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Association of Indian Management Schools

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Prof (Dr) Upinder Dhar
Chairman, Editorial Board

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Editorial

Motivated Enough to Illustrate the Passion!

What does it take to be a successful entrepreneur? Is it being born a prodigy? Is it having a Type-A personality? Is it being an extravert who spends time ameliorating around on projects? While some entrepreneurs have those characteristics, they rarely define that make most of the entrepreneurs. Not everyone is born with an intellect that will change the world. A student who could not make it through college, like Bill Gates, is more likely to succeed than the lifelong over-achiever. Thus, if a person is not a born genius or over-achiever, what makes him/her an entrepreneur? Some of the common characteristics that entrepreneurs possess are: passion, resilience, sense of self determination, flexibility, and ability to see opportunity everywhere.

Think Bill Gates, Steve Jobs or Dhirubhai Ambani, the reality is that most of the entrepreneurs work on bizarre amount of hours for little or nothing. Why do they put themselves through this? Because they are driven to either solve a problem or make it easier. How *passionate*? According to some researchers, 65 percent of founders have been identified as driven by 'heart'. Most of them are fueled by an unshakable sense of purpose. Throughout all the trials and tribulations, entrepreneurs reward themselves intrinsically by realizing that they are on a mission for the greater good. No matter how bad it gets, it is their passion that motivates them during all the times when everyone else tells them to quit.

Sir Winston Churchill once said that success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm. As an entrepreneur, one may be going to fail. That is just an unfortunate fact. While something that drastic would be too much for most people to handle, an entrepreneur has the unusual ability to get up and dust himself/herself off. Instead of giving up, an entrepreneur learns from failures. What went wrong? How can I learn from my mistakes? How can I succeed next time? These are the questions entrepreneurs ask themselves. They do not stop when times get tough. They are *resilient* and throw off the negativity. They experience setbacks during or at some point to only become some of the most well-known and successful entrepreneurs in history.

Every entrepreneur affirms that there are numerous problems to overcome. Whether it be not securing enough funding, proving the naysayers wrong or facing the competition head on, it is not easy being an entrepreneur. And, being passionate and resilient can only go so far, which is why entrepreneurs also have a strong *sense of self determination*. Self-confident and self-motivated are also key characteristics of

entrepreneurs, as they know their idea is good. They are motivated enough to illustrate to others that it is worth the time and money to go forward. While they also understand that they cannot do everything on their own, they realize that they are the only ones to make their idea a reality. According to a study by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 91 percent entrepreneurs are confident that their businesses will be more profitable in the next 12 months.

Being able to adapt to changes and challenges is crucial for any business. Most of the entrepreneurs feel that their idea or business plan is significantly different from what it was in the beginning. An idea may be brilliant but not implemented effectively. Entrepreneurs are *flexible* to make the adjustments to make the idea feasible. Furthermore, entrepreneurs are prepared and willing to modify their plan when new information arrives and when there are changes in the environment. An example of being flexible would be the story behind Hyungsoo Kim and his company Eone. Kim initially developed a wrist watch that featured Braille. He quickly discovered that people want to be included and not have attention brought to their disability. Thus, he trashed the original plan and came up with a watch that would not only be worn by the visually handicapped, but even by the people with sight.

Entrepreneurs are innovators who are always on the lookout to either develop a new idea or improve an existing product or service. At some point in their lives, they may notice something that could be better. But, instead of just saying that something could be better was not enough, they actually put a plan in motion. In other words, entrepreneurs have the ability to *see the future* before it happens. They are inspired by the things that have never been seen before, things yet to be discovered. One must have the vision that nobody else does, and the vision to see it through. Jeff Bezos had a vision to tap into the new world of electronic retailing in 1994 and become “the world’s most consumer-centric company.” His little virtual bookstore was Amazon, which today is the model for all e-commerce businesses.

The readers of AJM are requested to go through the contents of the journal and help us in improving the academic value of this publication by offering suggestions based on their critical review and constructive observations. The prospective contributors to this journal are advised to follow APA pattern (latest Edition) for presenting the references.

