



The labor market outcomes of two forms of cross-border higher education degree programs between Malaysia and Japan

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Higher education
International education
Twinning
Study abroad
Scholarship
Employment

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the labor market outcomes of two different forms of cross-border higher education degree programs (i.e., study abroad vs. twinning) between Malaysia and Japan. Based on a new graduate survey, it examines whether there are differences in the labor market outcomes between the two programs and what other factors have significant effects on the labor market outcomes. We observed no significant differences in the labor market outcomes between the two programs. Instead, the degree fields, internship, and university rankings are significant for the first employment. For current work, post-graduation qualifications and skills such as English become important.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades cross-border higher education has become a means to build capability at an individual level because it can expose students to a large variety of educational opportunities that are domestically unavailable. Developing countries with limited domestic higher education institutions can respond to their growing domestic demands for higher education through some form of cross-border higher education (OECD and World Bank, 2007). According to Knight (2008), the concept of international higher education has shifted from “activities” (e.g., international cooperation, study abroad, and international agreements) in the 1980s to “mobility” of students, programs, providers, curriculum, and so forth in the mid-1990s. Among the various forms of cross-border higher education degree programs, conventional study abroad, which requires overseas residence for the entire duration of the studies, could be ideal for developing a “well-trained international workforce” (Vincent-Lancrin, 2007: 73). On the other hand, newer forms of cross-border higher education (e.g., twinning, double degree, and branch campuses) could be preferable forms in order to use limited resources to expand access to higher education to more students because these newer forms of cross-border education are presumably less expensive than conventional study abroad.

In light of this development in the field of cross-border higher education, whether newer forms of cross-border higher education

degree programs are as effective as conventional ones with respect to labor market outcomes is an important policy and empirical question. If the former are indeed as effective as the latter, the newer forms of cross-border higher education programs can be a viable policy instrument for human resource development. Thus, the answer to this question would provide policy makers in developing countries with relevant information to select efficient forms of cross-border higher education to support the nation's human resource development. However, empirical research on the relation between cross-border higher education and labor market outcomes is scarce, especially those between non-Western countries. In this paper we explore this question by comparing labor market outcomes of the graduates of a twinning program with a conventional study abroad program between Malaysia and Japan. We hypothesize that there is no difference between the two forms of cross-border higher education as to the labor market outcomes. Thus, we further explore what other educational factors and post-graduate qualifications and experiences affect the labor market outcomes of those graduates.

Cross-border higher education has been one of the long-standing foci of Japanese official development assistance (ODA) in education with various modalities of grants and concessional loans. Japan's Education Cooperation Policy 2011–2015 emphasizes the development of a cross-border network of higher education for the knowledge-based society, and it plans to promote the creation of regional networks, the acceptance of international students, and student and faculty exchanges between universities to foster highly specialized human resources (MOFA, 2010). While conventional study abroad programs account for the majority of such assistance so far, there are several cases that support newer forms such as twinning and double-degree

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programs. The Higher Education Loan Project II (HELP2), with a concessional loan and grant for Malaysia, is one of them.

The Malaysian government has been highly committed to human resource development as one of the pillars of their national development plans and has facilitated conventional as well as newer forms of cross-border higher education (EPU, 2006; Sirat, 2006; Lewis and Pratt, 1996). As a matter of fact, Malaysia has been one of the most active countries that have utilized newer forms of cross-border higher education, including twinning programs, for its human resource development. According to Lee (1999), by the early 1990s, the demand for higher education in Malaysia surged due to the democratization of secondary education in the 1970s and 1980s. Consequently, the number of private higher educational institutions doubled between 1992 and 1995, and the number of students enrolled in those institutions increased from 15,000 in 1985 to 35,600 in 1990 and then to 127,594 in 1995. However, prior to the 1996 private higher education regulatory reform, Malaysian private higher education institutions could not award their own degrees. Therefore, those institutions forged various forms of cross-border higher education programs with reputable higher education institutions in the UK, the US, New Zealand and Australia to absorb ever-increasing demand for higher education since the early 1980s (Lee, 1999; MOHE, 2010; Sirat, 2006). However, the 1997 Asian financial crisis posed a problem of access to overseas higher education programs as the depreciation of Malaysian Ringgit caused the cost of overseas study unbearably high. Thus, in 1998 the Malaysian government approved the 3+0 program which was a new form of cross-border higher education that eliminated a residential requirement in host countries. This led to the reduction of study cost while enabled students to receive foreign degrees (Lee, 1999; Ziguas, 2003). After the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the cross-border higher education programs have started to attract foreign students to Malaysia, and the Malaysian government now aims to be an education hub of the region (Lee, 1999).

