett et al., (2010), p.14].

Forming a partnership between two institutions may gain a variety of benefits. In addition to those benefits of performing educational outsourcing such as cost deduction, resource reallocation and innovation, partnership practice allows institutions to reducing service duplication, improving efficiency and accountability, expanding relations, promoting institution’s reputation, and increasing student enrolment. Partnership can engender innovation in its process (Hall and Hord, 1987, Grobe, 1990). Grobe (1990) stated that members of the partnership can learn from each other and the structure and content of the partnership can change over time. Therefore, a new and innovative form of partnership can be developed in the future.

The development of partnership takes time and it can be classified into the following eight stages (Trubowitz, 1986):

1. hostility and scepticism
2. lack of trust
3. period of truce
4. mixed approval
The above eight stages indicate that partners start from knowing each other, either positive or negative experience to the final approval and continuous commitment may take a lengthy process. A variety of conflict, confusion, and misunderstanding may be encountered and resolved until mutual benefits can be generated and continued.

A successful partnership is based on the spirit of mutual trust and support among participants. It is not easy to establish a perpetually last partnership in real world. However, a successful partnership should embed the following characteristics [Grobe, 1990; Barnett et al., (2010), p.16]:

• involve top-level leadership in decisions
• develop programmes that are grounded in the needs of the community
• create an effective public relations campaign
• establish clear roles and responsibilities of each partner
• employ strategic planning and develop long-term goals
• utilise effective management and staffing structure
• ensure that shared decision making and local ownership occur
• provide shared recognition and credit for all personnel involved
• commit resources that are appropriate and well-timed
• provide intensive technical assistance
• create formal written agreements
• are patient with the change process and gradually expand the involvement of others.

On the other hand, partnership could be vulnerable if any ignorance or distraction from the agreements or contract occurred by one or two partners. The two frequent causes of partnership failure are the lack of commitment by organisational leader and insufficient financial funding to continue the project (Lugg, 1994). Other barricades to partnership development are the cultural, regulatory, and personal barriers from partners (Barnett, 1995).

Barnett et al. (2010) classified educational partnerships into the following four types: vendor model, collaborative model, symbiotic partnership model, and spin-off model. Vendor model is a contracting-based collaborative activity that is a part of outsourcing practice we discussed in the last section. Collaborative model deals with more versatile goals and relationship than that of vendor model. The partnering institutions in this practice should embed strong mutual trust and interdependence, the final goal of this partnership must generate agreeable benefits to each side. Symbiotic partnership model is a more complex partnership that “moves beyond the mutual gain” to “where there is a compounding of benefits through the joint effort” [Barnett et al., (2010), p.26]. This
partnership will create a join system and hire staff members for implementing shared goal and project. While partnership continues to be developed that makes partners feel that they need to create a new organisation, this becomes a new partnership type called spin-off model. Creating a new organisation allows a much stronger partnership to be positioned between partnering parties. In the mean time, a variety of risk may exit that need to be cautiously monitored (Barnett et al., 2010).

3 Educational partnership practices

Educational partnership practices have been recently established in higher education institutions. We now discuss various partnership practices in higher education institutions.

3.1 Study abroad programmes

Higher education institutions establish a variety of academic collaboration and partnership with foreign peer institutions. The most popular academic collaboration and partnership programme is ‘study abroad’ programme. Study abroad programmes can be varied based on their location, community partners, curriculum, facilities, term length, and staff support availability. The main purposes of offering study abroad programmes are to explode their students’ global view and cultural experience. The US colleges and foreign peers establish collaborative programmes that allow one college to send (or exchanges) students to the other college to study for a certain period of time. The detailed agreements in such programmes needs to be mutually accepted, including tuition and fee, curriculum, language adoption, facilities provision, staff support, etc. Study abroad programmes need to go through several stages of collaborative practices before reaching to a sustainable partnership.

Most US campuses encourage their students to participate in study abroad programmes. For example, President Lariviere at University of Oregon (UO) suggested that “the university’s aspirational goal should be that 100% of our students study or intern abroad” (University of Oregon, 2010). The administration at UO enjoyed the continuous enrolment increase in their study abroad programmes in recent years. The projects at UO study abroad programmes are “strategically targeted to increase UO study abroad participation while maintaining and enhancing the quality of our programs, effectively managing the associated risks, and contributing to the University’s mission as an international center of higher learning and scholarship” (University of Oregon, 2010).

Harvard University offers study abroad programmes for students to learn in classroom, laboratory and field-based engagement programmes globally. Harvard University feels that students should participate in a wide range of other activities abroad. The university provides generous funding to students who like to attend study abroad programs. About 60% of Harvard’s undergraduate students participated in any of its study abroad programmes (Harvard University, 2011).

