



Received: 10 July 2015
Accepted: 02 November 2015
Published: 01 December 2015

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The challenges of international collaboration: Perspectives from Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University

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Abstract: This case study addresses the international collaboration challenges faced by Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University for women in Saudi Arabia. The objectives of this investigation are to define the challenging sources of international program collaboration between Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University and foreign institutions from the perspective of the university staff who are involved in initiating these collaborations. A total of 27 university staff members who were involved in initiating institutional collaborations participated in semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis of the interviews suggested that the major sources of challenges to the university's international collaboration efforts are difficulties in making contacts with international institutions, language barriers, faculty resistance to international partnerships, cross-cultural issues, and establishing partnership agreements.

Subjects: Lifelong Learning; Sustainability Education, Training & Leadership; Teachers & Teacher Education

Keywords: internationalization; collaboration; partnership; globalization; Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This is one of the stories of international collaboration between universities in the West and East. In this case study the newly developed Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) for women in Saudi Arabia—established in 2007 at a cost of \$5.3 billion—is seeking assistance and cooperation from international higher education institutions around the world in order to develop its undergraduate and graduate academic programs. The objective of the study is to identify the difficulties in achieving and sustaining international collaboration. The study is based on the data gathered from the surveyed PNU staff involved in the collaboration process. The results show that making a connection, cross-culture issues, building relationships, faculty resistance, and language barriers are challenges facing the collaborating partners.

1. Introduction

Globalization is increasingly affecting the context of higher education (HE). Governments, academic systems, and subdivisions are adopting internationalization to cope with globalization (Altbach, 2005). Egron-Polak (2015) considers internationalization as a road map to quality, a key to competitiveness, and part of the race for talent. According to Altbach and Knight (2007), the motivation to internationalize enhances the capacity for research, knowledge, cultural understanding, competitiveness, prestige, and strategic alliance. Marginson (2004) distinguishes between globalization and internationalization and notes, “Globalization refers to the spread of cross-national and worldwide phenomena, including their growing influence at local, regional, and national levels.” In contrast, “internationalization refers to relations between nations as discrete entities, without implying any necessary change in those nations themselves or in the structuring of their relationship” (2004, p. 4). HE is becoming more collaborative. International collaborations among researchers and universities have increased and are almost mandatory for institutions that seek global visibility in science and technology (Knobel, Patricia Simões, & Henrique de Brito Cruz, 2013). Institutions are encouraging their faculty to engage in collaborative research (Brew, Boud, Lucas, & Crawford, 2013). All types of partnerships and alliances are occurring among organizations to promote innovations, address complex problems, and access new markets (Gray, 1989; Levina, 2005). Global access takes many forms, such as branch campuses, online programs, franchised foreign academic degrees, and independent institutions that are modeled after foreign universities (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The 2014 4th Global Survey by the International Association for Universities (IAU) reports an increase of dual/double degree programs with foreign partners over the past three years (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). Altbach labels this “multinationalization” and defines it as “offering one country’s academic program to other countries” (2005, p. 65). This form of collaboration is manifested in dual or joint degrees.

Academic institutions in the Arab world are joining this global initiative. Educational change has become a theme for planning and educational policy for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman) that are eager to adopt globalization and modernization while preserving their national and cultural identities (Elsemary, Alkhaja, & Hamidou, 2012).

In Saudi Arabia, international collaboration is clearly displayed in the annual International Exhibition & Conference on Higher Education (IECHE). The IECHE is hosted by the Ministry of Education with the mission to “act as a liaison between foreign and local higher education institutions providing them with excellent networking venue for exchanging knowledge and solid international alliances creating a cooperative environment where ample opportunities for seekers of overseas higher education are gathered under one roof” (IECHE, 2015). From 2011 to 2014, the IECHE witnessed 152 collaborations between Saudi universities and other universities around the world. This year, 450 universities participated in the IECHE, including top-ranked global universities (Higher Education Statistics Center, n.d.).

Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University (PNU) for women is one of the newly established Saudi universities in the kingdom. In recent years, PNU has been in contact with and engaged in international partnerships of graduate and undergraduate programs with institutions from around the world. These institutions come from the USA, Canada, France, Ireland, the UK, South Korea, Australia, Denmark, Morocco, and Lebanon. Currently, PNU has achieved four partnerships in graduate programs and five partnerships in undergraduate programs. However, international collaboration is not an easy task to accomplish; it is challenging and risky, according to Rosas and Camarinha-Matos (2009). The collaboration initiatives have burdened PNU with many challenges. To gain a better understanding, the author investigated the sources of these challenges from the perspective of PNU staff who are involved in the collaboration initiatives. The goal of this study is to provide insights and contribute new knowledge that will make international collaboration between HE institutions in developed and developing countries, where diverse language, culture, and regulations exist, less

complex and problematic. This research aims at defining the sources of the challenges that confront PNU's initiatives in international partnerships from the perspectives of its staff.

In considering the case of PNU, I present first an overview of PNU and its organization and discuss the need for international collaboration. Next, I report the results of the investigation that include interviews, observations, and policy documents. I conclude with a discussion of the findings for PNU and the implications of its partnership role in international collaboration.

1.1. Background of PNU and the need for international collaboration

The establishment of PNU is the outcome of a series of significant events for women's HE in Saudi Arabia. These events began in 1970 with the establishment of the first girls' college in the country. The establishment of more colleges followed for a total of 102 colleges that are distributed throughout 72 Saudi cities and include 600,000 students. In Riyadh, the capital city, six colleges became the foundation of the first women's university in the country; the remaining girls' colleges were annexed to state universities in their local areas (Introduction to the University, n.d.). PNU was established in 2007 at a cost of \$5.3 billion and a budget of more than \$716 million (Budget, n.d.).

PNU is the largest university in the world for women, with a campus of more than 8-million square meters that is designed to accommodate 60,000 students (Khan, 2011). The physical structures include the academic campus, a central library, a convention center, a health sciences and research laboratory, a medical center, K-12 schools, a residential area, a grand mosque, and a community center. The university has 14 colleges and an Arabic Language Institute. The colleges include Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (Art and Design, Arabic Language and Literature, English Language and Literature, Geography, History, and Islamic Studies), and Health and Medical Education (Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Pharmacy, and Physical Therapy) (PNU Project, n.d.). Additional colleges include programs in Computer and Information Sciences, Business and Administration, Community Service, Home Economics, Language and Translation, Education, Sciences, and Social Services (PNU Deanships & Colleges, n.d.).

In addition, the university established the Deanship of Preparatory Year with a mission to "develop leading personalities in the different aspects of knowledge, skills, and values, capable of learning to achieve international competitiveness in a knowledgeable society, through strategic partnerships and the optimal employment of the latest technology" (PNU Deanship of Preparatory Year, n.d.). This deanship is the first to initiate international collaboration with a foreign institution that teaches English as a second language.

PNU student enrollment in the 2013–2014 school year reached 46,776. There are 2,054 faculty and staff, and 865 of them hold Ph.D.'s (Higher Education Statistics Center, n.d.). PNU's vision "aims to achieve national and international leadership through college education and scientific research" and "contribute to society and environmental development based on Islamic values and social and culture awareness for sustainable development" (*Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University Information Booklet*, 2013, p. 1). The vision to internationalize PNU is a reflection of the special attention given to women's HE in the country. The strong support of the late King Abdullah to improve women's HE (Fatany, 2007) and the 8th National Plan (Ministry of Economy & Planning, n.d.) represent a new era for Saudi women. Both the former King and the National Plan call for widening opportunities and expanding women's participation in national development, especially in HE.

PNU's leadership is making a considerable effort to transform the university from a local to a global institution, similar to the cultural and educational changes that occur in other regions and countries (Almansour & Kempner, 2015). The university established the International Cooperation Department with a mission to "become the link between PNU and all other international institutions and organizations within and outside the Kingdom with the purpose of achieving PNU's objectives for development and excellence" (Vision & Mission, n.d.). Almansour and Kempner's (2015) study summarizes PNU's effort to go global:

PNU has aspirations to be a globally recognized university. To achieve this goal, a number of administrators have explained that “forming partnerships with programs in universities with good reputations” is a key element to gain global status. According to one of the Vice Rectors, “The strategic plan includes PNU’s globalization; however, aspects of globalization are not clear yet.” A senior PNU administrator summarized the additional strategies being taken to internationalize PNU: collaboration with and recruitment of international scholars, changes in courses and curriculum, and increasing the website presence of PNU’s strengths and the quality of its programs. (p. 525)

Although PNU is vigorously pursuing academic program partnerships for both undergraduate and graduate programs, the greatest emphasis is on the graduate level. Since 2008, the emphasis on graduate programs has been particularly strong because all graduate programs were suspended to allow the restructuring and development of new programs that could compete internationally. Moreover, the graduate programs have not been reviewed or updated since 1980. A large study initiated by PNU was launched to review and evaluate the status of graduate programs. The findings called for the suspension of graduate programs and the development of new programs that can best serve the needs of the country’s national plan. New programs were to be developed that contribute to the knowledge society in correlation with the scientific and global development in sciences (Saudi Press Agency, 2009).

