

The Effects of Employee Commitment in Transnational Higher Education: The Case of International Branch Campuses

Stephen Wilkins¹, Muhammad Mohsin Butt², and Carrie Amani Annabi³

¹*Faculty of Business, The British University in Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

²*Curtin Business School, Curtin University Sarawak Campus, Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia*

³*School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

Abstract

Higher education is a labour intensive activity and strong organisational performance depends upon employee commitment. This study analyses antecedents and consequences of employee commitment in universities that are involved in transnational higher education, with a focus on identifying differences between the employees at home and foreign branch campuses. The data for the study were obtained using a questionnaire that was completed by both teaching and non-teaching staff at three institutions in the UK, three institutions in Malaysia, and two institutions in the United Arab Emirates. A conceptual model was proposed and tested using structural equation modelling. The results indicate that employees at international branch campuses are not as motivated and committed to their organisations as their counterparts at home campuses. The findings suggest that institutions need to employ different and customised human resource strategies at home and foreign campuses, specifically with the aim of improving employee commitment and performance at the foreign campuses.

Keywords

higher education, international branch campuses, organisational support, employee involvement, employee commitment, organisational citizenship behaviours

Introduction

Higher education is highly labour intensive, which provides the rationale for analysing specific aspects of employee attitudes and behaviours that might influence organisational performance. The marketisation of higher education globally has put pressure on institutions to simultaneously improve quality and minimise costs. This has been particularly noticeable in transnational higher education, where international branch campuses are expected to cover all of their costs from tuition fees and other commercial income (Wilkins, 2016). In effect, managers have had to get more from their staff for less. In this situation, it is easy for employees to perceive reduced organisational support.

When employees perceive that the organisation does not value their contributions or care about their well-being, then the employee's commitment toward the organisation is likely to fall (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and when organisational commitment is low, then the employee may exert less effort in their work and be more inclined to leave the organisation for another (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Employee commitment in higher education might have an impact on employee performance and student satisfaction (Xiao & Wilkins, 2015).

This study analyses antecedents and consequences of employee commitment in universities that are involved in transnational higher education. Specifically, the research seeks to identify possible differences in employee commitment, attitudes and behaviours at the main home country campuses and international branch campuses abroad, to assess the extent to which different human resource strategies might be desirable in different operational contexts.

Employee commitment

Many different definitions and conceptualisations of organisational commitment can be found in the literature (Swailes, 2002). However, three distinct conceptualisations may be identified. First, organisational commitment may be considered as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation (Mowday, Steers, & Porter 1979). Second, organisational commitment may be considered in terms of loyalty, in addition to identification and involvement (Cook & Wall, 1980). This approach focuses on the individual's sense of belonging and attachment to the organisation, which results in loyalty. The third approach to conceptualising organisational commitment, proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991), has become the most popular and influential model used in research on employee commitment.

Meyer and Allen (1991) suggest that organisational commitment consists of three components, namely affective, continuance and normative commitment. Affective commitment refers to an individual's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation. Employees with a strong affective commitment stay with the organisation because they *want* to. In contrast, with continuance commitment the employee recognises that there are costs associated with leaving the organisation, such as losing the opportunity to use acquired skills, the loss of attractive benefits, and disruption to personal relationships. Thus, the employee stays with the organisation because they feel they *need* to. Finally, normative commitment exists when an individual feels obliged to continue employment with the organisation; hence, they stay in the organisation because they feel that they *ought* to.

Although Meyer and Allen's three-component model of commitment is the most popular and most used model in employee commitment research, the model has been criticised for not sufficiently differentiating between the psychological state of commitment (identification) and its consequences, such as the willingness to engage in extra-role behaviours and the desire to stay with the organisation (Peccei & Guest, 1993). Rather than being a part of the commitment construct, it had been earlier argued that willingness to exert effort and desire to stay are actually outcomes of commitment (O'Reilly III & Chatman, 1986). Furthermore, several studies have indicated that the three components do not create a unidimensional construct (e.g. Benkhoff, 1997; McGee & Ford, 1987; O'Reilly III & Chatman, 1986; Peccei & Guest, 1993).

A meta-analysis conducted by Meyer et al. (2002) found that affective commitment is the most used measure of commitment. This study used a scale for affective commitment as the measure of employee commitment, as affective commitment goes to the heart of what most researchers and managers think of when conceptualising or discussing employee commitment (Edwards, 2005).