Princeton University’s (2011) fully-integrated programmes encourage students to be part of a foreign university through cultural and linguistic exposure. This approach makes students to experience a completely foreign learning environment with great international experience.
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University of Minnesota at Twin City intended to send 50% of its students overseas as a strategic goal for global participation; however, only about 15% of them studied abroad (Fischer, 2010). The main reason caused this low participation rate was that many students and faculty members thought that “going abroad wouldn’t work in a give course of study, for reasons of quality and timing” (Fischer, 2010).

In recent years, business schools in the US intensify their international components in curriculum, especially toward MBA programmes. For example, the Farmer School of Business at Miami University (in Ohio, USA) requires MBA students to complete a six-week global consultancy course at the end of the programme (Dalton, 2011). Another example is Goizueta Business School at Emory University, where more than half of their full-time MBA students complete an international internship, study abroad or take an international mid-semester travel module to gain global skills (Dalton, 2011).

Higher education institutions may build up relationship with each other through previous project related cooperation, collaboration, or leadership network. These partnerships may take a considerable time to be developed. Another way of establishing partnership is through consulting service from specialised organisations or agencies. We discuss this perception in the next section.

3.2 Network and agencies for partnership

Higher education institutions recognise the vital importance of global partnerships for their future development. Building global partnerships allow colleges to augment academic collaboration and curricular innovation. However, seeking global partnerships requires adequate relationship and network building, which may not be the strength in hand to most colleges. An alternate way of pursuing global partnerships is through the networking with certain consulting agencies. Several prominent consulting agencies are exemplified below.

3.2.1 The Institute of International Education

The Institute of International Education (IIE) is an agency for international students and scholars’ exchange. IIE’s Center for International Partnerships in Higher Education is an office that assists colleges to develop and sustain institutional partnerships with other colleges in the world (Institute of International Education, 2011). Based on IIE’s mission, they provide the following initiatives to college faculty and administration, and policymakers (Institute of International Education, 2011):

- linking US higher education institutions to countries where they are seeking partnerships
- organising tours for foreigner institutions to visit US colleges and then establishing potential partnerships
- providing advice and liaison services through IIE’s network and international offices
- providing research data and papers on critical issues and policies.
3.2.2 The Institute for the International Education of Students

The Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) is a non-profit organisation that includes memberships from 175 US colleges and universities. IES enrolled more than 5,000 students in semester-, year-, and short-term study abroad programmes and internship abroad programmes (Gillespie, 2009; The Institute for the International Education of Students, 2011). Since 1950, IES has provided US colleges with various academic study abroad programmes that focus on intercultural development.

3.2.3 Ed-Collaborate – the global education network

Ed-Collaborate (2011) is a licensed association that provides assistance to establishing partnerships between prospective partners of global educational institutions, colleges, and universities. Ed-Collaborate also provides online consulting services to other consultancy providers and institutions to building up relationship and partnerships.

3.2.4 Office of University Partnerships

Office of University Partnerships (OUP) was established by US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1994 to encourage and expand the number of partnerships among colleges and their communities (Office of University Partnerships, 2011). OUP is a governmental agency to support collaborative work through grants, interactive conferences, and research to reach the following three goals (Office of University Partnerships, 2011):

- “Provide funding opportunities to colleges and universities to implement community activities, revitalize neighborhoods, address economic development and housing issues, and encourage partnerships.
- Create a dialogue between colleges and universities and communities to gain knowledge and support of partnership activities and opportunities as well as connect them to other potential partners and resources.
- Assist in producing the next generation of urban scholars and professionals who are focused on housing and community development issues.”

4 Model of successful educational partnerships

Educational partnerships demand for a variety of contributors that make them work. This paper identifies several determinants that contribute to successful educational partnerships. These determinants can be categorised into five major components; they are commitment to partnership, curriculum and learning, quality and risk management, geographic and economic settings, and change management. The five constructs of this model are shown in Figure 1. The implications of individual construct are described below.
4.1 Commitment to partnership

Higher education institutions are aware of the substance of global partnerships, therefore, they intend to advance study abroad programmes and to sustain international collaboration and partnerships. The process may not be easy or simple at the beginning; however, institutions could seek external agencies for building up such relationship. Once institutions established the relationship and partnership, they need to maintain and strengthen their commitment for further development. Many successful partnerships have gone through such corridor. The commitment to partnership construct consists of the following two components:

- **Relationship management**: relationship management refers to the continuous efforts to be placed into such collaboration and partnerships. Relationship management relies on smooth communications and networking among vendors, schools’ administrators, and staff members. Regular contacts on collaborative projects, programme design, implementation, and project assessment are needed in order to maintain a healthy relationship between project partners.
Resource sharing and allocation: maintaining and committing a long lasting educational partnership needs to consume a tremendous amount of resources. Other than financial contribution, partners need to allocate facilities, staffs, and other resources for completing collaborative work. The adoption of partnership requests the shift of resources from original objective to the new purpose at individual partnering location. Another important factor to be considered is the distribution and allocation of needed resources to be applied to the on-going projects. The partners must agree upon the ways of resource sharing and allocation to achieve the objectives of the partnership.

