Academic Careers in Transnational Higher Education: The Rewards and Challenges of Teaching at International Branch Campuses

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Abstract
This research investigates the attitudes, working conditions, experiences, and job satisfaction of academic staff employed at offshore campuses. An online survey questionnaire was completed by 72 academic staff in 10 different countries, which included China, Malaysia, Qatar, the UAE, and Vietnam. It was found that the desire for adventure and travel, and to experience a foreign culture, were the most popular motivations for working at an offshore campus. Common challenges and disadvantages of teaching at an offshore campus are the lack of job security, support for research, academic freedom, and opportunities for development and advancement. However, such academics often have motivated students, smaller class sizes, greater autonomy at work, fewer meetings, higher disposable income, and less of the 'publish or perish' culture. Almost three quarters of our research participants believe that it *is* possible to have an attractive career teaching in transnational education, at offshore campuses.

Keywords
transnational education, offshore campuses, academic staff, international academic careers, transnational teaching

Introduction

With the internationalization of higher education, transnational education has become popular with both universities and students. The term 'transnational education' refers to study programs or educational services in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2001). This research is concerned only with international branch campuses. However, in this paper, we use the term 'offshore campus' in preference to 'international branch campus', in recognition of the fact that in China, the largest host country of such campuses, legislation permits foreign universities to open campuses only in partnership with a local institution (Wilkins, 2016), which are then not considered branches by the Chinese government.

Relatively little research has investigated the working lives and experiences of academic staff employed at offshore campuses, including their individual attitudes and job satisfaction. Of the research that has been undertaken, most has been based on a single institution (e.g., Cai & Hall, 2016; Dobos, 2011; Liu & Lin, 2017; Smith, 2009), or on a single host country/city (e.g., Chou, 2020). To our knowledge, this is the first study that investigated the attitudes, opinions and working lives of offshore campus academics across multiple institutions and host countries.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to investigate the attitudes, working conditions, experiences, and job satisfaction of academic staff employed at offshore campuses. The study answers the following research questions: Why do academic staff choose to work at offshore

campuses?; How attractive are the remuneration and rewards packages for academic staff at offshore campuses?; How do the workloads (teaching and research) of academic staff at offshore campuses compare to their onshore counterparts?; What are the rewards and challenges for academic staff of working at an offshore campus?; Are academic staff at offshore campuses satisfied overall with their job and career?; and, Is it possible to have a rewarding and satisfying academic career in transnational higher education, working at offshore campuses?

The findings of this research may be of interest particularly to institution managers, higher education researchers, and individuals who are considering an academic position in transnational education, alongside individuals who are already employed at an offshore campus.

International Academic Careers

This study is concerned with any full-time academic holding a teaching, research or academic leadership position at an offshore campus, with the intention of pursuing a long-term career as an academic, or manager of academics, in higher education. Many of these individuals are expatriates. Thus, the focus of the research is on the motivations, attitudes, experiences and satisfaction of foreign academics who could be considered as pursuing an *international* academic career. Trembath (2016, p. 116) defines an expatriate academic as, 'a member of the higher education sector who has moved their dominant place of residence across national borders to take up legal, long-term, yet time-bound, employment in a teaching or research-related role within a university environment.'

Richardson and McKenna (2002) identified four main types of expatriate academic: (1) the explorer, who wants to explore new countries and different cultures; (2) the refugee, who wants to 'escape' from unfavorable circumstances, such as an unrewarding job or a bad relationship; (3) the mercenary, who is motivated by higher levels of salary and financial benefits; and (4) the architect, who believes that international work experience will enhance their career progression. McKenna and Richardson (2007) later suggested the missionary as another type of expatriate, referring to individuals who want to 'do good', e.g., by contributing to human and national development. In practice, when making the decision on whether or not to become an expatriate academic, many individuals are influenced by a mix of pull and push factors simultaneously (Wilkins & Neri, 2019). Institution managers should ascertain the motives of job applicants, as previous research has found that these may have an influence on work adjustment (Selmer & Lauring, 2012, 2013), work performance, and job satisfaction (Trembath, 2016).

Expatriate academics taking up a new position in a foreign country may face a range of common challenges, including adjustment to work differences; adjustment to interacting with others; and adjustment to the new country (Black & Stephens, 1989; Wilkins & Neri, 2019). A study conducted by Chen and Zhu (2020) in China found that the expectations of expatriate academics focused more on the broad context of working in China, rather than on specific situations within their chosen academic institution, which revealed their lack of knowledge and information about the new field they had entered. An individual's work performance and job satisfaction may be influenced by several things, such as their level of seniority, career plan, experience in international education, and their pre-employment expectations (Cai & Hall, 2016; Wilkins & Neri, 2019; Yang, Borrowman, Tan, & New, 2020).