The collaboration efforts are intended to develop faculty and produce better student outcomes. International collaboration is also considered by PNU to be a gateway to recognition and global rankings. PNU attempts to form dual program partnerships with high-ranked institutions from around the world. The process of achieving international partnerships involves encouraging colleges and departments to choose a potential partner and establish contacts. College deans or committees formed by colleges or departments, which represent the majority of faculty members, are assigned to achieve this goal. When a preliminary agreement is reached, colleges forward the initial agreement to the Vice Rectorate for Educational Affairs for undergraduate programs or the Deanship of Graduate Studies for graduate programs. These offices are responsible for the approval and completion of the agreement process, including legal, financial, and logistic issues.

PNU is a very conservative institution. Its objective to go international reflects the new leadership of the women who currently run it. Moreover, PNU’s financial soundness and independent leadership make it like no other women university or college in the Arab or Muslim world. Most Arab and Muslim universities include women colleges in their physical structure. These colleges are hardly comparable to PNU’s independence in the decision-making process or its financial capability.

1.2. International collaboration and challenges

According to Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant, “Collaboration represents a complex set of ongoing communicative processes among individuals who act as members of both the collaboration and of the separate organizational hierarchies to which they are accountable” (2005, p. 59). Their model suggests two stages. The first stage is a conversation among participants, and the second stage is the transformation of these conversations into action. Stewart (2015) summarized the principles of effective international collaboration in the following 10 points: clarifying purposes and goals; establishing the rights and responsibilities of partners; respecting social and academic cultures; developing roles and responsibilities of university leaders, faculty, staff, and students; considering ethical standards; building an institutional culture that supports international collaboration; ensuring that the capacity exists to deliver on the commitments made to all stakeholders; providing support to faculty and students throughout their international experience; ensuring the existence of a database that documents past and current international collaboration agreements; and developing the capacity to measure benefits and outcomes. Effective collaboration depends on the relationship of the collaborating partners that require continued negotiations among them as long as the collaboration lasts. Effective contact with international institutions is built on trust and requires time to achieve (De Wit, 2015; Egron-Polak, 2015; Marginson, 2015). Organizations should be adequately prepared before

they participate in a collaboration. Both “hard” factors, such as technological compatibility and competency fitness, and “soft” nature aspects, such as the organization’s character and willingness to collaborate behavior, norms, ethical issues, values, and trust, influence partners’ preparedness to collaborate (Rosas & Camarinha-Matos, 2009). Simonin (1997) indicates that collaborative efforts do not usually achieve their original goals, and many times, they fail. Altbach (2005) explains that twenty-first-century academic systems cannot exist by themselves but warns that globalization must not turn into a new form of colonialism. Traditionally, the relation between institutions tends to be unequal, with the academic models, programs, and curricula from the more powerful outside institution dominating the local partner. Knobel et al. (2013) note that elements of exploitation can exist when international collaboration involves partners of unequal scientific strength.