International branch campuses

During the last fifteen years, many universities have established international branch campuses as part of their internationalisation strategies. At the start of 2016, there were 230 international branch campuses in operation globally and a further 24 were planned or in the process of being built (Cross-Border Education Research Team, 2016). The United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), Australia and Russia are the countries that have the most institutions operating foreign campuses, while the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Singapore, Qatar and Malaysia are the countries that host the most international branch campuses (ibid.). An international branch campus may be defined as ‘an entity that is owned, at least in part, by a foreign education provider; operated in the name of the foreign education provider; engages in at least some face-to-face teaching; and provides access to an entire academic programme that leads to a credential awarded by the foreign education provider’ (Cross-Border Education Research Team, 2016).

International branch campuses can be staffed in a number of ways: transferring employees from the home campus on a permanent or long fixed-term basis; flying in faculty from the home campus for short intensive periods of teaching at the branch campus; or recruiting staff locally in the host country (Salt & Wood, 2014). Most institutions use a mix of these methods. This research is concerned only with the branch campus employees who are based at the branch. Faculty who are based at the home campus and merely ‘fly in’ to teach at the branch are not included in the samples as these employees are unlikely to develop strong feelings of identification or commitment toward the foreign campus (Smith, 2014). Even though some ‘fly in’ staff may begin to develop a sense of identification with a branch, these faculty members will have an incomplete perspective on the branch and they will not be hired under the same policies as staff permanently employed at the branch.

Potentially, any employee at an international branch campus might feel torn between the natural allegiance to their students and local colleagues and their loyalty to the home university, with its particular culture and procedures (Dobos, 2011; Healey, 2015). Staff at international branch campuses are often employed on inferior terms and conditions compared to staff at the home campus, and branch campus staff typically perceive a lack of support for professional development and limited scope for career advancement (Healey, 2016; Hughes, 2011; Salt & Wood, 2014). When these staff perceive a lack of organisational support, this has the potential to reduce their own motivation, commitment and loyalty toward the institution.

Branch campus staff are often deprived of participation in strategic decision making and technology (such as video conferencing) is rarely used to involve these staff in committee meetings held at the home campus (Healey, 2016). Many branch campus employees feel sidelined, overlooked or marginalised by their departmental colleagues at the home campus (Cai & Hall, 2015). Although universities that own international branch campuses typically decentralize, to a large extent, functions such as human resource management and marketing, strategic decisions about location, financial investment in infrastructure, scale of operations, and curriculum are made at the main home country campus (Shams & Huisman, 2014). When teaching content and materials are determined and produced at the home campus, branch campus lecturers may perceive a lack of job involvement (see Dobos, 2011; Smith, 2009). When employees are denied involvement in their jobs, they are less likely to be motivated, committed and loyal to their employer.

Purpose of research and proposed conceptual model

Relatively little is known about managing employees at international branch campuses (Healey, 2016). However, Salt and Wood (2014) found that universities engaged in transnational education do not appear to imitate the structures and processes of multinational business corporations and that universities seem to lack the infrastructure to manage the specific challenges of overseas staffing. The staffing of international branch campuses is one of the greatest challenges facing campus managers (see, for example, Fielden & Gillard, 2011; Shams & Huisman 2016), but the existing literature focuses on the hardships related to recruitment and the seconding of academic staff from home to host campuses. Therefore, other important human resource-related issues such as commitment and involvement are underexplored. Specifically, few studies have examined the antecedents and consequences of organisational commitment in multinational organisations, and to our knowledge, none have been concerned with identifying differences between home and foreign branches.

Although possible reasons why employee commitment *might* be lower at international branch campuses have already been discussed, it *cannot* be assumed that employee commitment is actually lower at branch campuses compared to home campuses. The vast majority of international branch campuses are relatively small organisations, typically with fewer than 1,000 students and 200 employees. In these small work units, relationships between colleagues can be close and rewarding, and the comradery that exists between employees at the branch may improve team working and identification with the local branch (cf. Nadolny & Ryan, 2015). These, in turn, might lead to higher job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation. Thus, it is not known, and it is not easy to predict, whether differences might be found in the antecedents and consequences of organisational commitment at home and branch campuses.

Such differences may appear a relatively minor matter, but we argue that if differences are found then this would imply that specific and different human resource strategies are needed at home and branch campuses in order to maximise employee commitment and organisational performance. Thus, a key objective of this study is to discover the extent to which employee commitment has an impact upon employee attitudes and behaviours at the home and foreign branch campuses of universities.

The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 summarises the hypothesised relationships investigated in this study.