Prof (Dr) Upinder Dhar
Chairman
Editorial Board – AJM

Case Study 09

Saraswathi University – Testing Waters Overseas*

Introduction

Indian ethos is believed to imbibe the philosophy of “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*”, if translated indicates “The world is one family”. The Indian education sector currently seeks to create a universal education system taking its roots from ancient Indian ethos aligned with the values of knowledge across the globe. Amidst an ever-changing world, higher global awareness, and interconnectedness through internationalization of higher education, the offering of education has a significant role to perform in shaping the next generations of learners.

In modern times, globalization is proved to be one of the most transformative forces. India has a historical legacy of internationalization of higher education that once flourished in ancient times. Universalization of higher education fosters intellectual growth, by providing the best academic and research practices through interactions among distinct educational practices while assisting in nurturing ‘global thinking humans’ through student and scholars’ mobility. Universities like Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila Vallabhi, Kanchi, Ujjain, etc., were once universally recognized and enticed world wide scholars.

This case study is based on Saraswathi University, a university in Southern India, which intends to internationalize higher education. Trusting the current Indian Government’s ‘Local to Global’ ethos, the university tried to test its strengths in ‘Teaching and Learning practices’ in various international cultures, to accelerate its vision of globalized education. Saraswathi University has strived to create its global manifestation, by instituting a university campus in Oskemen, Kazakhstan. To note, it was the first independent Private University in Kazakhstan, established with a vision

* This case was developed by Kiran S Kakade (Guru Nanak Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai), Ratnakar Mishra (NSB Academy, Bengaluru), Sakshi Sharma and Smita Lal (Institute of Marketing and Management, Delhi) during the 6th Online Case Writing Workshop organized by the Association of Management Schools, Hyderabad from 24th to 26th February 2022.

to become a gateway for students from Eurasia; hence to build a strategic educational presence in that region.

University's Dream to Go Beyond Boundaries

Saraswathi University was established in 1996 in Bengaluru, India, with a vision to serve the world as a global University offering higher learning. In quest of academic excellence, invention, and fostering entrepreneurship. Saraswathi University itself had promised to become one of India's leading universities while excelling in research and teaching. Following its vision to have a global footprint, Saraswathi University opened a campus in Oskemen, Kazakhstan with support from the Kazakh Government. It was one of its pioneering effort that established it as India's first Private University in Kazakhstan, under a Presidential Decree.

Initially, the University planned to offer undergraduate courses in Engineering (B.Tech.) and Business Administration (BBA). The Kazakhstan Government provided a 9-acre campus including an old building within it, to set up the college. The Kazakh Government also gave an additional 100 acres of land, free of cost, for future expansions if needed. As part of the strategic plans, Saraswathi University proposed expansion three years after commencement of its operations. At present Saraswathi University, Kazakhstan provides extensive global opportunities to its students aiming to nurture them to be global citizens of tomorrow.

Establishing a Presence in Kazakhstan

In its first academic year 2018, the university succeeded in enrolling about 600 students riding on a 'Student Connect Strategy.' The Kazak Government's strong regulations and directives in the higher education sector, had necessitated many creative problem solving initiatives by Saraswathi University, whilst establishing its presence in Kazakhstan. The university signed an agreement with Kazak Government as well as other local stakeholders that proved successful, and won many accolades for Saraswathi University in the mind of the local populace.

Adding a feather in its Cap, University started an 'International University Fastrack Program' to remove the woes of non- English speaking students thinking the language barrier should not come in the way of reaching its potential students. This initiative is comprised of a bridge course that Kazak students to take, with an emphasis on learning English Language skills enabling students to take on courses in an international university. The university encouraged and sponsored its students and faculty to

participate in seminars and short-term courses discoursed by many reputed foreign Universities, what later strengthened its originally conceptualized 'Student Connect' purpose.

