International School and Host Country Nationals: A Case-Study from Malaysia

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Background

- Now c. 3 million children in international schools.
- Market continuing to grow.
- Expanded demand coming from host country national families.
- Expanded demand particularly strong in Asia.
Malaysian Context

Changes in government policy:

- Until 2006, only 0.05% of international schools’ enrolments were Malaysians.
- From 2006, Malaysian capped at 40% of an international school’s enrolments.
- Now, 40% cap has been removed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of international schools in Malaysia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>112</td>
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- 2012 12,200 Malaysian students out of a total international school population of 27,800 (c. 44%).
PREVIOUS RESEARCH:
› Has been focused on parental choice.
› Has been focused on Asian students’ experiences when receiving education overseas.

NEED FOR STUDIES FOCUSED ON:
• Student experiences.
• Host country nationals (receiving international education in their own country).

DATA COLLECTION
• Research data from a case-study school in Malaysia (pseudonym: Kolej Malaysia).
• Wider analysis of websites of international schools in Malaysia and documentation from the school, but not reported on here.
• Interviews with host-country students and expatriate teachers form the centre of the analysis reported in this paper.
Case Study School: Kolej Malaysia

- Now has 70% Malaysian students.
- Has students from over 20 nationalities, mainly from around SE Asia.
- Follows UK curriculum.
- Has 40% international staff.
- Both boarding and day students.

Conceptions of an ‘International School’

- The expatriate teaching staff saw being labelled ‘international’ as a compliment; for the Malaysian students, it had negative connotations.
- The staff had arrived at the school for an adventure/ time-out from their careers; for students, it was integral to a long-term plan and the acquisition of cultural capital.
Five Aspects of International Education

1. English as the medium of instruction.
2. An international curriculum.
3. Approaches to teaching.
4. Approaches to learning.
5. The cultural orientation of the school.

English as the Medium of Instruction

- A preoccupation for the staff, but not for the students.
- Malaysian middle-class often code-mix at home, so use of English familiar to these students.
An International Curriculum

- Few differences for the staff.
- Significant differences for the students.
- Period of adjustment required.

‘In A levels we have to think and we have to think more and apply our knowledge, whereas in our local education, it tests how much you know.’ (Wei Ping, student)

‘I used to just learn about Malaysia. Now I learn about more general things and, like, I never knew about it before, so thank God I came here. So I know about it.’ (Rohana, student)
Approaches to Teaching

- Students and staff both identified two competing approaches.
- Students saw them as complementary (enjoyed the fact that Kolej Malaysia has both local and expat staff).
- Expatriate staff saw the two as competing, and the Western approach as superior.

- ‘The Malaysian teachers add a different dimension to it because I find that the expatriate teachers tend to be more focused on learning and creativity and that kind of thing, and the Asian teachers tend to be more exam-centred. You get the best of both worlds, essentially.’ (Irfan, student)
- ‘The local staff haven’t been taught in teaching and learning strategies and we’re running ahead with these new initiatives and they don’t actually know what the training is. They’ve missed the basics.’ (Stephanie, staff)
Approaches to Learning

- Teachers focused on self-motivation, questioning and making mistakes. They saw differences on these three dimensions to what they had experienced with Western students.
- The students felt that they were being made into different kinds of learners. Some had found it hard initially to adjust.

- ‘This one girl, she gets her mid-term assessments, she gets a B and she starts crying hysterically...and I said a B is really great, a B is great. And they said, miss, we’re not Bsians; we’re Asians.’ (Jane, staff)
- ‘I think the thing with the Malaysian system is that it produces one kind of student, one that is very exam-oriented and focused on getting just As. And while it looks good on paper, when you want to go overseas I think that international schools prepare you a lot more. It makes you a lot more open-minded and it opens you up to new things.’ (Miriam, student)
The Cultural Orientation of the School

- A) Cultural Uncertainty.
- B) Culture Shock.
- C) The Maintenance of Malaysian Cultural Identity.

Staff preoccupied with maintaining cultural identity and being culturally sensitive; students, by contrast, not concerned about these things, but focused on acquiring the cultural capital (institutional and habitus) to continue their education overseas.

‘My mother tells me about Malaysian culture all the time and she says, Irfan, you’ve got to get in touch with your roots. But... if you want to talk about Malaysian culture, we’re living it now; I’m not missing out on current Malaysian culture. But if you want to talk about cultures in rural communities, culture in low-income communities, then that’s a different case altogether.’ (Irfan, student)
Conclusions

1. Malaysian MoE wants to stop the student brain-drain, but providing more ‘stepping stones’ could increase it.
2. The disparity in conceptions of learning between Malaysian and international staff needs to be addressed.
3. Marketing institutions as ‘international’ may not increase demand.
4. Malaysian students don’t see it as responsibility of international school to maintain their culture; they are more interested in the cultural capital that they gain.

Thank you