

Higher Education at New Crossroads With Dominance of Asian Varsities

DUBAI — As more Asian universities enter the charts to become the future 'hot-spots' for higher education, it could be a cause of threat for universities that are modestly ranked, according to new trends surveyed by international academics.

This year, as some top universities slipped from their positions in the Times Higher Education rankings, Asian universities in the top 100 have increased from 14 to 16.

The University of Tokyo that landed at 22 and is the highest ranked Asian university along with many other universities in the region are believed to be "snapping at the heels" of currently leading universities.

With top ranking universities opening campuses in the UAE and emulating teaching practices, some school educators believe in a few years time the countries' education sector will witness a boom in enrollments.

"I would say higher education is in its embryonic stage and will grow from strength to strength," said Jason King, Head of Secondary at the International Wellington School.

"We have started on a journey to improve higher education in the UAE and lots of new courses have come up. With renowned university campuses coming up, students can still gain a degree from the UK here," he said.

Though no university from the region has acquired a rank in the top 200 list, compilers see many in the Middle East putting significant sums into new universities.

The Michigan State University's Dubai campus has reported a 41 per cent increase in student applications for their undergraduate programmes this year from local, GCC and China depicting a trend that analysts call regional mobility.

Federal universities in the UAE including the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), Zayed University and UAE University-AI Ain have invested in advanced infrastructure and attracted international teachers and methodologies, to impart education that is on par with overseas universities.

Most of them are open to nationals only but the Zayed University has decided to extend its expertise to expatriates as well.

Sanjeev Verma, director of Intelligent Partners, an education consultancy in Dubai said federal universities are good but cannot be an option for a majority of the population that comprises expatriates.

"In Asia, Singapore and Malaysia are coming up quite strong as it is reasonable and secure," he said.

"Though Asian countries are making it to the top, the traditional destinations for study will always be popular."

Australia is another preferred destination due to the cost factor but numbers might drop this year due to media reports on racial attacks according to Verma.

Aishwarya Shivkumar, who has joined the Birmingham City University this month, cited a similar reason for reconsidering her decision to study in Australia,

“Besides I was told UK is a design hub and visual communication is what I want to do.”

In September 2009, the European Union warned that India and China are likely to become the world’s leading research powers by 2025.

However, Martin Ince, Founding Editor of the Times Higher Education — QS World University Rankings says that though Asian universities are unlikely to replace the high rankers their ambitions are ominous for many of the modestly placed universities in the top 200.