4.2 Curriculum and learning

Most educational partnerships are to offer academic programmes and internships for their partnering schools. One major attraction in partnership programmes is to build novel and innovative curriculum for incoming students. While students select schools for studying abroad, curricular innovation is always a major concern for them since it generates the value of learning experience. Creating innovative learning experience for students can deliver a successful partnership. The curriculum and learning construct consists of the following two components:

- **Curricular innovation**: College students spend extra time and money for attending study abroad programmes. Their purpose is to learn lessons that cannot be received from their home college. For this reason, partnering schools must discuss the need of offering new and innovative classes for students. This way can maintain the quality of the programmes and also continuously increase the rate of student’s participation.

- **Student’s needs and interests**: Other than curricular innovation, a sustainable partnership needs to accommodate student’s needs and interests of global learning. For example, Study Abroad Office in a college needs to prepare sufficient information and brochures for individual study abroad programmes. Information such as language requirement, travel information, lodging and room arrangement, budget preparation, time and term of study, advice, etc., are necessary materials for prospective students. Students can choose the kind of programme they like to participate based on the information they received.

4.3 Quality and risk management

Educational quality is an important success factor for educational partnership. A sustainable collaborative project should fulfil the needs and requirements of the contract. In the meantime, schools should maintain their academic quality and reputation for attracting prospective partnership. Quality management describes the processes that risks have been identified and monitored in educational partnership. The quality and risk management construct consists of the following two components:

- **Educational quality and reputation**: educational quality and reputation are essential for maintaining a long term partnership. Colleges and universities in the US are working tirelessly to improve their academic ranking in various surveys. A high educational quality may earn a better reputation, it also implies that a better opportunity to gain a successful partnership.
• **Risk management:** maintaining a partnership may not be easy. Various uncertainties and risks may hinder the progression of the existing collaborative projects. For this reason, a carefully planned risk management process should be taken for monitoring the quality of partnership’s implementation.

4.4 **Geographic and economic settings**

While higher education institutions select global partners the geography and economic realities are among the list to be judged. Study abroad programme, for example, is the most common international programme on campus. Students pick geographic location and nation they like for global study. Therefore, understanding the cultural, political, and geographic and economic settings allows institutions to establish suitable programmes for their students. The geographic and economic settings construct consists of the following two components:

• **Cultural and political setting:** higher education institutions intend to promote global awareness to their campuses. Cultural differences include languages, cultural interests, religions, customs, social attitudes, and political philosophies exist among the nations offering study abroad programmes. In order to offer safe and beneficial programmes for their students, colleges must evaluate and select suitable cultural and political settings in targeted nations for establishing desired partnership.

• **Location and economic environment:** students select interested location for study abroad. Most often they pick big and known cities to stay. The main reason of choosing known cities for study is to enjoy the quality of life and travel convenience in there. Any region holds high economic development may attract more students to come. For these reasons, higher education institutions must consider the factor of location and economic environment as a successful determinant of partnership.

4.5 **Change management**

Pursuing educational partnership may result in organisational changes that affecting areas such as organisational structure, task and jobs implementation, people, culture, learning, IT and infrastructure setting, and service delivery methods. Accommodating to these changes, colleges should control possible organisational turbulences and chaos through the creation of a well prepared change management strategy. A well designed change management practice and monitoring method could assure the success of educational partnership. Specifically, the change management construct consists of the following two components:

• **People, culture, learning, and IT changes:** educational partnership involves a variety of domestic and international programmes that established within participating higher educational institutions. Personnel participating in the partnership programmes, such as faculty and staff, must understand their partner-institutions’ culture, environment, IT infrastructure, so they can continuously increase learning effectiveness. The more complicated global partnership would face severe challenge such as language, cultural, and religious differences, which may force institutions to change themselves firmly. A well prepared change management programme should accommodate institutions for adjusting these changes steadily and smoothly.
Service delivery changes: educational partnership creates new and complicated services that may be deviating from regular services offered by colleges. The study abroad programme involves extraordinary services to facilitate their partner-institutions’ students, such as room and board, travel assistance, and healthcare service. Colleges must rebuild their website to make it user-friendly. Many partnership programmes involve distance learning education. Therefore, building a modern IT infrastructure for online learning and social networking purposes would be a new service delivery model to higher education institutions. Providing innovative and satisfactory services to their partner-institutions would enhance their students’ interest and the partnership.