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Teaching in Transnational Education

One of the distinguishing features of working as an academic at an offshore campus is that the individual needs to simultaneously 'serve two masters', namely the home campus and offshore campus managements (Dobos, 2011). The objectives of home and offshore campus managements sometimes conflict with one another, particularly with regard to academic and commercial priorities. Many offshore campuses are established with a partner in the host country, which typically provides premises, infrastructure, equipment, and sometimes even academic staff (Wilkins, 2021), and are governed by revenue expectations, primarily because this type of education is commodified (Annabi & Wilkins, 2016). Many offshore campus academics are employees of the host country partner companies, and not of the foreign university that features in the campus's name. Their contractual terms and conditions may be quite different to staff at the onshore campus (Hill & Thabet, 2018; Wood & Salt, 2018).

Offshore campuses belonging to global elite universities are often very popular with students and parents, allowing them to be highly selective in their admissions (Wilkins, 2021). For example, New York University Abu Dhabi accepts only around 4% of applicants (Morgan, 2020), and the University of Nottingham Ningbo generally recruits only students that score in the top 10% of China's Gaokao national college entrance examinations (Garrett et al., 2017). This contrasts with previous research indicating that offshore campuses may engage in lower program entry requirements and implement relaxed academic standards, including soft marking (Altbach, 2010; Annabi & Muller, 2016; Dobos, 2011), but emphasizes the difference in approach of elites versus commodified providers.

The nature of transnational education dictates that course syllabi, module content and learning outcomes are nearly always specified by the home campus, but very often also teaching materials and lecture slides are provided by the home campus (Clarke, 2015; Dobos, 2011; Liu & Lin, 2017). However, teaching staff at other offshore campuses are allowed considerable freedom to customize and develop their own teaching materials, which is generally welcomed by the academics (Clarke, 2015). Home campus staff are generally heavily involved in the moderation of coursework assessments and examinations, and generally make the final decision on the marks and final degree classifications that are awarded to students (Dobos, 2011).

Selmer and Lauring (2011) argue that it should not be assumed that academic skills are automatically transferable in different countries. Some academics believe that they can replicate in the offshore classroom what they did in their home country (Wilkins & Neri, 2019). However, in countries such as China, Qatar and the UAE, academic staff need to self-sensor their teaching, learning materials and research, to satisfy local norms and expectations, which results in them often avoiding discussion or consideration of political, religious or other potentially sensitive subjects (Liu & Lin, 2017; Wilkins, 2017).

Most offshore campuses are relatively small-scale operations and, in comparison to the onshore parent campus, are often teaching-focused with little or no expectation that academic staff undertake research and publish. However, many larger campuses encourage cutting-edge research and expect publications in the top scholarly journals (Wilkins, 2021). In Qatar, for example, over one quarter of the national scholarly research output is produced by offshore campuses (Pohl & Lane, 2018).

What may be concluded from this overview of teaching in transnational education, is that this sector is far from homogenous; rather, the sector has a diverse range of participants that have a diverse range of objectives and modes of operation, which offer quite different employment experiences for their academic staff.

Method

This research investigates the working conditions, experiences, attitudes and opinions of academic staff employed at offshore campuses. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, an interpretivist, qualitative approach was appropriate. The data used in the study were obtained from an online survey questionnaire that was completed by individuals holding an academic or academic leadership position at an offshore campus. Our survey participants may be considered as expert interviewees, in this case being experts on academic work at an offshore campus (see Flick, 2009). Expert interviews are particularly useful in the kinds of situations which might prove difficult or impossible to gain access to accurate and detailed data, some of which may be considered personal, e.g., the interviewee's remuneration (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2009). In asking the survey participants to provide their answers in an online questionnaire, individuals had time to think about and recall events, clarify their thoughts and opinions, and consider what information they were willing to put into the public domain, and which information they would rather keep private.

The survey questionnaire had 48 author-developed questions, designed to gain information on the individual's working conditions, experiences, attitudes and opinions of academic work at an offshore campus. In order to obtain rich and detailed data, the questionnaire included 20 open questions. Examples of questions include: What were your original reasons for taking an academic position at an offshore campus? What are the best things about working at your offshore campus? What are the worst things (challenges and downsides) about working at your offshore campus? Overall, how satisfied are you in your current position? and, Would you recommend your campus to a lecturer considering an academic career in higher education? The candid and detailed answers provided by many individuals likely took in excess of 60 minutes to write, and one participant reported that they had spent 90 minutes completing the questionnaire.

