

How Do International Branch Campuses Integrate Resources? A Systematic Review of Resource Integration Processes

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Abstract: How do International Branch Campuses integrate resources? This systematic review synthesizes literature from 2000 to 2025 to answer this question. Drawing on resource-based view and resource dependence theory, we identify four resource types requiring integration: financial, human, academic, and reputational. We examine the integration process from planning to regeneration, and identify interactions between resource types. Two research gaps are identified: limited longitudinal research on integration processes and resource regeneration, and insufficient attention to interactions between resource types. The review offers a conceptual framework and directions for future research. A forthcoming fourth article will examine IBC failure and sustainability.

Keywords: International Branch Campus; Resource Integration; Resource-based View; Resource Dependence Theory; Systematic Review.

1. Introduction

Who governs International Branch Campuses? How is governance implemented? Our first two reviews addressed these questions. This third review addresses a complementary question: how are resources integrated? Even with appropriate power distribution and governance mechanisms, IBCs cannot succeed without effectively integrating diverse resources.

International Branch Campuses (IBCs) are resource-intensive organizations. They must integrate resources from multiple sources: home universities, host governments, local partners, and their own operations (Wilkins, 2016; Hickey, 2024). Financial resources include tuition and funding. Human resources include faculty and staff. Academic resources include curriculum and quality assurance. Reputational resources include brand and legitimacy.

This review draws on two complementary theories. **Resource-based view** suggests that organizations gain competitive advantage through unique and valuable resource combinations (Wilkins, 2016). **Resource dependence theory** emphasizes that organizations depend on external resources controlled by others, creating power dynamics and integration challenges (Hickey, 2024).

This systematic review asks: What resources do IBCs integrate? What processes characterize integration? How do different resource types interact? What research gaps exist?

This is the third of three articles examining IBC governance and management. The first addressed stakeholder power, the second addressed governance mechanisms, and this article addresses resource integration processes. A fourth article will examine why IBCs fail.

2. Research Methods

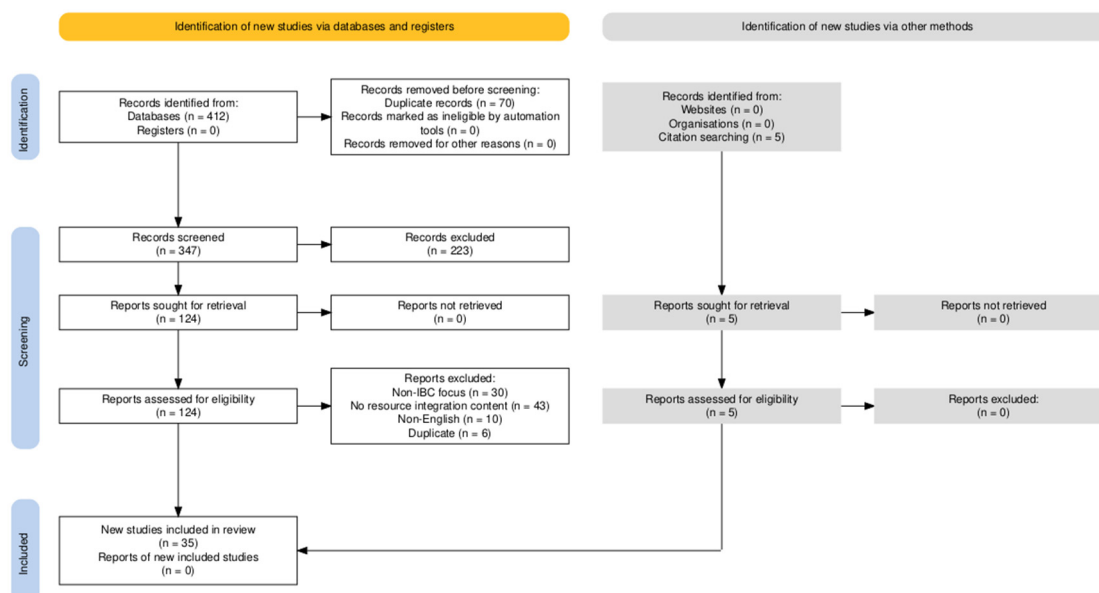


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for study selection (resource integration)

This review follows PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Four databases were searched in March 2025: Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar, covering publications from January 2000 to March 2025.

Search strings combined: ("international branch campus" OR "transnational higher education") AND ("resource integration" OR "resource-based view" OR "resource dependence" OR "financial resources" OR "human resources" OR "academic resources" OR "reputational resources").

From 87 studies included in the broader project, 35 studies with direct relevance to resource integration were synthesized for this article. Thematic analysis focused on resource types,

integration processes, resource interactions, and research gaps.

The study selection process followed PRISMA 2020 guidelines, as illustrated in Figure 1.

3. Research Findings

Figure 2 presents a conceptual framework of resource integration in International Branch Campuses. The framework shows four resource types and the integration process from planning to regeneration.