The aggregate results of the 4th Global Survey of Egron-Polak and Hudsun (2014) show that the risks of the internationalization of higher educational institutions are manifested in limited opportunities for students with financial resources, the difficulty of the local regulation of the foreign programs’ quality, and excessive competition among these institutions. In addition, the potential risks to society are education commodification, unequal sharing in partnerships, and growing gaps among institutions in the country. The 2014 IAU survey results also demonstrate the internal and external obstacles to the internationalization of institutions. The most significant internal obstacles are insufficient financial resources and the staff and faculty’s limited experience. International collaboration challenges the faculty that participate in cross-institutional collaboration because they must enter the world of global interaction to confront its challenges (Cooper & Mitsunaga, 2010). Sometimes, faculty view these collaborations with suspicion and without any positive contribution to their careers (Wang & Beasley, 2014). A case study on PNU’s transformation from a local to a global institution by Almansour and Kempner (2015) reports that a Vice Rector of PNU indicated that PNU’s aspirations to go global are hampered by human resources, experts, time, and resistance to change. Research by Wolcott (2003) also reports that faculty’s fear and feelings of inadequacy create an attitude that increases resistance to changes in the status quo. Tagg (2012) notes that faculty resistance against institutional change is rooted in human instincts, and that we need to design change for our institutions as well as redesign our institutions for change. Adria and Rose (2004) report on faculty resistance to the use of information and communication technology. Boice (1990) similarly finds faculty resistance to writing-intensive courses. Terpstra and Olson (1984) surveyed 23 full-time faculty to investigate the sources of resistance to Management By Objectives and found that decreased autonomy, academic freedom, opportunity for promotion, and job security are the sources. To overcome faculty resistance to formal training in educational principles and methods, Ahmed (2013) reports on a faculty-tailored development program at Ain Shams University Medical School in which 76 faculty were engaged in a self-learning process through web-based modules and an email-based discussion. McBride (2010) proposes strategic planning to address faculty resistance. Randall’s case study (2012), however, shows that the process of change, not the individual style of leadership, is significant to a university’s successful transformation. Randall finds that change in HE occurs when faculty are committed to participate or sometimes lead the change initiatives.

The results of the 4th Global Survey of Egron-Polak and Hudsun (2014) show that the most significant external obstacles to internationalization are limited public funding and the language barrier. Language barriers are impairments to effective communication when interlocutors have different native tongues and lack a shared language (Tenzer, Pudelko, & Harzing, 2014). These barriers can also damage and distort relationships (Feely & Harzing, 2003). “[T]alking the same language can in fact be even more hazardous for communication than talking in different languages, since attention is focused on the superficial surface of ‘sameness’ of language, forgetting that the use and meaning of the English word is inevitably rooted in one’s own cultural background and mother tongue” (Kraus & Sultana, 2008, p. 74). Translation becomes an alternative when collaborating with potential partners who do not share the same language. Farquhar and Fitzsimons discuss “the notion of translation as a complex paradigm for multiple exchanges: in language, within and among cultures, and in the exercise of power. Such complexity problematizes any simple social reality” (2011, p. 661). Brew

et al. (2013) report that collaboration challenges become increasingly demanding when the commonalities between the parties are reduced. Significant cultural and language differences demand continual efforts to renegotiate understanding.

Cross-cultural issues have been reported by researchers as a challenge in international collaboration. Kraus and Sultana report, “The very notion of ‘cross-cultural’ communication, as the basis of the CROSSLIFE project, may itself be overly optimistic given the complex inter- and intra-personal processes involved in constructing meaning in the context of a group and the diversity within every ‘cultural unit’.” (2008, p. 69)

Difficulties in communication within a culturally mixed group are often complicated and intertwined, and cannot be easily “explained away” by referring to “culture” (Kraus & Sultana, 2008). MacKenzie and Meyers’ (2012) study of collaboration among colleagues who complete the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning reports challenges in the lack of time to build sustainable collaborative relationships. This difficulty is especially relevant if distance is an issue and the collaboration is among strangers from different disciplines who must find a common goal, navigate differences in time zones and manage the quantity of communication that is needed, and the differences in culture. Wang and Beasley (2014) note that factors such as personal connection, doing business with friends, trust, centralization of authority, equality of status and action, age, timing of decisions, internal approval process, negotiating style, seniority and authority, communication telephone issues, communication emails issues, travel and study abroad as an accreditation factor, subsidized study abroad for students, permission to travel for study abroad, and individual VS group travel in the USA are perceived differently by the USA and China.

The stereotyping of cultures in the popular media plays a challenging role for securing personal connections and trust. In this regard, Kraus and Sultana (2008) note that questioning stereotyped perceptions and unpacking the content of culturally bound categories require a degree of trust in the group and a sense of belonging, which both take time to be established.

2. Study approach and methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach in the data collection to allow participants to share their views in depth and in a private setting (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). The participants were selected through purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). A key concept analysis was employed (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The data were gathered through interviews and a review of policy documents revealed the new direction of the university toward international collaboration. Reviewed policy documents were official letters sent by the university administration to colleges and departments. In addition an observation of faculty reactions to international partnership issues was included in the study. The author’s observation took place during department meetings and general discussions among faculty on the issue.