Roadblocks Encountered by Saraswathi University

While establishing its presence in Kazakhstan, Saraswathi University faced many challenges, notably;

- **Social-cultural Concerns:** It was found that the local Kazakh people are very conservative in nature and sensitive to racism. Thus, taking them into confidence was a challenge. The language barrier was also of major concern that was initially hampering communicating with people. Everywhere the impart of education requires a creative solution. For example, we can think of digital aids like 'Google Translate', but it is not always an infallible option and often witnessed as source for communication and cross-cultural misconceptions. However, with persistence and hard work in reaching out the community at large, a level of trust has been built over a few years from inception.
- **Geographical Issues:** The University campus was established in remote areas where there was a trend to take admission in a Public University. This mental bloc to prefer a public university over a private set up was needed to be addressed and overcome.
- **Retaining Students:** In the Kazakhstan education system, students have a flexible option to switch between Institutes at any time, which proved it difficult for the university to retain its admitted students.
- **Legal Intricacies:** It was difficult to comply with the legal procedures of Kazakhstan for foreign universities desirous of establishing educational institutions in their country. Saraswathi University was put on test to numerous rigid legal conditions and models for its establishment set up. These various models to setup an establishment are mentioned here below:

Model-1: Invest Money and Take Revenue- (Ratio Basis);

Model-2: PPP (Feasibility and Critical Review),and

Model-3: Direct Presidential Decree (Group of People).

It was again proved a herculean task to analyze and opt for the best of all possibilities presented before them. The University finally preferred the third

option namely 'A Presidential Decree' that lured them as the best option available.

- **Registration Issue:** The obstructions to obtain the Government's registration were many and felt as almost unsalable challenges to University which were endemic in the country. Rules of compliance were virtually non-negotiable. In this cited situation, an agent who was tasked by the University ignored the due diligence of stipulated legal process, which resulted seeing him in jail. He was subsequently released against a \$ 5000 dollar fine.
- **Human Resource Problems:** Sourcing Faculty members from the locals was another major issue, as local Kazakh people do not have English speaking background. Thus, conducting and administering courses in English seemed difficult forcing them to manage with the minimum availability of trained human resources. The local staff also was very reluctant to work, and there was no reliance on their work schedules as they had a 'might work and might not work attitude', with absenteeism and resignations predominant.

Strategies Employed for a New Market

All the challenges mentioned above were serious in nature that were needing creative solutions to address. Some of these were:

- **Admission Strategy**
 - The University, which is now operating in a developing country in Eurasian region, not only serve students from Kazakhstan but also from neighboring countries like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.
 - Saraswathi University aimed at setting a competitive fee structure, aiming to attract students for admission. It succeeded initially in its plan to show its presence in Kazakhstan with 'High Quality yet Low fees (\$ 2500)' pricing strategy, which stood out as a great value for money concept for students in Kazakhstan, especially when they compared the price tag offered by other global institutions.
 - In a bold initial move, the University also offered students an option to study without tuition fee for one year, in Bengaluru, India, at its own campus. This resulted in great success for admissions, subsequently.
 - The University further provided assurance to students about a 6-month industry internship at leading corporate companies, which was greatly appreciated later.

- **Marketing Strategy**

- Social media played a significant role in creating awareness amongst students, helping it to create the required 'Student Connect'. This was successfully captured and leads nurtured through counseling, moving students' awareness to interest and action leading to final successful admissions. University officials personally visited different places in Kazakhstan to promote the University to highlight educational benefits of studying in Saraswathi University.
- Four days of orientation program was planned for students and their parents taking together with a focus to give an in-depth knowledge on various academic concepts. These proved later as highly successful. Many scholarships on different criteria and parameters were instituted to help students financially.
- Contracts were offered to staff and students with incentives for admission referrals.
- All these initiatives eventually resulted in garnering and fetching 600 admissions in the very first year, 2018.

- **Industry Oriented Courses**

- Wide pools of courses were offered aiming to cater to different educational interests and needs of students. There were various Degree offerings, viz: BBA, BTech. BSc., and MBA, courses. Saraswathi University also did chose an exclusive mix of seasoned committed academicians and corporate, in their faculty pool.
- Students learned through industry projects and assignments. They were given an opportunity to go on a student exchange program from one month to 6 months in a Saraswathi's partner University in other parts of the globe. Students of B.Tech.(Hons.) were given an option to work in India for 6 months, as a part of the curriculum.
- All the programs were taught in English, so students could pursue their careers or higher learning across the globe. The University thus focused on building students' interpersonal skills, through technical and cultural activities that ran throughout the year.

