

Internationalization and Universities: Building Human Capital in the Islamic World

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The Islamic world is the home to 1.6 billion Muslims who represent almost a quarter of the entire global population. Although sharing the same belief system, the Islamic world is highly diverse in many area of economic, social and cultural progress. Muslim countries range from the wealthy to the desperately poor from the turbulent but oil rich Middle East, to multiethnic Asia and some of the most destitute parts of Africa. Despite the various developmental obstacles facing Muslim countries, education is commonly and universally acknowledge as the core of human capital development. Education as a basis for the building human capital is an imperative not only at the school level, but even more so at higher qualification. Universities play a major role in ensuring that the people have the means to develop skills and attain knowledge needed for economic growth. The many higher education institutions that have already been established in Muslim countries can culture of mutual sharing and exchange through internationalization initiatives.

In the age of technology and the World Wide Web geographical boundaries are no longer considered a restriction. The General Agreement on Trade in Services, introduced by the World Trade Organization in 1995, constitutes education as a tradable service, which means universities can market programmes and curricula outside national boundaries through twinning programmes, establishment of branch campuses, partnerships or other arrangement. This carries a lot of potential for the Islamic World, as Muslim countries can, through inter-university partnership; help one another improve higher educational standards and build a network of educational expertise in the spirit of Islamic solidarity. Some forms of partnerships, such as the establishment of branch campuses, have become the norm in many countries. In the cause of open and distance learning (ODL), accessibility, affordability and flexibility are central concepts that have driven an ODL institution like Open University Malaysia to leverage on internationalization to establish nine overseas learning centres around the world.

This presentation will broadly discuss higher education in the Islamic World, and describe how internationalization can improve the quality of provision, as well as widen the access to university education across Muslim countries. This presentation will also explore the role of universities in human capital development, as well as showcase some of OUM's experiences in internalization.

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