In this investigation, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with PNU staff. The interviews employed open-ended questions and focused on the participants’ personal experiences and challenges regarding the international collaboration process. The participants of the study were deans, department committee chairs, and faculty members who were in charge or assigned by their colleges or departments to initiate and negotiate international partnerships in academic programs. The total number of staff who was involved in initiating international partnerships was 31. Twenty-seven out of these 31 individuals participated in the study and represented the colleges of Nursing, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Sciences, Business Administration, Computer & Information Science, Education, Art, Social Services, Community, and Arts & Design. Most interviews were conducted face to face, and other interviews were conducted by phone with follow-up as needed.

3. Results

The qualitative analysis of the interviews generated the main theme of challenges in PNU's international collaboration efforts. The emerging themes that were common among the participants were the difficulties in making contacts with international institutions, language barriers, PNU faculty resistance to international partnerships, cross-cultural issues, and partnership agreements.

3.1. Difficulties in making contact with international institutions

Twenty-four out of the 27 participants complained of no response from international institutions when they attempted to make contact for the purpose of collaboration. In addition, 25 participants were unaware of how to approach foreign universities and to be taken seriously. One participant indicated that making contact was the most difficult challenge and wished the university administration would bear this responsibility, rather than leaving it to the departments and colleges. Two participants who received a response were asked about PNU's credentials and international accreditations, but these international institutions declined to cooperate with a newly established university. Two participants reported that international institutions declined to engage in a partnership with PNU because their faculty were engaged in grants, research, and publications. A participant noted that when she received a response from an international institution, it was, "Who are you?" Another participant was told that PNU was unknown and must build a name before it sought partnerships. One participant was able to make a successful connection and initiate partnership negotiations only because she was friends with a faculty member in the collaborating institution. The results show that most existing collaborations were initiated during the annual IECHE hosted by the Ministry of Education. A participant informed the study that she achieved a program collaboration agreement for her college by making a successful first contact with a foreign institution during the 2012 IECHE. The study findings show that the universities that have already signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with PNU are being continuously asked for partnerships in several graduate programs. Twenty-five participants remarked that PNU's International Cooperation Department has done very little to assist them in this regard.

3.2. Language barrier

A lack of proficiency in English has discouraged and delayed efforts to establish effective communication with international partners. Fourteen out of the 27 participants admitted that a lack of knowledge of the English language was a crucial factor that discouraged the initiation of successful contact with international institutions. Thirteen participants needed help to research the web and find a program that was compatible with their department. Three participants requested that faculty with an English specialty assist them in making contact. A participant indicated that her department had to hire English language translators to assist in the communication process. In two cases, the success of the ongoing negotiations with foreign institutions was attributed to these negotiations being conducted in the Arabic language.

3.3. PNU faculty resistance to international partnerships

Although the top leadership of PNU favors international partnerships, college departments must approve them with a majority vote. The study findings show that most academic departments at three colleges do not favor collaboration with foreign institutions. Fourteen participants report their rejection of full-program collaboration, although they agree with a 50/50 collaboration in which PNU shares the program operation with the foreign institution. One participant said, "What are we supposed to do when others come to teach?" Two participants indicated that the department majority vote does not favor bringing outsiders who are unaware of the Saudi culture and historical background. A participant argued that the labor market does not require the outcomes of international graduate programs. A participant asked, "Why don't they trust us?" The study findings through document review and observation show that some faculty stalled and intentionally delayed their department's discussion of international partnerships and influenced others to refuse the collaboration. A participant commented that the faculty in her department resisted change.

3.4. Cross-cultural issues

Because of Saudi Arabia's social setting of segregation between males and females, 26 of the participants indicated that the negotiating partners could not provide the required female staff to operate the program on campus. In some cases, the foreign partner offered to hire female staff to compensate for female staff shortages, but the suggestion was not received equally satisfactorily among the departments. A participant commented, "We want the same qualified specialized staff that operate this program in the foreign institution, not only to teach our students but also to train our faculty." The study findings show that PNU introduced a new online concept in which 30% of program courses can be taught online by male professors. In two cases, the participants reported that the dual partnership included requirements that were unsuitable for Saudi society but were suitable for the foreign partner.