Literature and hypotheses

Organisational support

Employees tend to personify organisations and perceive that their organisation has a favourable or unfavourable orientation towards them (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to organisational support theory, employees recognise perceived organisational support to meet their emotional needs and to assess the extent to which the organisation will recognise, appreciate and reward increased efforts made to benefit the firm (Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006). This mental process undertaken by employees fits with social exchange theory, which argues that the individual's actions are performed on the basis of reciprocity, in which employees provide extra effort and loyalty to the organisation in return for management recognition and appreciation, which satisfies their esteem needs; financial rewards and other benefits; and career advancement (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

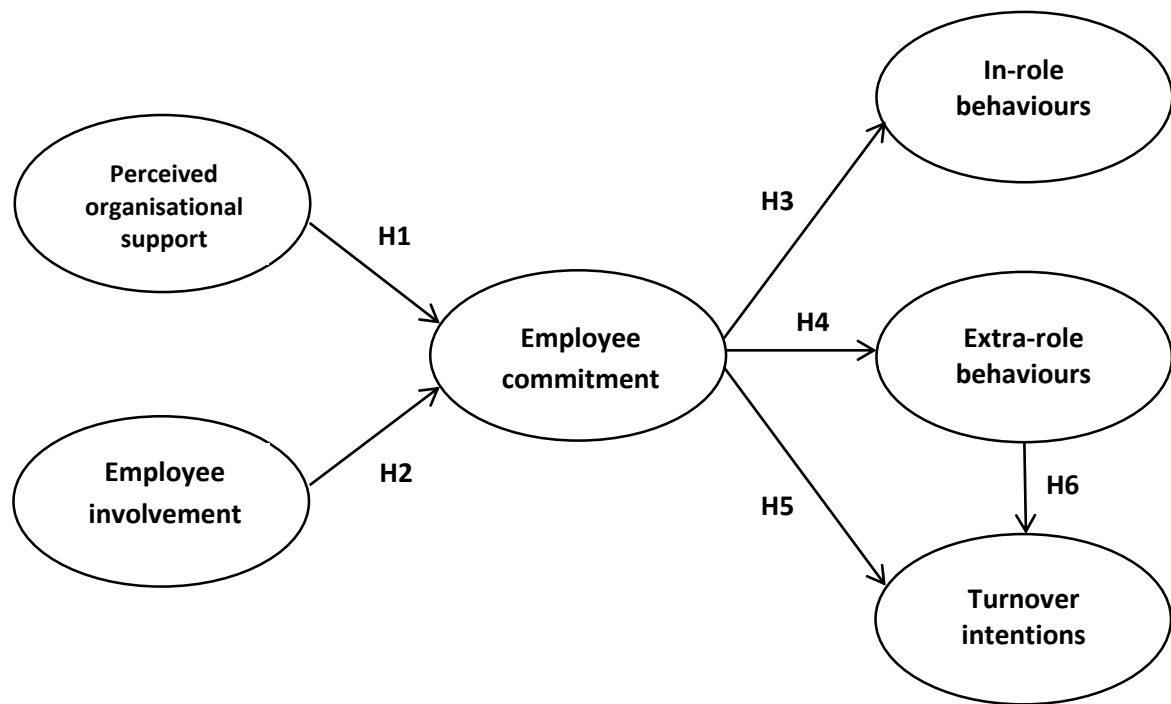


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.

On the basis of reciprocity, perceived organisational support will typically lead an employee to feel obliged to care about the organisation's welfare and to demonstrate greater employee commitment to help the organisation achieve its objectives (Rhoades, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 2001). Perceived organisational support also strengthens affective commitment by fulfilling esteem, approval and belonging needs, as well as confirming organisational membership (Armeli et al., 1998). Numerous studies have confirmed that perceived organisational support and affective commitment are strongly associated (e.g. Guzzo, Noonan, & Elron, 1994; Settoon, Bennett, & Liden, 1996; Shore & Wayne, 1993). Likewise, perceived support and consideration from managers and supervisors have also been found to be associated with affective commitment (e.g. DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; Glisson & Durick, 1988; Yoon, Baker, & Ko, 1994). Thus, we expect:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived organisation support is positively related to employee commitment.

Employee involvement

The term 'employee involvement' may refer to a range of practices, but in this research it will be taken to be employees' influence over how their work is organised and carried out (Fenton-O'Creevy, 2001, p. 28). Employee involvement may take various forms, including participation, consultation, empowerment and decision making (Morgan & Zeffane, 2003). The distribution of power and involvement in decision making are two key elements of employee involvement.