4.6 Educational partnership success

Educational partnership’s success is a crucial goal to be achieved in every higher education institution. Chou (2007) adopted items of satisfaction and perceived benefits to measure the outsourcing success. This paper also incorporates these two components into the educational partnership success construct.

- **Satisfaction:** satisfaction represents the degree of a partner’s satisfaction over the other. Satisfaction has been widely used as a relationship success in inter-organisational relationship (IOR) research (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Mohr and Spekman, 1994).

- **Perceived benefits:** Perceived benefits are a partner’s perception of benefits gained from a specific partnership practice. Possible perceived benefits are student’s benefits, college or university’s benefits, and community’s benefits.

The success model of educational partnerships clearly presents the mechanism of educational collaboration, interaction, and partnership. Therefore, we can reach to the following proposition:

**Proposition** Commitment to partnerships, curriculum and learning, quality and risk management, geographic and economic settings, and change management are possible determinants of successful educational outsourcing and partnerships.

5 CASE study: an innovative Yale-NUS partnership

An innovative higher education’s partnership between Yale University and National University of Singapore (NUS) has been announced by both universities’ administrators in September, 2010. The whole plan is to build a new liberal arts college in Singapore. An innovative thought is to have jointly governed college that using both universities’ names – ‘Yale-NUS College’. Singapore government intends to develop its country to be a hub of education and innovation. Its prestigious name is the reason that Yale is gaining the partnership. Singapore would pay the entire cost of building the college and related operating costs (Branch, 2010). The idea of this new college is to have an autonomous institution that administered by a board with equal seats from Yale and Singaporean officials (Branch, 2010).
Yale University has a long history of offering international programmes to their students. Other than that, Yale University has extensive partnerships with foreign universities. For example, it has a joint centre for biomedical research at Fudan University in Shanghai, China, and another joint programme at Peking University for both schools’ undergraduate students (Yale University, 2011).

The Yale-NUS project is making an immense move to Yale’s global connection, especially to Asia area. Although it is in essence an innovative move in higher education, this project raised diverse reactions from Yale’s stakeholders. Yale’s administration feels that “it is an opportunity to establish a beachhead in Asia as the region grows in economic strength and creates an enormous market for higher education – a market that has already drawn many leading Western universities” [Branch, (2010), p.33]. Yale’s faculty members who are involving in the project feel that “it’s an irresistible chance to create a liberal arts college from scratch, without the strictures of existing departments and norms” [Branch, (2010), p.33]. However, there are public critics expressed that “it’s an ill-advised collaboration with a government whose restrictions on civil liberties are incompatible with the very nature of liberal education” [Branch, (2010), p.33].

The creation of a new liberal arts curriculum in Singapore campus has attracted Yale faculty. Branch (2010, p.34) pointed out two reasons of that: “first, if Yale hopes to popularize liberal education in Asia, such a curriculum will be necessary to make the liberal arts relevant there. Second, globalization is making a broader knowledge of non-Western culture increasingly important for graduates of schools like Yale itself. Curricular innovations from Yale-NUS might very well find their way back to New Haven”.

The negative feeling and debate come from the Singapore government and its People’s Action Party. Human rights activists in the world criticise Singapore government’s use of capital punishment to drug possession cases and other criminals. The worse situations are the use of criminal libel laws to still its critics and against public protest. These cultural and legal systems in Singapore are highly contrary to USA’s (Branch, 2010). Therefore, campus debates regarding this partnership are still on the rise.

This Yale-NUS case indicates the importance of global networking and partnership in higher education. The deal can benefit not only their students but also universities’ reputation and financial advantages. Many determinants cause the success of educational outsourcing and partnerships, briefly speaking, such as relationship management, resources sharing and allocation, curricular innovation, students’ needs and interests, educational quality and reputation, risks management, cultural and political setting, and geo-economic environment.

6 Conclusions

The practices of educational outsourcing are related to educational partnership. Their purposes are to cut down operating cost and to gain competitive advantage in the market. Higher education institutions outsourced their administrative services to external vendors for saving cost and increasing competency. On the other hand, institutions established academic collaboration and partnership with other institutions for similar reasons, such as resource sharing and reputation enhancing.

Various study abroad programmes have been offered in the US colleges and universities for promoting international awareness and partnership. Yale-NUS
partnership is an innovative practice in global partnership. We can expect more inventive partnerships to be established among higher education institutions in the near future.

Educational partnership can be successfully achieved through valuable contributors. This paper identified four determinants to partnership success, including commitment to partnership, curriculum and learning, quality and risk management, geographic and economic settings, and change management. These five determinants can be mingled together to achieve educational partnership’s success. The future study to this research would be developing matrices for testing such success model. Although some measurements are hard to be developed, we believe such tasks can be done in the next level of this research.

References