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted, as we sought to recruit only individuals who held a full-time position as an academic or academic leader at an offshore campus. Our rationale for targeting only full-time employees was that one of our key research questions is concerned with the possibility and attractiveness of pursuing an academic career in transnational higher education. Potential survey participants were identified mainly through institutional websites. Invitations to participate in the study were sent by email to 865 individuals, with a reminder sent after 5-7 days. 72 usable responses were received, representing a response rate of 8.3%. Table 1 provides a summary profile of the study's participants.

A process of thematic analysis was undertaken to identify the key ideas, patterns and relationships in the data, and determine the survey participants' shared attitudes, beliefs and experiences. Working independently initially, two researchers performed the data analysis, first coding the data manually, and then identifying the key themes. There were no notable disagreements between the researchers relating to the coding, themes or data interpretations.

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The researchers are confident that the sample size achieved was easily sufficient to assure that data saturation had been achieved.

Table 1. Summary Profile of Study's Participants (*n* = 72).

		n	*%*			*n*	*%*
Gender	Male	36	50.0	Offshore	China	20	27.8
	Female	31	43.1	campus	Italy	1	1.4
	Other/prefer not to say	5	6.9		Malaysia	8	11.1
Job role	Instructor[a]	8	11.1		Qatar	5	6.9
	Lecturer/Assistant professor	35	48.6		Rwanda	1	1.4
	Senior Lecturer/Associate professor	19	26.4		South Korea	1	1.4
					Thailand	1	1.4
	Professor	2	2.8		United Arab Emirates	25	34.7
	Head of Department or Faculty[b]	4	5.6		Uzbekistan	3	4.2
					Vietnam	7	9.7
	Senior campus manager[c]	4	5.6				
Discipline	Business[d]	25	34.7	Home or	Australia	14	19.4
	Engineering and Construction	6	8.3	partner	Canada	3	4.2
				campus	France	1	1.4
	English	9	12.5		Ireland	1	1.4
	Humanities (excluding English)	2	2.8		United Kingdom	30	41.7
					United States	23	31.9
	Sciences and Mathematics	3	4.2				
	Social sciences[e] (excluding Business)	27	37.5				
Time at current campus[f]	3 years or less	34	47.2				
	4-6 years	18	25.0				
	7-9 years	9	12.5				
	10 years or more	11	15.3				

*Note*s.
[a]Includes Associate Lecturer
[b]In addition to the participants classified as professor, heads of department or faculty may also hold the title of professor
[c]In addition to the participants classified as professor, senior campus managers may also hold the title of professor
[d]Includes Accounting, Economics, Finance, Supply Chain Management etc.
[e]Includes International Relations, Media Studies, Middle East Studies, Psychology, Sociology
[f]Whole years of service, e.g. 3.5 years classified as '3 years or less'

Findings

Motivations for taking an academic position at an offshore campus

The majority of our participants' motivations for taking an academic position at an offshore campus seemed to fit with Richardson and McKenna's (2002) four metaphor classification of explorer, refugee, mercenary and architect. The explorers, mercenaries and architects were

positively pulled or attracted to work at an offshore campus, whereas the refugees' motivations can be seen as push factors, related to escaping the individual's country of citizenship or previous residence, because of an unattractive career or life situation. Many participants' motivations for taking an academic position at an offshore campus included both pull and push factors.

Explorer motivations were the most popular reasons for our participants taking an academic position at an offshore campus. Many Western academics clearly see Asian countries such as China, Malaysia and Vietnam as exciting and interesting countries, in which they can experience a different culture and easily travel to other countries in the region during vacations. Despite the fact that countries such as Qatar and the UAE have no income taxes, relatively few of our participants reported having mercenary (financial) motivations for taking an academic position at an offshore campus.

> I wanted to explore Southeast Asia, and maybe Australia, so I was willing to take a lower salary.
> (*Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor, Australian institution in Malaysia*)

A relatively high number of our participants reported having been motivated to work at an offshore campus because of push factors in their country of citizenship or country of previous residence. In many cases, these were related to the unavailability of suitable academic positions or unattractive working conditions in these countries. A number of our participants had motivations that did not fall within the categories suggested by Richardson and McKenna (2002). For example, 7% of our participants moved to be closer to other family members, while 7% were already living in the host country, usually because they or their spouse already held a job there. A few other individuals were motivated by the opportunity to contribute to nation building, or by factors related to national or organizational culture.

> I came for adventure and a challenge. I was bored and annoyed with the neoliberal values permeating the institution at home I'd given my hearts blood to, watching things erode before my eyes. So, I initially jumped ship for a two year break. However, once one reaches escape velocity, one realizes that one can escape. So I stayed away, and now I really really don't want to go back. I may never go back, if that's possible.
> (*Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor, Australian institution in Malaysia*)

> I am happier with an organizational culture that is aligned with my national culture.
> (*Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor, US institution in South Korea*)

Remuneration, rewards and workloads at offshore campuses

In general, the salaries of offshore campus academic staff reflect the economic wealth and cost of living in the host country. Several associate professors in China, Qatar and the UAE reported receiving a basic salary in excess of US$100,000 per annum, whereas no associate professor in Malaysia or Vietnam earned more than US$72,000, and the vast majority received less than US$55,000. Some institutions have a policy of paying academics at home and offshore campuses similar salary levels, so, for example, an individual moving from the US to Rwanda may not have to take a reduction in pay.