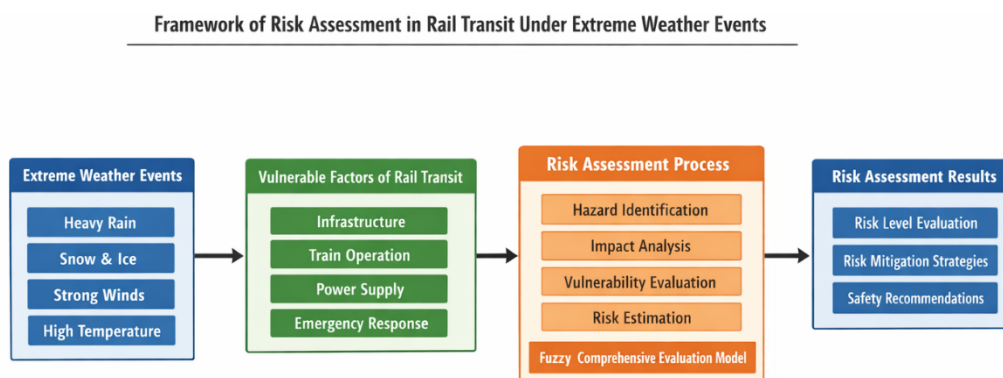


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Resource Integration in International Branch Campuses

3.1. Four Types of Resources and Their Integration Challenges

Financial Resources

Financial resources include tuition revenue, government subsidies, partner investments, and donations. The core challenge is balancing diversification with stability (Healey, 2015; Hickey, 2024).

Some scholars argue that diversified funding sources reduce dependence on any single stakeholder and increase sustainability (Wilkins, 2020; Hickey, 2024). Successful IBCs combine multiple sources: tuition from international and local students, government funding, and home university investments.

However, others note that too much dependence on tuition from a single market creates vulnerability to enrollment changes (Healey, 2015). Government funding, while stable, may come with political conditions that limit institutional freedom (Wilkins, 2020). Hickey (2024) emphasizes that financial integration requires deliberate **resource planning** that considers both internal capabilities and external dependencies.

Human Resources

Human resources include expatriate faculty, local faculty, and administrative staff. The core challenge is integrating diverse groups with different expectations while building shared identity (Yao & Yang, 2024; Swenddal et al., 2022).

Swenddal et al. (2022) made an important discovery: the **"IBC Othering Loop."** Faculty at branch campuses often construct their identity as separate from the home campus. This happens through low organizational identification, difficult relationships with home colleagues, and perceived differences in resources and students. This cycle is self-reinforcing and hard to break.

Other studies identify successful integration practices: joint teaching teams, dual promotion systems, cross-cultural

training, and shared governance participation (Trembath, 2016). However, expatriate faculty often face cultural adaptation challenges and limited career growth (Yao & Yang, 2024). Local faculty frequently experience limited decision-making power (Harry et al., 2019).

Cross-cultural training can be further supplemented by systematic training on teachers' digital literacy to improve cross-campus collaborative teaching efficiency (Lan, 2025). Beyond faculty management, AI-based psychological evaluation tools can assist IBCs in managing cross-border student groups and ease student identity adaptation barriers (Liao et al., 2025).

Academic Resources

Academic resources include curriculum, quality assurance protocols, teaching materials, and research capacity. The core challenge is maintaining home standards while adapting to local context (Shams & Huisman, 2011; Hou et al., 2018).

Hou et al. (2018) compared IBCs in Malaysia, Singapore, China, and South Korea. They found multiple quality assurance models: exemption from local review, reliance on home accreditation, dual accreditation, and international accreditation. Each model reflects different resource dependencies and regulatory environments.

Lamers-Reeuwijk et al. (2019) found that teaching quality across campuses requires ongoing coordination. It cannot be achieved through one-time arrangements.

For research, Stek and Park (2024) found that IBCs can contribute to regional research networks, but this requires deliberate faculty development and cross-campus collaboration.

Lin et al. (2025) optimized research resource allocation by normalizing positive indicators via extremum standardization, deriving subjective and objective weights through interval AHP and improved CRITIC, and developing a game-theory Nash equilibrium combined weighting model to quantify 20 researchers' performance for differentiated research reward

distribution.

Sheng et al. (2024) focused on the complex problems in performance evaluation of university researchers amid the reform of scientific research systems. Taking multiple factors including disciplinary differences, research outputs and talent training into account, they constructed an objective evaluation model integrating the entropy weight method and TOPSIS method. Empirical tests prove that this model can efficiently support team selection and individual performance allocation.

Wang et al. (2024) found that educators can fully grasp students' learning status, deliver personalized tutoring and optimize teaching procedures by collecting, analyzing and mining student learning data. Nevertheless, numerous issues arise regarding data privacy and security, algorithmic fairness, and the reliability of academic predictions. Educational institutions should improve data privacy regulations and strictly control data quality.

Reputational Resources

Reputational resources include brand value, legitimacy, and stakeholder perceptions. The core challenge is building **legitimacy** with multiple audiences at the same time (Farrugia & Lane, 2013).

Farrugia and Lane (2013) analyzed mission statements of 45 IBCs. They found that IBCs build legitimacy through multiple strategies. They embrace **global identity** to establish legitimacy with both home and host country stakeholders. They use **home country orientation** to signal quality. They employ **host country orientation** to show local contribution.