- **Faculty-Student Engagement Programs**

- The focus on the faculty pool was on sharing knowledge with other university faculties and students. This enhanced their reputation in faculty development

amongst the community and created credibility of the educational offerings being provided by Saraswathi University.

- Saraswathi University was also engaged in the development of a strategic plan for continuing faculty growth. The university organized various faculty development programs, effectiveness programs, domain refresher programs, and specialized programs for the overall development of faculty, which ultimately led to students' progress.
- Students' engagement programs were instituted starting from orientation programs and leading on to specialized clubs and student interest engagements activities and visits and liaisons with international speakers from different domains.

Future Endeavors: A Strategic Way Forward

- The University is now thinking of creating a "*Global Saraswathi Uni Hub*" where they propose collaboration with the best universities across the globe, to provide the best from world education to students of Kazakhstan. This will be enabled by specialized MoUs of collaborations offering courses like: Management Degree from Harvard Business School, Mechanical Degree from Germany, etc.
- Saraswathi University believes in 'Personalized Individual Learning'. Thus, the focus in strategic planning is to create more customized courses, which do not go by the traditional educational structures, i.e., a one-size-fits-all in education.
- Students can study Mathematics along with Music, Philosophy and Photography, and Dance and Literature, thus offering creative mixing in academic disciplines that often lead to new innovations.
- The University is also working on 'Competitive Value Offerings' in multidisciplinary courses, all focused on making the students more industry-ready.
- Prestigious collaborations with world-class institutions, backed by strong funding will help expand the reach of the Saraswathi University brand. This will also include strengthening associations with industry, both local and international.

Future Possibilities and Expansions

- The Kazakhstan Government has offered Saraswathi University an open proposal to come up with a school education setup as well. This is perceived as a new business venture too for the University. This will build a readymade market of alumni students, from school to university, reinforcing its brand strength and equity further. However, this will be the focus of an independent study later though experiences from this case can be easily adapted and implemented, making the process easier to do, and capitalizing on opportunities in the future.

Conclusion

India is becoming a fast-evolving nation and viewed as a key higher education hub for students of its neighboring countries. Expanding overseas campuses on their own or in partnership would help in stretching the horizons of the Indian education brand. Endeavors have been stepped up with the announcement of India's 'National Education Policy 2020', which encourages the move towards an internationalization of Indian institutions. Within this framework, Saraswathi University, Kazakhstan exceedingly inspires the agility of its students, and plan to foster meaningful cross-cultural exchanges to its numerous other international networks and academic partnerships. The opportunities are unlimited, but it comes with a plethora of challenges as well. However, this case stood as a great example for other players in the educational operations, where they can benefit from the strategies expanded globally.

Questions

1. Examine the case and do the SWOT and PESTLE analysis for the University.
2. Highlight the difficulties faced by the Saraswathi University. What strategies were adopted by the university to enter a new market domain? How far were they successful? Or a failure?
3. Discuss and suggest possible ways for the university to consolidate operations in Kazakhstan considering the growth matrix strategy.
4. Map out the strategy as to how this successful venture experience can be expanded to other neighboring countries.

Teaching Note

Executive Summary

This case highlights the challenging journey of the Saraswathi University of India and its role in contributing to regional capacity building through the context of internationalization of higher education. This case focuses on certain issues that one education house faces once it decides to set up its campus outside India. The Saraswathi University of Bengaluru decided to venture into Kazakhstan, to set up its own campus, offering various academic programs. Saraswathi University is well-known in India for its quality education and has an international standard campus, set up at Bengaluru, in 1996. The campus is renowned for its education quality consciousness and boasts of 10,000 students for 141 programs ranging from undergraduate to research programs. The university is known to house 80 nationalities.

With the core needs of education for all at the forefront, the University decided to open its campus in Kazakhstan in 2017. Kazakhstan is a country that was a part of the earlier Soviet Union, and got its independence on 16th December 1991. The Central Asian country of Kazakhstan is perhaps most famous for its huge reserves of oil and natural gas. According to the Kazakhstan Government, the population as of 2019 was close to 18.9 million, but with a density as low as 6 people per square kilometer. One of the strongest economies in Central Asia, Kazakhstan is the first nation who turned debt-free to the International Monetary Fund, 7 years ahead of its schedule.