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For offshore campus academics, the basic salary is just one component of the expatriate remuneration package. Virtually all of our participants who were recruited from outside the host country reported receiving an allowance to cover the cost of housing, annual air tickets home for self and family, an allowance to cover the full or partial cost of their children's schooling, and medical provision or insurance. However, these benefits are not usually offered to individuals who were already living or working in the host country at the time of recruitment. For those individuals who receive them, the total financial value of the expatriate benefits is often similar to their basic salary. Thus, several academics at research-intensive offshore campuses reported receiving total remuneration packages exceeding US$180,000 per annum., with senior managers earning even more. However, in all countries, individuals who were recruited locally as an assistant professor or lecturer earn a salary of less than US$50,000 per annum., with the vast majority receiving no further financial benefits. Finally, it should be noted that academics in Qatar and the UAE pay no local income tax, whereas in China, Malaysia and Vietnam, individuals pay local income tax at rates between 15-35%.

Some 71% of our survey participants are satisfied overall with their remuneration and rewards package, while 19% said they are very satisfied, some using words like 'generous' and 'excellent'. However, 10% of our participants are dissatisfied with their package, one describing it as 'pitiful', while another, in Qatar, reported that they have not received a salary increase in 15 years. Some individuals noted that there is a lack of transparency with regard to how salaries are determined at their campus. Even among the participants who are satisfied overall with their remuneration and rewards package, one common concern is the lack of pension contributions while working at an offshore campus.

Although previous research has suggested that teaching loads can be considerably higher at offshore campuses compared to onshore campuses (e.g., Cai & Hall, 2016), our data indicates that most of the participants have teaching loads that are comparable to what they may have experienced at the onshore parent campus. There are, of course, exceptions. Most of our participants at research-intensive universities teach 2-6 courses or modules per academic year, while the academics at teaching-focused institutions teach 6-12. Senior lecturers and associate professors tend to have slightly lower teaching loads than instructors, lecturers and assistant professors. In general, average class sizes at offshore campuses are far lower than at home campuses. At many offshore campuses, the maximum class size is 50-60, and our participants reported only three institutions that deliver lectures to classes exceeding 200 students, which is common at campuses in Australia, the UK and US, particularly in subjects such as business.

In research-intensive institutions, particularly in China, Qatar and the UAE, the offshore campus academics are expected to produce the same quantity and quality of research output as staff at the onshore campus, but equally, they have a comparable workload allocated for research as within the onshore parent campus. Several participants mentioned that their institution expects research to be undertaken and for publications to be achieved, although a specific amount of work time is not formally allocated for research in their employment contract. Other participants noted that in recent years, more teaching-only contracts have been issued, and in some cases, contracts have been revised, with the time allocated for research removed. In some instances, academic staff have also received mixed messages about undertaking research from home campus and offshore campus managers. It should be noted that not all offshore campus academics want to be research active.

> Management do not care about research from our campus because it cannot be submitted in the REF [Research Excellence Framework] assessment, and therefore attracts no external funding. No time is provided for research. In fact, contracts were changed to remove research time from the workload. This was done by a department head in the UK who does not seem to value UAE research. (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, UK institution in the UAE*)

> I am on a teaching intensive contract. Even so, in the UK my line manager was supportive of continuing research, whereas my campus line manager does not see it as important, except as a staff retention tool. (*Head of Department or Faculty, UK institution in Malaysia*)

Offshore campus academics can access the same journals, databases, and online resources as staff at the onshore campus. More than three-quarters of our participants confirmed that funding for research and attending conferences is available, and so it was generally perceived by these participants that offshore campuses provide the resources and support necessary to undertake research, even if research is not formally stipulated in their employment contract.

Institution objectives, culture and leadership

An academic's work performance and job satisfaction may be influenced by the institution's objectives, culture and leadership. Some institutions have a clear vision and mission, and this can be inspiring for staff, as well as providing them a clear sense of purpose and direction in their everyday working lives. Many individuals go abroad hoping to make a difference to the lives of people in another, often less developed, country than their own. Thus, individuals may enjoy higher levels of job satisfaction when they perceive that their institution's primary reason for existing is altruistic rather than financial. Some participants reported institution achievements in the areas of knowledge, innovation and higher education capacity building, as well as economic and social development. However, 21% of our participants perceive that the primary objective of their campus is producing revenue and/or profit.