They identified three types of legitimacy: **cognitive legitimacy** (being seen as appropriate) from accreditation; **pragmatic legitimacy** (serving stakeholder interests) from student value; and **moral legitimacy** (being seen as right) from local development.

Wilkins and Neri (2018) show that faculty quality affects IBC reputation. Wilkins et al. (2017) show that employee commitment influences student perceptions.

3.2. The Resource Integration Process

Literature suggests four stages of integration.

Stage 1: Resource Planning and Acquisition

IBCs assess their internal capabilities and external dependencies. They then identify and secure needed resources (Wilkins, 2016; Hickey, 2024). This involves negotiating agreements, securing funding, recruiting faculty, and obtaining approvals (Healey, 2015). Hickey (2024) emphasizes that resource planning should consider both internal strengths and external dependencies. Challenges include getting credible commitments and identifying hidden resources like local knowledge.

Stage 2: Resource Allocation

Resources are distributed to teaching, research, administration, and infrastructure. Allocation decisions reflect stakeholder priorities and power dynamics (Shams & Huisman, 2011). Conflicts arise when different stakeholders want different allocation patterns. This stage shows the link between governance and resource integration—governance structures shape who controls allocation.

Song et al. (2024) quantified multiple research indicators by integrating principal component analysis and the entropy weight-TOPSIS method. Bonuses were distributed based on team research rankings and allocated hierarchically to individuals. They established an optimized performance allocation model solved with genetic algorithm constraints to balance fairness and incentives and maximize the overall

research benefits of teams.

Stage 3: Resource Integration

Diverse resources are combined to create organizational capabilities. Expatriate and local faculty work together on curriculum. Home and host quality assurance systems are aligned. Financial reports are consolidated (Yao & Yang, 2024). This stage faces cultural conflicts and identity barriers. Swenddal et al. (2022) show that integration can be blocked by "othering loops" that are hard to break without deliberate action.

Stage 4: Resource Regeneration

Through integration, IBCs create new resources. These include localized curricula with intellectual property value, alumni networks, research collaborations, and contextualized expertise (Wilkins, 2020; Hickey, 2024). Deng et al. (2025) show this through **human capital spillovers**—IBCs create new human resources in host countries. Hickey (2024) argues that successful IBCs generate reputational benefits beyond immediate financial returns.

3.3. Challenges in Resource Integration

Literature identifies several challenges that can block integration. These include resource dependence imbalance (Healey, 2015), missing governance mechanisms (Wood & Salt, 2017), and identity barriers such as the "IBC Othering Loop" (Swenddal et al., 2022). However, a detailed analysis of why IBCs fail is beyond the scope of this article and will be addressed in a forthcoming fourth review on IBC failure and sustainability.

3.4. Interactions Between Resource Types

Recent literature shows that different resource types interact.

Human-Financial Synergy: Deng et al. (2025) found that financial collaboration strengthens human capital spillovers. When financial resources are combined with human resource development, the impact on host countries is stronger.

Human-Reputational Link: Faculty quality and commitment directly affect IBC reputation (Wilkins & Neri, 2018; Wilkins et al., 2017).

Academic-Reputational Connection: Choices about accreditation signal quality to stakeholders. This links academic and reputational resources (Farrugia & Lane, 2013).

Research Gap: While these interactions are observed, systematic analysis of how resource types work together or against each other is lacking.

3.5. Research Gaps

Gap 1: Limited Longitudinal Research on Integration Processes and Resource Regeneration

Most studies provide snapshots at one point in time. There is limited understanding of how integration unfolds over years, what causes movement between stages, and how early choices affect later outcomes (Healey, 2015; Wilkins, 2020). Hickey (2024) calls for research tracking IBCs from start to maturity.

In addition, most research focuses on getting and using resources, not creating new ones. Resource regeneration—how IBCs generate new resources through integration—remains understudied. Hickey (2024) mentions reputational benefits. Deng et al. (2025) document human capital spillovers. But systematic analysis of regeneration processes and conditions is lacking.

Gap 2: Insufficient Attention to Interactions Between

Resource Types

While studies document individual resource types, research on how they interact is limited. Deng et al. (2025) provide evidence of human-financial synergy, but systematic analysis of interactions between all four resource types is lacking. Key questions include: How do financial pressures affect academic quality? How do reputational challenges impact faculty recruitment? What are the feedback loops between resources? Understanding these interactions is essential for effective resource management.

3.6. Link to Previous Reviews

This review connects to the first two articles in this series. Stakeholder power (Article 1) shapes who controls resource allocation decisions. Governance mechanisms (Article 2) provide the structures through which integration occurs. Understanding resource integration requires integrating insights from both power and governance perspectives.

4. Conclusion

This review identified four resources requiring integration in IBCs: financial, human, academic, and reputational. Integration follows a process: planning, allocation, integration, and regeneration. Resource types interact synergistically. Two research gaps exist: limited longitudinal research on integration processes, and insufficient attention to resource-type interactions. Future research should conduct longitudinal studies and analyze resource interactions. For practitioners, deliberate resource planning and monitoring all four domains are essential for successful integration.

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