



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

15th Gulf Research Meeting

Cambridge, 22-24 July 2025

Workshop No. 10

Internationalization of Higher Education in the Gulf: Reality or Fantasy?

1. Directors

Reynaldo Gacho Segumpan

Professor and Dean of the City Graduate School, City University Malaysia

Mary Precy Aguilar

Virtual Reality (VR) Initiator at United Arab Emirates University

2. Abstract

The internationalization of higher education in the Gulf region has become a strategic priority for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as they seek to position themselves as global knowledge hubs. Through significant investments, these nations have formed partnerships with prestigious foreign universities, established branch campuses, and implemented policies to attract international students and faculty. While these initiatives are designed to elevate academic standards and integrate global best practices, questions remain about the depth and sustainability of these efforts. Are they truly reshaping higher education, or do they represent a surface-level transformation? This workshop zooms into the development of internationalization in the Gulf, examining whether it is a meaningful shift or a mere catchphrase.

3. Context

There are numerous stands on what internationalization is and its purpose but what is common knowledge is the definition given by Knight (1994). This refers to internationalization in higher education as ‘the process of integrating intercultural, or global dimensions in the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education’ (Knight, 1994). Internationalization is evident through the provision of international curricula, sourcing of international students and staff, students and staff mobility, adherence to international academic standards and quality and through research collaboration and management (De Wit, 2000; Kehm & Teichler, 2007). This workshop will explore how internationalization unfolds and is sustained among higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Gulf. It seeks answers to the following questions, inter alia:

- Are HEIs in the Gulf ready for internationalization?

- How do HEIs in the Gulf face the challenges brought about by internationalization?
- How do HEIs brace for the impact of internationalization?
- Are HEIs in the Gulf globally competitive as regards quality of higher education?
- What is the quality of higher education in the Gulf?
- How does the international community view the standards of higher education in the Gulf?

It is envisaged that this workshop will contribute substantially to the area of Gulf studies in understanding internationalization of higher education in the Gulf. Moreover, the workshop will be an excellent platform for global educational leaders to discuss internal and external factors that (re)shape the quality of higher education in the Gulf and how to further solidify the position of higher education institutions in global rankings.

4. Focus/Objectives

- 1) To evaluate the current state of internationalization in the higher educational institutions in the Gulf
- 2) To assess the impact of internationalization on the quality of education, academic standards, and global competitiveness of higher educational institutions in the Gulf region
- 3) To explore the challenges and barriers of fully integrating internationalization in the higher educational systems in the Gulf region
- 4) To determine whether the internationalization efforts in the Gulf region represent meaningful, long-term reforms or superficial changes, focusing on the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives
- 5) To come up with recommendations in enhancing the process of internationalization to ensure it contributes to the broader goals of educational and economic development in the Gulf region

5. Papers Focus/Topics

- Comparative education
- Educational leadership in the Gulf
- Global rankings
- Gulf higher education
- International education
- Leading educational institutions in the Gulf
- Quality education

Note: Other topics closely related to the theme/focus of the Workshop are also welcome.

6. Paper Structure, Referencing, and Format

Authors should refer to the [GRM Paper Guidelines](#).

7. Publication Plans

With our previous experience and engagement Routledge/Taylor & Francis, UK, we hope to publish (Scopus-indexed) quality papers that will be presented during our workshop. Tentatively, the general outline will be as follows:

- Introduction
- Quality of Higher Education in the Gulf
- Contemporary Higher Education Landscape in the Gulf
- Case Studies of Internationalization in Gulf HEIs
- Internationalization of Gulf Higher Education: Quo Vadis?

Papers that cannot fit in with the joint publication will be considered for publication individually in a journal or as a GRC paper, under the guidance of the workshop directors.

8. References

- Cantwell, B., Marginson, S., & Smolentseva, A. (Eds.). (2018). *High participation systems of higher education*. Oxford University Press.
- de Wit, H. (2000). Changing rationales for the internationalization of higher education. *Internationalization of higher education: An institutional perspective*. Bucharest, Romania: UNESCO/CEPES.
- Kehm, B. M., & Teichler, U. (2007). Research on international higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4):260-273. DOI:10.1177/1028315307303534
- Knight, J. (1994). *Internationalization: Elements and checkpoints (Research Monograph, No. 7)*. Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Bureau for International Education.
- Knight, J. (1999). *A time of turbulence and transformation for internationalization*. CBIE Research, 14, 1–19. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED549870.pdf>.
- Marginson, S. (2022). Global science and national comparisons: Beyond bibliometrics and scientometrics. *Comparative Education*, 58(2), 125–146. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2021.1981725>.
- Segumpan, R. G., & McAlaney, J. (2021). *Higher education in the Gulf: Quality drivers*. UK: Routledge.

9. Directors' Bio Notes

Professor Reynaldo Gacho Segumpan is currently the Dean of the City Graduate School, City University Malaysia. Prior to this, he worked (16 years) under the Ministry of Higher Education (CAS) and University of Technology and Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman. Professor Segumpan is a Chartered Manager and Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute, UK; Chartered Scientist of the Science Council, UK; Fellow of the Institute of Science & Technology, UK; and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, UK. He has travelled to more than 30 countries (e.g., UK, US, Switzerland, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Egypt, South Korea, Mongolia) for research and conference engagements. He attended the 2018 Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations in Harvard University, USA and served as one of the Workshop Directors during the Gulf Research Meeting in 2019 and 2022 where two edited books had been materialized and published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis, UK. Professor Segumpan has presented and published more than 100 research papers and has also completed a special training in qualitative research methods conducted by ProQual Institute of Research Methods, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA (January-March 2022). He holds a PhD and a DComm (Doctor of Communication – Chancellor's List).

Dr. Mary Precy Aguilar has nearly 30 years of experience in international higher education, working in Thailand, Vietnam, and the United Arab Emirates. She has contributed extensively to curriculum development, teaching, learning, and research in this field. Dr. Aguilar holds a Ph.D. in Management from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia, and a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching and Learning from RMIT. She has been actively involved in branch campus and twinning program operations of Australian universities in Asia, which led her to pursue a research thesis titled ‘The Influence of International Education on Workplace Integration and Organisational Commitment: The Case of Vietnam’. In 2017, she was one of 40 doctoral students globally selected to be mentored by renowned International Business scholars at the Academy of International Business and Sheth Foundation Doctoral Student Consortium. Her research interests include business education, international higher education, internationally educated local staff (IntELS), international human resource management, organisational commitment, and First Year Higher Education (FYHE). Dr. Aguilar also serves as a Virtual Reality (VR) Initiator at the United Arab Emirates University in partnership with INSEAD, where she received training from INSEAD experts.