Senior management are more likely to delegate decision making when they believe that employees possess the 'excellence' that is needed to effectively participate in strategic decision making and problem solving (Timming, 2015). Because employees working at the home campus are often reluctant to work abroad for personal or family reasons (Dupuis, Haines III, & Saba, 2008) or because they fear it will have a negative effect on their career progression (Wilkins & Huisman, 2012), many of the managers employed at international branch campuses did not previously hold a similar managerial role (Healey, 2016). This could be one reason why strategic decision making is centralised at the home campus. However, employees deprived of decision making and job involvement may feel less committed to the organisation if they perceive that the organisation is not committed to them.

In transnational higher education, most stakeholders (e.g. students, parents, local employers, quality assurance bodies) expect programme content and assessment to be mostly identical at the home and foreign campuses (Shams & Huisman, 2014; Smith, 2010). For this reason, many international branch campuses simply deliver 'off-the-shelf' programmes that are designed at the home campus. This policy deprives branch campus faculty of job involvement, which may also be considered an infringement upon their academic freedom and professional values (Schapper & Mayson, 2004).

A number of authors have concluded that employee involvement has a positive effect on employee commitment (e.g. DeCotiis & Summers, 1987; García-Carbrera & García-Soto, 2012; Ineson, Benke, & Laszlo, 2013; Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982). Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Employee involvement is positively related to employee commitment.

In-role and extra-role behaviours

In-role behaviours are the job-related behaviours expected of all job holders, for example, attendance at work, punctuality, and completing work tasks with due care and attention (O'Reilly III & Chatman, 1986). In contrast, extra-role behaviours are not directly specified by the job description but these behaviours do benefit the organisation (ibid). Extra-role behaviours are also known as organisational citizenship behaviours (Organ, 1988). In higher education, there is considerable scope for staff to engage in extra-role behaviours, for example, organising trips for students, organising conferences, reviewing papers and participating in various committees, such as those concerned with teaching and learning, ethics in research, or health and safety.

Extra-role behaviours are very valuable to organisations since they have been found to have a strong effect on overall organisational success and effectiveness (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998). Previous research has found that positive relationships exist between employee commitment and in-role behaviours (e.g. Brown & Peterson, 1993; Coffman & Gonzalez-Molina, 2002; Darden, Hampton, & Howell, 1989; Hackett, Bycio, & Hausdorf, 1994). Similarly, previous research has also concluded that positive relationships exist between employee commitment and extra-role behaviours (e.g. Gregersen, 1993; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Ahearne, 1998; Meyer, Allen, & Smith, 1993). Hence, the following hypotheses are specified:

Hypothesis 3: Employee commitment is positively related to in-role behaviours.

Hypothesis 4: Employee commitment is positively related to extra-role behaviours.

Employee turnover intentions

Employee turnover is often higher at the foreign branches of multinational organisations than at the home branches, so the ability to recruit, develop and retain employees in the long term are key competencies needed to achieve sustained competitiveness abroad (Reiche, 2009). According to Meyer and Allen (1991), when an individual has a high level of affective commitment to their organisation, they identify with and feel attached to the organisation, which leads them to *want* to stay with the organisation.

Intentions to stay in or leave an organisation have been the most widely studied behavioural correlate of employee commitment. Most studies have found a strong relationship between employee commitment and turnover intentions (e.g. Brunetto et al., 2012; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Stumpf & Hartman, 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Wiener & Vardi, 1980). Furthermore, George and Bettenhausen (1990) found that extra-role behaviours enhance work group attractiveness and reduce employee turnover intentions. Thus, we expect:

Hypothesis 5: Employee commitment is negatively related to turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 6: Extra-role behaviours are negatively related to turnover intentions.

As well as assessing whether our proposed model of antecedents and consequences of employee commitment holds equally at home and foreign branch campuses, a key aim of this research was to discover whether employee commitment is stronger at either home or foreign campuses, and if so, how this impacts upon employee in-role and extra-role behaviours and turnover intentions.

Method

Sample and data collection

In addition to testing the proposed hypotheses, a key objective of this study was to discover whether perceived organisational support, employee involvement, employee commitment, in-role behaviours, extra-role behaviours and turnover intentions differed between employees at the home and foreign branch campuses of universities. University campuses in the UK were used to represent home branches and university campuses in Malaysia and the UAE were used to represent foreign branches. We used multigroup analysis to assess construct invariance across country samples and to assess possible group differences in the Malaysian and UAE samples.

The data for this study were obtained using a questionnaire that was distributed to both teaching and non-teaching staff. The non-teaching staff consisted mainly of programme administrators and employees from support functions such as learning resources and information technology, as well as staff from the marketing and human resource management functions. Using a convenience sampling approach, a total of 795 questionnaires were distributed at three institutions in the UK, three institutions in Malaysia, and two institutions in the UAE. Although, most international branch campuses are relatively small, our sample included three institutions that were considerably larger than the average branch campus (having over 200 full-time equivalent employees each).