Negative media coverage and stereotypes of Saudi Arabia may influence the foreign female staff's decision to participate in the partnership team or delay the progress of collaboration, as one participant indicated. In related matters, two participants reported concerns of foreign institutions' staff regarding transportation, food, and women who cover up (Abaya). A participant indicated that she had to assure female foreign staff that transportation services such as taxis and private hires are available in order to obtain personal needs.

3.5. Partnership agreement

The laws and regulations of academic programs at foreign universities differ from the regulations at Saudi universities. A participant indicated that she worked with a potential collaborating institution for many months but could not reach an MOU because of the conflict in the governing law between the two systems. The study results show that three participants who were involved in negotiations and did not necessarily reach an agreement were unaware of the contract requirements, taxes, and financial costs. A participant involved in program partnership negotiations reported a conflict of credit hour numbers between the Saudi HE regulations for graduate programs and their foreign partner. The participants were challenged by the foreign program's English test admission score and were afraid that students would not be able to obtain the minimum score. The participants reported on the foreign institutions' preferences for online teaching, advising, and other related academic activities that conflict with PNU collaboration requirements, such as physical presence on the PNU campus.

4. Discussion and implications

The resulting themes are discussed in the same order that they were reported above, and they are connected to one another, as the discussion will show.

4.1. Difficulties in making contact with international institutions

The results of the current study indicate that international collaboration is challenged at its early initiating stages. It has been a tiresome and somewhat humiliating process for most PNU staff to make contact with foreign universities with little success. The PNU staff seem to be challenged by the first phase of international collaboration. The PNU staff who were assigned to establish collaborations with international institutions had no previous experience or training on how to make a connection with a foreign entity and had no specific instructions on how to proceed with the first email contact and its protocol. Challenges of a different nature are expected to arise when collaboration progresses. PNU's international collaborations seem to occur in the following three situations: during the annual IECHE exhibition and conference that is hosted by the Saudi Ministry of Education; when there is a friendship between the PNU staff/faculty and a faculty member at the foreign institution; and when the foreign institution is already a collaborating partner in another PNU program. PNU's preparation to achieve its objectives in international program partnerships is not significant. The research has warned that international collaborations are complex and not easy to achieve or sustain (Rosas & Camarinha-Matos, 2009; Simonin, 1997). According to the model that was proposed by Hardy et al. (2005), PNU did not accomplish the first stage of collaboration. The preparation for international collaboration is influenced by "hard" factors such as matching competence and

technological fit and by “soft” factors such as behavior, values, and trust (Rosas & Camarinha-Matos, 2009). PNU is a newly established university and is relatively novel in the global academic community, and it is likely lacking the “hard” factors and “soft” aspects that were proposed by Rosas and Camarinha-Matos. In this regard, Marginson (2015) observes that building a relationship that leads to trust is a crucial element in international partnerships. MacKenzie and Meyers (2012) note that building partnerships between complete strangers who communicate at a distance is likely to require more than a year. In establishing international collaboration in HE between the USA and China, personal friendship is recommended to be developed as a precondition in collaborating with China (Wang & Beasley, 2014).

A study on institutional partnership between staff at two universities in the UK and Pakistan Buxton and Macaulay (2012) concludes that intellectual partnership around common interests and building personal friendship and collegiality are the key to sustainability. Pierson, Myck-Wayne, Stang, and Basinska’s (2015) report on an international partnership between two universities in the USA and Poland indicates that time spent between international partners leads to building an open communication and genuine reciprocity that with time becomes a factor in sustaining international partnership.

One can understand PNU’s goal to become globally visible, but has it done enough to achieve that goal? According to one of the PNU’s Vice Rectors, “The strategic plan includes PNU’s globalization, however, aspects of globalization are not clear yet” (Almansour & Kempner, 2015, p. 525). Perhaps PNU’s International Cooperation Department is not fully developed to assume its role in assisting the academic departments to make initial contact with international institutions and to provide support until they achieve their objectives. As a result of so many failed attempts to connect with foreign institutions, PNU is making more program partnerships with the institutions that have already agreed to become partners. This strategy supports the idea of building relationships that lead to trust, which has been suggested by previous research (De Wit, 2015; Egron-Polak, 2015; Kraus & Sultana, 2008; Marginson, 2015; Rosas & Camarinha-Matos, 2009; Wang & Beasley, 2014).