> We aim to offer a comprehensive, international and American-style educational experience to our students, and to assist the government of Uzbekistan to improve education across the country by cooperating, engaging and providing examples of modern education. (*Senior Manager, US institution in Uzbekistan*)

> We aim to support capacity building in Rwanda, to facilitate the country's transformation from an agricultural to a knowledge-based society. (*Senior Manager, US institution in Rwanda*)

> To make a financial profit at any academic cost. (*Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor, UK institution in Malaysia*)

> Growing student numbers and enhancing student experience, but not staff experience. (*Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor, UK institution in the UAE*)

Some institutions, particularly those from France and the US, aim to promote arts and humanities education in addition to the sciences and social sciences. Occasionally, institutional

objectives may be perceived as soft power objectives, for example, promoting the use of a particular national language. It appears that most offshore campus academics like to believe that they are providing a high quality Western-style education. When an institution lacks clear objectives or strategy, or fails to communicate these adequately to staff, the institution is likely to be less efficient and effective, and staff satisfaction may be lower.

> We provide a French curriculum education to students from or living in the UAE, or the region. We contribute to the development of social sciences, humanities and law studies in the UAE, and offer a welcoming and cosmopolitan place for students to study.
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, French institution in the UAE*)

> The objectives of my institution are unclear, to be honest. Our president either does not have a strong sense of vision for the campus, or is not good at communicating that view.
> (*Senior Manager, UK institution in China*)

A high proportion of our participants positively mentioned the smaller size of the offshore campus, compared to the home campus. A smaller campus seems to promote collegiality, effective teamwork, and, generally, a friendly and supportive work environment. However, in many campuses, academic staff are recruited internationally while the administration and support staff are locally recruited, sometimes leading to conflict.

> Our campus is small, and quite collegial as a result. The atmosphere is generally supportive, and the creative culture is strong. (*Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor, US institution in Qatar*)

> I had a chance to experience the work culture at the 'home' campus. I prefer the work culture at my current [offshore] campus, as I perceive staff relationships to be more informal, relaxed and friendly. This could be partially a result of my current campus being smaller than the home campus. It could also be an outcome of having fewer 'star' academics, with a strong feeling of superiority, working at my current campus (as compared to the 'home' campus).
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, UK institution in the UAE*)

> The culture of my campus is a blend of Arabic and Canadian. The majority of instructors are from Canada, and the majority of administration and support staff are recruited locally. All communications are given in both Arabic and English. We have both a karak [tea] stand and a Tim Hortons outlet [Canadian coffee shop] on campus. (*Instructor, Canadian institution in Qatar*)

Some of our participants observed that offshore campuses need leaders who have both relevant managerial and international experience, who have a clear vision for their campus, and who can command the respect and support of their staff to achieve it. Many of our participants described their leaders as dynamic, competent, engaging, friendly, and supportive, although others were far less favorable and used terms to suggest incompetence and myopia.

Several of our participants complained about being micromanaged and not having any voice with regard to policies and processes. Perhaps, because of the pressures of working in a transnational context, or because the local culture and regulations allow it, offshore campus leaders are often more autocratic/authoritarian than the leaders at the home campus. Most

offshore campus academics are not represented by a trade union, so they have no collective voice.

> We are a start-up. I have nothing but great things to say about the management style at my campus. The senior members seem to be very experienced in academic institutional management, politically intelligent to corral resources for the institution, supportive of faculty and staff, hands-off/trusting of employees, and generally pleasant to interact with, personally and professionally. In a state of rapid expansion, the managers focus on external factors affecting institutional growth, and grant faculty large amounts of autonomy to manage their areas of responsibility. (*Lecturer or Assistant Professor, US institution in China*)

> It is very top-down. Meetings are only to share feel-good stories about people's achievements. There is no room for critical discussion, or for staff to raise concerns.
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, Australian institution in Vietnam*)

Relationships between offshore and onshore campuses

Approximately 45% of the offshore campus academics who participated in this study have never visited the home or partner campus of their institution, and almost 80% have never taught there. However, by the very nature of the transnational education model, offshore campus academic staff are likely, at least at times, to find themselves in a matrix-style organizational structure where they are answerable to two or more sets of managers, from both the onshore and offshore campuses. Academic staff need to communicate fairly regularly with staff at the onshore campus, on matters such as program accreditation; module/course content and delivery; coursework assignments and examination papers; moderation and student marks; research collaboration; dissertation/thesis supervision; and student placements.

About one third of our participants have their module/course learning outcomes and content determined at the onshore campus, and in 8% of cases, the onshore staff also prepare the lecture presentations and learning resources. Much of the communication that is required is conducted by email or in virtual meetings, using online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Skype and Zoom. 38% of our participants have been involved in face-to-face meetings in which staff from the onshore campus visited the offshore campus.