Although various funding and management models exist among international branch campuses, our sample comprised of branches owned and operated by the parent institution. It should be noted that ownership of the branch does not necessarily mean that the home university actually owns the physical infrastructure of the branch, as this is often provided by local private or public sector organisations. All of the sample branches offer programmes across a range of disciplines, which include business, computer science and engineering. In order to overcome barriers of physical distance between the researchers and respondents, and to satisfy respondent preference, the questionnaire was available online (using the Qualtrics software) or as hard copy.

A total of 515 completed questionnaires were returned. After data cleaning for missing values and extreme cases, a usable sample of 502 respondents was obtained, resulting in a usable response rate of 63.1%. Of the 502 respondents, 47.3% were male and 52.7% were female; 255 (50.8%) were employed in the UK, 112 (22.3%) in Malaysia, and 135 (26.9%) in the UAE; 32.8% were employed in non-teaching roles, 41.6% were employed in junior faculty roles (instructor/lecturer/assistant professor), and 25.6% were employed in senior faculty roles (senior lecturer/associate professor/professor). The respondents that taught were from a similar range of disciplines at the home and branch campuses, although over two-thirds of the total sample of teaching staff were involved with business/management programmes.

Measures

The study adopted/adapted previously validated scales. All items were answered using a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = disagree strongly and 7 = agree strongly. The scale for *organisational support* comprised two sub-scales adopted from Reade (2001) that measure support from local managers and support from head office, which in this research refers to the university's home campus management. To measure *employee involvement*, a five item scale was adapted from Lodahl and Kejner (1965). Examples of items include: 'At night, I often think about the next day's work' and 'I am depressed when I fail at work'.

The six-item scale for employee commitment was adopted from Allen and Meyer (1990). Examples of items include: 'I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation' and 'This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me'. The scales for *in-role* and *extra-role behaviours* were adopted from O'Reilly III and Chatman (1986). Finally, the four-item scale for *turnover intentions* was taken from Abrams, Ando, and Hinkle (1998). This scale measures the individual's intention to *leave* the organisation. All of the Cronbach's alpha scores were above 0.79 (see Table 1), indicating strong internal consistency for the scales used in this study (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

A draft version of the questionnaire was subjected to a pre-test at one UK University, which involved 20 employees (13 in teaching roles and 7 in non-teaching roles). All participants took part in an individual semi-structured face-to-face interview with one researcher. The interviews were used to gain useful contextual background information and to ensure that all items were easily understood and that they appeared to be measuring what they were intended to measure. Examples of questions asked were: Do you think that the level of support you receive from your university affects how you feel as an employee of the university? How would you measure your job involvement? To what extent do you feel a sense of commitment to your university? Were there any questions in the questionnaire that you had difficulty in understanding? The survey instrument appeared to work well in the pre-

test, as the pre-test participants had no difficulty in completing the questionnaire and they raised no specific issues, so no changes were made to the questionnaire.

Preliminary analysis and measurement model

IBM SPSS Statistics and SPSS Amos (version 22.0) were used for the data analysis. This section provides details of the preliminary series of statistical analyses conducted to establish the reliability and validity of the scales. To establish the internal consistency of the scales, reliability was tested using the Cronbach's alpha test. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to establish factor convergence. Then, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to establish that the measurement model demonstrates construct reliability and validity. CFA helps to establish convergent validity by demonstrating that the factor loadings of observed variables are statistically significant on their respective latent constructs (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). To establish discriminant validity, the approach suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) was adopted. Composite reliability and average variance extracted were used as an evidence of construct reliability.

Harman's one-factor test was applied to investigate a possible common method variance (CMV) problem in the data (Podsakoff et al., 2003). EFA on single fixed factor revealed that the factor only explained 43.9% of the variance of the 25 observed variables compared to 69.9% variance explained by a five factor model, implying that no CMV problem exists in the data (Hair et al. 2010). Finally, a full structural equation modelling procedure was used to test the hypothesised relationships between the constructs.

CFA was conducted to establish the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement scales. Items with low loadings (less than .50) and high modification indices were removed in a step by step approach. This resulted in the removal of two items from the employee commitment scale. The removal of these items resulted in a very good fit between the data and the model: χ^2 (256) = 554.63, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.20$; CFI = .97; IFI = .97; RMSEA = .05.