In this historical context of the Malaysian higher education development since the early 1980s, the Malaysian government has supported traditional study abroad programs for Malaysian youth in Japan and Korea under the Look East Policy commenced by the Prime Minister Mahathir in 1982. These programs set out with the objectives to build highly skilled human resources familiar with Japanese and Korean culture and work ethics.¹ Since the early 1990s, the Japanese government has provided its assistance and cooperation for several cross-border higher education programs to support such Malaysian government's human resource development (JICA, 1992). Reflecting a long-standing emphasis of the Malaysian government to develop human resources in science and technology and a substantial presence of Japanese firms in the Malaysian manufacturing sector, a large majority of Malaysian undergraduate students in Japan have majored in engineering. On average 76% of all Malaysian undergraduate students in Japan between 2005 and 2009 were engineering major, and they accounted for 17% of all foreign students who majored in engineering in Japan.² Thus, not only HELP2 but also most LEPP graduates majored in engineering in Japan, and they represent a large majority of Malaysian students in Japan. HELP has supported the cross-border higher education in engineering in two different forms. The first phase of HELP (HELP1) started when the demand for higher education had increased in Malaysia in the early 1990s, and it was the conventional study abroad. HELP2, the second phase of HELP, was implemented after the Asian financial crisis, and it

changed its form to a twinning arrangement. HELP2 emerged to address cost-saving concerns by reducing the residential requirement in Japan from four years to three years for students receiving undergraduate degrees from Japanese universities.³ Meanwhile, the Malaysian government has continued their support of the conventional form under the Look East Policy Program (LEPP), which has a four-year residential requirement in Japan. While this program has been conducted since the early 1980s, Japanese government stepped in and financed this program by a concessional loan for the period of recovery from the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Two different Malaysian government agencies execute these programs. The Yayasan Pelajaran MARA (YPM) or the MARA Education Foundation under the MARA Foundation has been the executing agency of HELP. Established in 1963 under the YPM Act, YPM supports educational activities of Malaysia's main ethnic group called Bumiputra (JBIC 2001). The other agency is the Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam Malaysia or the Public Service Department (hereafter JPA), which oversees various types of scholarships programs and run LEPP.

Since the basic assumption of using a twinning arrangement is cost-saving without sacrificing quality, whether there is no difference in educational quality between the twinning arrangement and the conventional study abroad is a crucial question to ensure similar labor market outcomes. This paper chose to examine HELP2 and LEPP programs because these two different forms of cross-border higher education degree programs were simultaneously implemented after the 1997 financial crisis: this provides us with a rare opportunity to compare and analyze the effectiveness of the two different forms of cross-border higher education degree programs since the graduates entered the labor market at the same time. As mentioned above, Malaysia has been one of the most active countries in cross-border higher education with the partners in Western countries. Thus, more studies cover Malaysian cases than other Asian countries. Nevertheless, the most existing research focuses on the partners in non-Asian countries. It is our hope to add further understanding of the effectiveness of cross-border higher education degree programs by examining the labor market outcomes of the different forms of cross-border higher education between the two Asian countries. Finally, while the newer forms of cross-border higher education have been supported by other bilateral and multilateral donors, to our knowledge, there is very limited research available to empirically evaluate the labor market outcomes of such programs. The remainder of this paper consists of the following sections: Section 2 describes the research framework and data, Section 3 reports the results and Section 4 is the discussion and conclusion.

2. Research framework

2.1. Findings of earlier studies

According to Knight's definition of cross-border higher education, mentioned above, conventional study abroad is about the mobility of people. Thus, the students move to a host country (Knight, 2008; OECD and World Bank, 2007). In the newer forms of cross-border higher education (e.g., twinning arrangements, joint degrees, double degrees, franchises, and branch campuses), a program or a provider moves to the students.

While both developing and OECD countries have been engaged in cross-border higher education activities, each country's and each actor's motives to do so vary depending on each country's

¹ Internal document of Public Service Department (JPA) received on September 7, 2009 (Pelaksanaan Program Dasar Pandang KE Timur).

² Our calculation based on an unpublished data of Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) received May 26 and August 23 in 2010.

³ In HELP3, which started in 2006, its twinning arrangement changed further, and it requires only two years of residence in Japan. HELP3 is not covered by this paper and the 2010 survey because no graduates were in the labor market at the time of the survey. For the governance of HELP project, see Yoshida et al. (in press).

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