4.2. Language barrier

The results agree with the findings of the 4th Global Survey of IAU (2014) that the language barrier is the most significant obstacle in addition to limited public funding. The results also agree with other researchers who have identified language as a barrier to collaboration and partnerships (Almansour & Kempner, 2015; Feely & Harzing, 2003; Tenzer et al., 2014). PNU’s desire to go global requires a global tongue, and this tongue is the English language. Altbach remarks that English is the global language of science and scholarship and is likely to continue dominant for the foreseeable future (Altbach & Salmi, 2011). “The results of globalization include the integration of research, the use of English as the lingua franca for scientific communication” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291). Although PNU offers its faculty free courses to learn and improve their English language proficiency, it is risky to expect them to initiate and engage in international partnerships on their own. Even using the English language as a medium of communication between potential collaborators with different cultures can be a hazard, as Kraus and Sultana (2008) report. The participants who were assigned to establish a connection could have easily damaged their relationship with the potential foreign partner before negotiations began. Even with the assistance of translators, language barriers exist, and complex problems can arise (Farquhar & Fitzsimons, 2011).

4.3. PNU faculty resistance to international partnerships

Apparently, some PNU faculty are threatened by foreign institutions’ presence at their university. The faculty’s fear and feelings of inadequacy create an attitude that feeds resistance to changes in the status quo (Wolcott, 2003). The faculty resist change when they are out of their comfort zone (Ahmed, 2013). Other faculty consider themselves qualified to develop and run quality undergraduate and graduate academic programs. They also know that international partnerships cannot exist without a majority vote of department members. What they choose not to acknowledge and what they resist is the new vision of the university to go global. However, faculty resistance at PNU should

be expected. Faculty resistance to change has been the research subject of many scholars' research (Adria & Rose, 2004; Ahmed, 2013; Almansour & Kempner, 2015; Boice, 1990; McBride, 2010; Tagg, 2012; Terpstra & Olson, 1984). Stewart (2015) observes that effective partnership requires building an institutional culture that supports international collaboration. Perhaps PNU should have developed a mechanism to manage potential faculty resistance and to encourage faculty to participate in implementing the new vision of the university before introducing international collaboration, as Randall's case study (2012) suggested.

4.4. Cross-cultural issues

When the commonality between partners is reduced, collaboration becomes increasingly demanding, and when major cultural or language differences are apparent, this is an indication to renegotiate understanding (Brew et al., 2013). PNU's requirement for female staff to run and operate dual academic programs is undoubtedly a challenging issue for foreign institutions and is likely against the law for some foreign institutions that may perceive this matter as gender discrimination. It's important to note that gender segregation in Saudi Arabia is a cultural issue related to Sharia Law. The Saudi governing system is based on Sharia Law. This reality, in turn, has a serious impact on the partnership's progression that PNU is trying to achieve. PNU's approach of allowing 30% of a program's courses to be taught online may have saved several partnerships from failing. Another alternative to address the female faculty shortage is for PNU to contact women's higher educational institutions. There are many women's colleges with good standing in the USA, UK, and Australia. Cross-cultural issues are expected to arise when potential partners have different cultural backgrounds, as reported in research by Wang and Beasley (2014), MacKenzie and Meyers (2012), and Kraus and Sultana (2008). The findings in case studies by Cooper and Mitsunaga (2010) demonstrate that remaining flexible is central to the success of international collaborations. Mutual respect and reciprocity are also extremely important between the collaborating partners. Stewart (2015) also emphasizes that respecting social and academic cultures is a key principle to effective international collaboration. Stereotyping ideas of partners' cultures should be addressed in an open and transparent setting. In this regard, Kraus and Sultana (2008) noted that questioning stereotyped perceptions and unpacking the content of culturally bound categories require a degree of trust in the group and a sense of belonging, which both take time to be established. The concerns of foreign female staff regarding living in Saudi Arabia have been received with understanding and addressed by the PNU's Deanship of Preparatory Year since its establishment in 2009. This office was the first to initiate an international collaboration with a foreign institution. It provides female foreign staff with a comprehensive orientation package on living in Saudi Arabia. Individuals who make contact and are involved in negotiations should have this useful information available to provide to foreign institutions. Again, PNU's leadership can decrease cross-cultural issues through a more effective management process. Developing roles and responsibilities for university leaders is one of the principles of international collaborations (Stewart, 2015).