All of the item loadings were statistically significant and were in the range between .60 and .92 (Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000). All of the scales yielded acceptable values for average variance extracted (AVE > .50) and construct reliability (CR > .70), thereby establishing convergent reliability (Yap & Khong, 2006). Table 1 reports the Cronbach's alpha scores, the composite reliability scores, the average variance extracted, and the correlation between each pair of constructs.

Table 1. Construct reliability, average variance extracted and correlations.

Construct	Alpha	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Organisational support	.90	0.91	0.73	0.85					
2 Employee involvement	.85	0.85	0.53	0.48	0.73				
3 Employee commitment	.92	0.88	0.61	0.71	0.63	0.78			
4 In-role behaviours	.79	0.80	0.57	0.45	0.40	0.59	0.75		
5 Extra-role behaviours	.80	0.81	0.60	0.46	0.48	0.66	0.65	0.77	
6 Turnover intentions	.92	0.93	0.72	-0.58	-0.51	-0.77	-0.52	-0.46	0.85

All correlations significant at $p < .01$

The Fornell-Larker (1981) criterion was used to establish the discriminant validity of the measurement scales. The bold numbers on the diagonal represent the square root of AVE for each construct. The off diagonal numbers represent the correlations between the constructs. The results suggest that there are no issues of discriminant validity in our data as all constructs have correlations that are lower than the square root of AVE for their respective construct (Yap & Khong, 2006).

Results

Examination of the descriptive statistics reveals that for support, involvement, commitment, in-role and extra-role behaviours, the UK respondents gave scores higher than the overall mean scores while respondents in Malaysia and the UAE gave scores lower than the mean scores. There was one exception, as the Malaysian respondents gave a mean score for commitment that was higher than the overall mean score. The UK respondents also gave more favourable scores than those in Malaysia and the UAE for turnover intentions, since a lower score indicates intention to stay. Thus, the descriptive statistics suggest that employees at international branch campuses are more likely intending to leave their organisation. A summary of the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean scores and standard deviations.

Construct	Overall <i>n</i> = 502		UK <i>n</i> = 255		Malaysia <i>n</i> = 112		UAE <i>n</i> = 135	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Organisational support	5.12	1.24	5.54	1.13	4.87	1.20	4.81	1.35
Employee involvement	4.92	1.14	5.25	1.04	4.52	1.08	4.63	1.19
Employee commitment	5.29	1.33	5.63	1.07	4.79	1.17	5.54	0.94
In-role behaviours	6.14	0.77	6.31	0.69	5.97	0.80	5.96	0.84
Extra-role behaviours	5.47	0.98	5.73	0.83	5.25	0.99	5.21	1.10
Turnover intentions	3.38	1.53	3.01	1.57	3.89	1.36	3.69	1.41

Establishing that measurement models are invariant across groups is a pre-condition before conducting multigroup moderation tests when examining cross-cultural data (Bryne, 2004). As the study involved multigroup testing, we decided to first establish the configural and metric invariance of the measurement model before proceeding with the structural model testing.

We used the traditional Chi-square difference test to establish metric invariance of the measurement model across the UK, Malaysian and UAE samples. There are several types of invariance model that needed to be established. The two most important types of invariance test are the configural and metric invariance. To test the configural invariance model, we conducted a multigroup factor analysis (MGFA). If the results of MGFA meet acceptable criteria, it may be assumed that configural invariance is achieved (Teo et al., 2009). Based on the battery of fit indices, it can be argued that the data and model fit well: χ^2 (768) = 1310.51, $p < .001$; χ^2/df = 1.70; CFI = .94; IFI = .94; RMSEA = .04.

In the second step, we proceeded to test the metric invariance structure by comparing the baseline multigroup measurement model with a constrained model, in which all the factor loadings were assumed equal. The results suggested that the measurement model was not

invariant across the three groups ($\Delta\chi^2 = 74.40$, $\Delta df = 38$, $p < .000$). This required pairwise comparison of all the three groups in the sample to identify the locus of this variation. Given that two of the groups (Malaysia and UAE) both represented international branch campuses, and are both located in Asia, we expected these groups to be invariant. Thus, we started our pairwise invariance analysis by comparing the Malaysia and UAE samples. The results suggested that there was no significant difference in the measurement model between the Malaysian and UAE samples ($\Delta\chi^2 = 21.36$, $\Delta df = 19$, $p\text{-value} = .32$). Therefore, it made sense to merge the data for Malaysia and UAE and to then compare this new data set with the UK sample, which represented the home campuses (Bryne, 2004).