Most of our participants reported having good or positive working relationships with onshore campus staff. In many cases, the relationships were described as being cordial, professional or effective, but some participants described onshore campus staff as arrogant, distant and unsupportive. Furthermore, some of our participants claim that many onshore campus staff have a weak understanding of international issues, and this can lead to onshore campus managers not understanding or appropriately responding to offshore campus needs and activities. Other participants commented that onshore campus staff have a tendency to regard the offshore campus staff and students as inferior to the onshore campus staff and students.

> My relationships with the home campus staff are very professional. We only discuss the issues at hand, which need to be solved. We don't communicate unless it's absolutely necessary.
> (Lecturer/Assistant Professor, Australian institution in Malaysia)

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Advantages of being an academic at an offshore campus

When asked to identify the main advantages of being an academic at an offshore campus, the most common responses seem to correspond with the explorer motivations for working abroad, such as travel and adventure; experiencing new cultures; better climate; and a higher quality of life. Among the work-related responses offered were, greater autonomy at work, motivated students, smaller class sizes, fewer meetings, and less of the 'publish or perish' culture. A few participants also mentioned the financial benefits, with one individual declaring that money was their only motivation for working abroad.

> It's enlightening working in a foreign country! Every day while walking to work down alleyways and through parks, I marvel that I'm actually living in the country that I now work in. I've met so many interesting people and experienced so many things. There's also satisfaction in thinking that I'm making a small difference in the lives of young people living in a developing country.
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, Australian institution in Vietnam*)

> I'm treated much better here than I was at home. The culture respects teachers for one thing, but also my institution is much more receptive to my needs and concerns. They throw parties for us and buy cool things (like humidifiers and air-filters) for our offices. I really like playing in the orchestra, with both students and staff.
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, US institution in China*)

> I really love the Dubai campus, and being able to work with colleagues that share similar cultural backgrounds as me. My boss is also an Arab woman, and it gives me hope to work with such an aspirational leader. I used to work in the USA, where all of my colleagues and bosses were white (Eurocentric) men. It's great to be surrounded by diversity and people who value culturally responsive teaching. (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, Australian institution in the UAE*)

Disadvantages of being an academic at an offshore campus

When asked to identify the worst things about working at an offshore campus, the most common responses were being far away from family and friends; long flights home; language and communication barriers; low standards of medical care; high cost or lack of choice for children's education; feelings of loneliness; and political issues, such as the blockade imposed upon Qatar by some other Arab countries in the region. Among the work-related responses were, local managers who are not genuinely interested in high quality teaching and research; job insecurity; difficulties in connecting with others for research and publishing; fewer opportunities for promotion; inadequate salary and benefits; being treated like a second class citizen in comparison to the home campus staff; virtual meetings outside normal work hours (due to the time difference with the onshore campus); and feelings of being censored and surveilled. For example, most universities in China have a Secretary of the Communist Party on campus, to ensure compliance with China's laws and policies, and to act as a link with the local government (Feng, 2013).

> Working in a communist country without freedom of speech does encroach on what I teach, the examples I use, and the discussions I have. Also, recently, I was going to deliver an online class and a colleague suggested I change how I talk about things that are sensitive to the government, and to not discuss some other things, since lectures are recorded. So, I have come to see that in reality, there is very limited academic freedom out here.   (*Instructor, UK institution in China*)

Some of our participants commented on the lack of training and development opportunities, which could support enhanced work performance and career progression. For example, despite the different education and cultural contexts in home and host countries, more than half of our participants reported that they had never received any form of training or advice on teaching in transnational education/at an offshore campus.

Job satisfaction and career opportunities

Several participants summarized an offshore campus academic position as challenging, but also rewarding. When asked if they were satisfied overall with their current position at an offshore campus, 59% responded that they were satisfied, 31% were very satisfied, and only 10% were dissatisfied. Younger academics, who are less concerned with career advancement, may be satisfied if their 'explorer' motivations are achieved, while older academics are more likely to be satisfied by money (mercenary motivations), or the opportunity to have a change of life or career (refugee motivations). Some academics identify with both the home and offshore campuses, a phenomenon known as dual organizational identification (Wilkins, Butt, & Heffernan, 2018). Working at a well-known Western university that is also highly regarded in the host country can be a source of pride and satisfaction. A few individuals spoke about satisfaction gained through altruism, as offshore campuses have added much-needed higher education capacity in several host countries, increasing citizens' access to higher education.