4.5. Partnership agreement

Although issues related to academic programs' governing law and finance are part of the collaboration agreement, they are not the faculty's responsibility to resolve. However, the faculty are deeply affected by the agreement's outcome. If an agreement is not reached between the two academic entities, the faculty's work and time have been wasted. The research suggests that a cross-border academic agreement is the product of a good negotiation that is preceded by preparation, building relationships, and building an academic culture that supports international collaboration and understands its challenges. MOUs are drawn when successful contact is established, communication obstacles are overcome, sincere support of collaboration is agreed to on both sides, acceptance and respect of cultural diversity is reached, and a continuous effort to renegotiate any misunderstandings is established. According to Hardy et al. (2005, p. 59), adopting a discursive approach provides many significant benefits to effective collaboration: "[I]t directs attention to the communicative practices among participants, which are critical to effective collaboration," "highlights the processual and temporal aspects of collaboration, thus allowing us to view collaboration as a social accomplishment that occurs in an iterative fashion over time," and "facilitates the development of

theory and research that attend to the multiple levels on which collaboration occurs; collaboration involves individual participants working in collaborative teams while representing the interests of organizational stakeholders.”

Finally, this discussion turns to the comparative analysis between PNU’s challenges and other similar women universities in the Muslim world. Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) in Rawalpindi, Pakistan had obtained funding from the British Council’s INSPIRE program and approached the Division of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, UK to partner for the British council funding in establishing an academic collaboration. In a comparative analysis between PNU’s and FJWU’s experiences in international collaboration, FJWU confronted challenges related to budgeting staff time on both sides, funding for travel, team leader change, visa issues, travel issues, time zone and teaching schedule, security issues, schedules slip and change, and target audience change (Buxton & Macaulay, 2012). Even though PNU did not confront most of these challenges, yet, few are expected to arise during academic collaboration progresses from negotiation stages to physical application. Although funding is not considered as a challenge for PNU, visa issues, time zone, teaching schedule, and changing team leader may pose as obstacles for PNU’s foreign partners. In contrast with PNU, FJWU didn’t have problems in communicating effectively to initiate academic collaboration nor did it have language issues, female faculty demand, and conflict in governing law. In a comparison between PNU and the Asian Woman’s Leadership University (AWLU) with Smith College of Massachusetts, USA serving as chief academic planning partner, both universities are challenged by issues related to governing law. PNU’s regulations are in conflict with regulations of its collaborating partners, and AWLU’s licensing request is rejected by the Malaysian Government (Updates from the AWLU board, n.d.).

5. Conclusion

PNU must tell its story to the world’s academic community (Stewart, 2015). Participation in international conferences, collaborative research, and exchanged visitations with international institutions should help PNU achieve global exposure. An institution with this size, resources, and willingness to go global can hardly be ignored.

The significant effort by PNU’s leadership to transform the university to a global level is an enormous responsibility for such a young and conservative institution. This process requires effective leadership and good organization and, perhaps, foreign advisors with expertise in international collaboration. As the largest university in the world for women with the potential to attract female students from all over the world, especially the Muslim world, it has to confront and deal with the double jeopardy issue such as gender and culture that are hampering its efforts to go global. PNU has a significant responsibility to build and define its new character. “PNU’s future as a global institution depends on its ability to maintain a delicate balance among the educational, economic, social, and cultural needs of women in the face of changing cultural mores” (Almansour & Kempner, 2015, p. 530).

The importance of this study and implications extend beyond PNU and universities in the Arab world. Other developing and non-English universities can draw upon the findings from this case of PNU. In particular, PNU’s experience demonstrates the need for increased use and facility with English for faculty and recognition of the cultural resistance to international collaboration. Because universities alone cannot change global academic culture, PNU has found ways to adapt to these expectations. PNU’s experience offers other universities methods to create beneficial international partnerships that can be integrated within the existing national culture. To facilitate these international partnerships, the following areas of research are worthy of further investigation:

- (1) Conflict between state laws and cross-cultural issues in international program collaboration;
- (2) Challenges that foreign institutions confront across borders in international collaboration;
- (3) English language issues of students’ admission to dual foreign academic programs; and
- (4) The impact of globalizing education on students’ culture and identity.

Funding

The author received no direct funding for this research.

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Citation information

Cite this article as: The challenges of international collaboration: Perspectives from Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University, Sana Almansour, *Cogent Education* (2015), 2: 1118201.

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