The results of the multigroup invariance test of the measurement model for home and foreign branch campus respondents revealed a partial invariance measurement structure ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.43$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p\text{-value} = .11$). Three items from the employee involvement construct were not invariant. Similarly, three items from the employee commitment construct and two items from turnover intentions were not invariant across home and foreign branch groups. This is quite acceptable, as it is highly unlikely to find a completely invariant structure in cross-cultural research (Bryne, 2004).

In accordance with the two-stage modelling approach, we proceeded with full structural equation modelling using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) in order to test the overall fit of the conceptual model, as well as the individual hypotheses. The results indicated that the data has a very good fit with the proposed model: $\chi^2 (264) = 617.24$, $p < .001$; $\chi^2/df = 2.33$; CFI = .96; IFI = .96; RMSEA = .05. All the paths in the model were significant. Table 3 presents the structural model results.

Table 3. Structural model results.

		Standardized estimates	Standard error	Critical ratio	Result
H1	Organisational support to employee commitment	.531	.033	11.92***	Supported
H2	Employee involvement to employee commitment	.393	.047	8.24***	Supported
H3	Employee commitment to in-role behaviours	.644	.036	11.94***	Supported
H4	Employee commitment to extra-role behaviours	.698	.057	11.83***	Supported
H5	Employee commitment to turnover intentions	-.906	.110	-13.00***	Supported
H6	Extra-role behaviours to turnover intentions	-.166	.094	-2.85*	Supported

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

These results provide support for all of the proposed hypotheses in our conceptual model. Among the two antecedents of employee commitment, support appears to be the strongest. It is also interesting to note that the relationship between commitment and turnover intentions was strongest (although negative, as expected), while the relationship between extra-role behaviours and turnover intentions was the weakest and was on the border line of

being statistically significant. The results also suggest a strong relationship between employee commitment and in/extra-role behaviours.

Based on the results for the structural model, we tested for the presence of a mediation effect of extra-role behaviours in the relationship between employee commitment and turnover intentions. When using structural equation modelling techniques, the bootstrapping procedure is considered suitable due to its ability to analyze the mediation of complex latent constructs (Kenny, 2012). Table 4 presents the results of the mediation analysis based on the extraction of 2000 bootstrap samples with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Our tests for mediation indicated that extra-role behaviours mediate the relationship between employee commitment and turnover intentions. However, it is a partial mediation as both the standardised direct and indirect effects remain significant in the model.

Table 4. Mediation effects: two tailed significance via bias corrected percentile test.

	Standardised direct effects <i>p</i> -value	Standardised indirect effects <i>p</i> -value	Mediator construct	Mediation
Employee commitment to turnover intentions	-.906**	-.116*	Extra-role behaviours	Partial

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Finally, we tested for the moderation effects of home and foreign branch campuses on the structural relationships in our model. The results ($\Delta\chi^2 = 31.18$, $\Delta df = 12$, $p < .001$) indicated that the groups are different and therefore we proceed with the pair wise comparison of the groups.

We started our pair wise comparison of the groups with Malaysian and UAE samples to establish whether these groups are similar or different at path level in the model. We began our analysis to establish configural invariance of the hypothesised model across the two groups. The test of configural invariance revealed that the path from extra-role behaviours to turnover intentions was not significant for the UAE data; therefore, this path was removed from the model and we ran the model again. The results of configural structural model suggest that the data is a decent fit to the model. Once configural invariance was achieved for the structural model, we proceeded with the metric invariance structure for the path model. We constrained all the structural paths in the model and used a chi-square difference test to establish if the two models (constrained and unconstrained) are different. The chi-square test statistic was non-significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 5.55$, $\Delta df = 5$, p -value = .35), suggesting that the groups are invariant at path level.

This allowed us to merge the Malaysian and UAE data and compare it with the UK data. The results of the multigroup unconstrained model suggest that the model achieved the configural invariance across the two groups. However, the subsequent chi-square test between the constrained and unconstrained models suggests that the groups are different at path levels ($\Delta\chi^2 = 25.4$, $\Delta df = 5$, $p < .01$). To identify which paths in the model are different across the two groups, we followed the step by step process of constraining each path, establishing if it is different or similar across the groups. If the chi-square test results were

non-significant, we retain the constrained path in the model and applied an additional constraint to the next path. If the results were significant, we unconstrained the path and applied a constraint to the next path in the model. The results suggested that the two groups were different in all of the paths except for the path between employee commitment and extra-role behaviours.

Discussion and Conclusion

The core purpose of this study was to analyse antecedents and consequences of employee commitment in universities that are involved in running international branch campuses. The secondary objective of the research was to identify possible differences in employee commitment, attitudes and behaviours at the main home country campuses and international branch campuses abroad.