The most common causes of dissatisfaction were inadequate pay, lack of opportunity for promotion, and extremely high workloads. Feelings of job insecurity are often high among offshore campus academics, because host countries typically offer only two or three year work visas. In comparison to onshore campuses, labor turnover is high at many offshore campuses, because people eventually feel the need to return to family and friends, achieve career advancement, or return to the culture with which they feel more comfortable. High labor turnover can be demotivating for the staff that remain.

> I am very satisfied with my current position. I am able to do research, I enjoy teaching (our students are wonderful - engaged, intelligent, and motivated), the lifestyle is comfortable, and the management style fits my preferred way of working.
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor*, *US institution in China*)

> Not all of my peers can understand why I would give up the traditional professor role. But, as a professor, you eventually realize that your number one impact is on the students. Here, we take very bright and motivated students who did not have the opportunity to go to top undergraduate (or even secondary) schools and really push them to graduate from a top-tier graduate program. It is very hard for them, and a challenge for us. But, in the end, we have the satisfaction of making

> a huge difference with each and every student, giving them opportunities that they never would have had otherwise.
> (*Senior Manager, US institution in Rwanda*)

> It's a great job, really nice colleagues, promising students and interesting courses, but the workload is oppressive. Teaching overloads are common. Workdays of 10+ hours are common. With three teaching terms per year, there's little time for research or personal renewal. It can feel a bit like working on a factory floor.
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, Australian institution in Vietnam*)

Our final research question was concerned with the possibility of having a rewarding and satisfying academic career in transnational higher education, working at an offshore campus. Just under 16% of the participants answered that they would not recommend a young academic to follow a career in transnational education, mainly because of the cultural demands, high workload, and the lack of career progression opportunities. Some 5% of our participants offered no answer, or an answer that was inconclusive, while 7% said that the answer depended on the individual's motivations, career ambitions and ability to adjust successfully to the demands and challenges of transnational teaching.

> I don't recommend working at an offshore campus for serious academics who are just starting out in their career. It is an interesting career path, but not one for serious academics. There is a lack of reliable and coherent research support, unclear tenure guidelines, authoritarian (albeit benevolent) administration, and at best, a modest academic reputation.
> (*Lecturer/Assistant Professor, US institution in China*)

A majority of our participants (72%) believe that it *is* possible to have an attractive career working in transnational education, at offshore campuses. It is generally perceived by them that the advantages and benefits strongly outweigh the disadvantages and drawbacks. Some participants observed that it may sometimes be easier for young academics to make an impact and be noticed in transnational education, which can then lead to rapid career progression. Academics who rise to senior management positions and like to be internationally mobile can have exciting and rewarding careers working at offshore campuses globally.

> I was inflicted with the HEI [higher education institution] bug twenty years ago and have not looked back since. I enjoy the mobility, international exchange, working with different nationalities, and the sense of adventure. I also enjoy the challenge of building a campus from the ground up. My first HEI experience was as Academic Chair in the Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE. Since then, I started Murdoch University in Dubai as PVC [pro vice-chancellor], then went to Lancaster University in Ghana as Provost, before returning as President of TAG [the Transnational Academic Group] to open Curtin University in Dubai. And now, I have moved to Uzbekistan to open a new university in a rapidly emerging market.
> (*Senior Manager, US institution in Uzbekistan*)
> [Note: the participant agreed to publication of this quote]

Discussion and Recommendations

Much of the extant research on academic work at offshore campuses has focused on the challenges and negative aspects, but the findings of this study offer several positives. This section discusses the answers to our research questions. First, the desire for adventure and travel, and to experience a foreign culture, were the most popular motivations for working at an offshore campus. In general, we found strong support for Richardson and McKenna's (2002) four metaphor framework. The only notable additions to this framework were family reasons and convenience or chance, arising because the individual was already living or working in the host country.

Second, we found that the larger, research-intensive institutions paid academics at levels similar to those received by academics at the home campus, and teaching loads and research expectations/support were also similar. The expatriate packages received by most academics who were recruited internationally, results in many offshore academics being considerably better off financially after moving abroad, although this must be considered in relation to taxable income and local costs of living. In countries with a lower cost of living, such as Malaysia and Vietnam, it is common for non-elite, teaching-focused institutions to offer pay that is competitive locally, as opposed to being comparable to home campus levels. A few participants perceived that they were poorly rewarded, such as the individual who had not received a salary increase in 15 years. Third, some participants reported having very high teaching loads, which could exceed 10 modules/courses per academic year. It was also notable that the elite, research-intensive institutions have considerably smaller class sizes, rarely exceeding 50 students, whereas other institutions had larger class sizes. In the research-intensive institutions, offshore academics are generally supported and expected to undertake research and publish, whereas in other institutions, teaching-only contracts are common. Virtually all of our participants reported that they had access to the same journals, databases, and online resources as staff at the home campus.