In terms of the antecedents of employee commitment, organisational support appears to be a far stronger predictor of employee commitment compared to employee involvement. This suggests that in higher education employee commitment is extrinsically driven. More interestingly, the multigroup analysis further revealed that for international branch campus employees, involvement is a weaker predictor of employee commitment than for the home campus employees. Similarly, the international branch campus employees were more dependent on organisational support for their commitment compared to home campus employees. International branch campus employees may be more inclined to seek additional organisational support in response to the perceived lack of quality infrastructure and policies to support research and other scholarly activities at these campuses.

For the three proposed outcomes of employee commitment, the relationship between employee commitment and turnover intentions was the strongest. This was quite expected based on the existing literature. However, the results also suggest that this negative relationship was stronger for home campus employees than for international branch campus employees. A similar pattern appears for in-role behaviours. The only exception in the model where the two groups were indifferent was the path between employee commitment and extra-role behaviours.

Implications for practice

This study provides a thoughtful insight for higher education institutions that currently operate an international campus or for those planning to embark upon this particular internationalisation strategy. The results suggest that employees at international branch campuses are not as motivated and committed to their organisations as their counterparts at home campuses. This presents a significant challenge for institutions, as the quality of teaching and research of universities is primarily dependent on its employees in general and academic staff in particular. The pattern of our findings is so consistent that it cannot be ignored.

There can be several reasons for this apparent lack of commitment among international branch campus employees. A significant number of employees working for international branch campuses are contractual rather than permanent employees. Furthermore, a sizable proportion of the employees working at branch campuses are expatriates (Healey, 2015). Many of these employees experience difficulties adjusting to alien cultures and norms. Additionally, the policies of many universities that treat expatriate employees transferred from the home campus differently to expatriates or host country nationals hired locally by the branch campus generates a lot of employee grievance and turnover.

The establishment of international campuses as an additional source of revenue rather than as a means to achieve other benefits of internationalisation, such as enhanced university image and reputation, is potentially a major stumbling block. This short-term financial focus creates an environment in which resources are increasingly becoming scarce for international branch campuses compared to home campuses. In summary, the operational context of international branch campuses is quite different and unique compared to home campuses and this demands a set of operational and human resource strategies that are designed specifically for the branch campuses.

Contributions, limitations and further research

This research proposed and tested a conceptual model of employee commitment across home and foreign branch campuses. This theoretical model helps us understand the important antecedents and consequences of employee commitment in higher education. More importantly, the research further contributes to the literature by investigating the issue from a multicultural perspective. The findings emphasise that institutions need to employ different and customised human resource strategies at home and foreign campuses specifically with the aim of improving employee commitment and performance at the foreign campuses.

Despite its significant contributions to the existing literature, there are some limitations in our research that need to be acknowledged. We used samples obtained in only three countries and thus our results may not be generalisable to all countries globally. Also, we acknowledge that three of the international branch campuses at which we obtained data are somewhat larger in size than the average international branch campus and therefore they might not be typical examples of this type of institution.

The study did not measure the potential differences between the employees at international branch campuses that were transferred from the home campus, recruited in the home country, or recruited locally in the host country of the branch campus. Thus, in future, it will be interesting to see if the locally and internationally recruited employees at a branch campus differ in their perceptions and attitudes towards the university. Future research should specifically investigate the employee perceptions related to internal and external equity at home and branch campuses. It could also investigate the impact of communication between home and branch campuses, particularly with senior management at the home campus, which represents the institution's headquarters.

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Author biographies

Stephen Wilkins is an Associate Professor in Business Management at The British University in Dubai, UAE. He is also a visiting lecturer at Hong Kong University, School of Professional and Continuing Education. He has a PhD in Management from the International Centre for Higher Education Management (ICHEM) at the University of Bath, UK. Stephen has authored over 40 refereed journal articles, the majority of which are concerned with international and transnational higher education. In 2011, he was the winner of the first EAIE Tony Adams Award for Excellence in Research.

Muhammad Mohsin Butt is an Associate Professor of Marketing at Curtin Business School, Curtin University Sarawak Campus, Malaysia. His research interests include multicultural marketing, brand equity and service quality. He has published extensively in international peer reviewed journals, such as *Studies in Higher Education*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*.

Carrie Amani Annabi is an Assistant Professor in the School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University, Dubai, UAE. She has co-authored a number of refereed papers and book chapters on a range of topics, some of which focus on teaching and management at international branch campuses. Prior to becoming an academic in Dubai, Carrie had extensive industry experience working in a range of international roles globally in countries such as Cyprus, Finland, Qatar, Singapore and the U.K.