Fourth, several participants mentioned that they felt more respected and appreciated by students, parents and their institution, than they had been in their home country. Regarding the benefits of working at an offshore campus, lifestyle advantages (such as adventure; travel; experiencing a new culture; better climate; and a higher quality of life) were cited by our participants more often than the work-related advantages (such as greater autonomy at work; motivated students; smaller class sizes; and no pressure to achieve research publications). In identifying the worst things about working as an academic at an offshore campus, lifestyle disadvantages (e.g., being far away from friends and family; long flights home; and language/communication barriers) were mentioned more often than work-related disadvantages (e.g., job insecurity; no pension; fewer opportunities for promotion; and low quality management).

Fifth, 90% of our participants are satisfied or very satisfied overall with their current position. This finding is very positive for both academics and institutions. Several of our participants took positions at offshore campuses because they gain satisfaction from providing higher education to students who may otherwise not have received it, but some individuals feel frustrated by their inability to bring about change in repressive regimes, where human rights abuses occur. Overall, the greatest sources of job dissatisfaction were feelings of job insecurity, lack of opportunity for promotion, and high workloads. Finally, almost three quarters of our participants believe that it *is* possible to have an attractive career working in transnational education, at offshore campuses.

The implications of our findings for individuals considering an academic job at an offshore campus is that they must be very clear about their motivations, so that they select the right institution (e.g., research-intensive or teaching focused) and the right host country (e.g., one in which they will be able to successfully assimilate, and in which their desire for travel and adventure may be satisfied). Before committing themselves to working at a particular offshore campus, individuals should consider a wide range of factors and issues, including student abilities and preferred learning styles; teaching loads, and institution expectations on undertaking research/achieving publications; leadership style and institution culture; language issues; living conditions; food availability; and host country bureaucracy, e.g., the time and effort needed to secure a residency permit and driving license. Individuals who conduct adequate research on these things before moving abroad (e.g., reading Clarke's (2015) book 'Working Abroad in Higher Education') will be better prepared, and less likely to become disappointed or dissatisfied with their decision to move abroad.

Offshore campus managers may also benefit from the findings of this research. Our recommendations are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Recommendations for offshore campus managers.

	Key recommendations
Recruitment	• Identify the individual's motivations for wanting an academic position at your offshore campus, to ensure that both the individual's and the institution's objectives are likely to be achieved • Ensure that job applicants possess a global mindset and strong intercultural competence skills
Employee reward	• Implement a transparent remuneration and rewards policy • Provide employment contracts that employees will perceive as fair, e.g. which provide an annual pay increment, if this is received by academics at the home campus • Include employees in the home campus pension scheme if this is possible, or provide support for retirement planning
Support and development	• Provide an induction program that helps the individual to adjust to life and work in a new country/culture • Provide ongoing training and development opportunities, to enhance work performance and support career progression
Management	• Develop a clear campus vision and mission, and communicate these effectively to staff • Demonstrate a commitment to delivering a high quality educational experience for students (rather than focusing on financial goals) • Implement strategies that promote the development of a friendly and supportive work environment (including positive relationships between international academics and local support staff) • Implement strategies that promote positive and effective relationships between staff at the offshore and onshore campuses • Avoid autocratic/authoritarian leadership styles and micromanaging, as expatriate academics may not be used to these, and may not respond well to them

Work and workloads	• Ensure that workloads and working conditions at the offshore and onshore campuses are similar
	• Be realistic with research and publication expectations, and provide appropriate support for research and scholarly activities
Employee retention	• Avoid the use of short, fixed-term employment contracts, which promote feelings of job insecurity
	• Support employees with career planning, and identify progression routes at the offshore and/or onshore campuses
	• Promote internally when possible; don't always recruit externally for senior offshore campus academic and leadership positions

Conclusion

As an organizational field, it may be observed that the offshore campus sector within transnational higher education is varied and diverse, and therefore generalizations are difficult. It is clear that while academic work at an offshore campus can be demanding and challenging, it can also be highly rewarding and satisfying. The findings of this research have clear implications for both individuals and institutions. The research is not, of course, without limitations. Although the survey generated over 700 pages of data, for which we are highly grateful to our participants, the findings cannot be generalized across all offshore campuses or host countries.

It was impossible for us to include every suggestion and reflect every opinion, but we aimed to report and discuss the most significant areas of consensus and disagreement. Thus, we hope that the findings of the research provide useful insights for academics, institutions and researchers. Although we tried to obtain a global sample, academics in several countries did not accept our invitation to participate in the study, nor individuals employed at campuses owned by Indian or Russian institutions. In order to confirm generalization of our findings, future research could replicate our survey in different countries, and among different institutions. It would also be interesting to see research that further identifies the factors that influence the work performance and job satisfaction of offshore campus academics.

Acknowledgements

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