The economy was growing at the rate of 8% before it hit a slowdown in the year 2014-15. The literacy rate is pegged at resounding close to 100% of ages above 15, taken together irrespective of gender. This is the main factor that attracts many foreign universities to set up their campus in any city of this country. Saraswathi University was looking for such an option after establishing itself as a quality education provider in India. Kazakhstan, for a while wooed many U.S campuses to set up their business there. In a similar fashion, Saraswathi University was allowed by the Kazakh Government to set up their business at Oskemen.

Case Study Objectives

- Highlight how the Government process helps the outside business house in general and academic institutions in specific, to set up their campus inside the country.
- Feature the challenges faced by an Indian academic institution while proceeding to set up its operations in Kazakhstan.

- Enumerate the socio-cultural aspects that usually come in the mind of the expatriates when they try to foster ethnocentrism.
- How can a big academic group plan to align its domestic as well as overseas operations whilst maintaining the same quality level?

Target Learning Group

This case was developed during the three-day case workshop organized by the 'Association of Indian Management Schools' for faculty members from 24th to 26th February 2022. The qualitative facts are based on the deliberations by leading top management personnel of the concerned Saraswathi University.

The case is developed for use at the MBA level 'Decision Making' and 'Strategic Management' course at an Indian University standard. Also, this case can be used in courses on 'Business Expansion and Entrepreneurship' alike subjects where the students can be apprised about the plight of entrepreneurs who are setting up their operations overseas.

Case Discussion Questions

1. What is the need to set up educational operations overseas? Enumerate whether the domestic environment is forcing such initiatives, or is it the strategic vision and mission of the concerned University that pushes the management to think of operational expansion outside India?
2. What are the processes and guidelines that one has to follow while setting up educational operations outside India? Discuss whether it's different or the same, across various business sectors? Which country has a better business environment as compared to the Indian scenario?
3. What are the necessary clearances one has to obtain to set up a University from host as well as field countries?
4. Socio-cultural aspects are also different from one country to another. With reference to India and Kazakhstan, what is the possible people's reaction when they see a foreign institution coming up in their own land, thus posing a threat to local operations?
5. What are the benefits to society, the country, and its citizens when such exchange programs are undertaken? Can student exchange programs of various existing institutions can be viewed as a prelude to this type of setting up complete operations?

Timeline and Teaching Strategy

Time-Division	This case is intended for a 60-to-90-minute discussion as a hands-on experience on establishing educational initiatives overseas, their operational challenges and solutions. The solutions are to be identified across all specialization areas of management like marketing, finance, HR, and operations
10 minutes:	Warm-up by discussing the need to allow foreign universities to set up their campuses in India and Indian universities setting up their campus abroad. Examples of leading Indian universities like BITS Pilani, Saraswathi University, SP Jain University, Mumbai can be considered. Here, any three or four students can be identified as the protagonist to set up their own operations overseas.
30-40 minutes:	Proceed through discussion questions from 1 to 3 highlighting the government regulations as well as its strength and weaknesses taking the Saraswathi University in particular. The discussion must highlight the achievements of the concerned university and its need to set up overseas. The vision and mission statements and their alignment to the overseas operations can be considered for classroom discussion.
20-30 minutes:	Question no 4 to 5 can be taken up for further discussion which is a bit subjective in nature. Students are supposed to be able to correlate their domain knowledge to the prevailing situational urgency to go abroad. The discussion can then be closed by thinking about the role of already identified student protagonists being at the top management position, and to think about other possible locations/ countries to set up their own business.
10 minutes:	In the end, the facilitator can summarize the thoughts of students on the case and link the case with the theoretical strategic Growth Matrix models.

Appendix-1

SWOT Analysis of Saraswathi University

Strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highly Adaptable• Focused• Trained Workforce	Weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Language• Socio Culture issues• Legal Compliance• Infrastructure• Local Workforce
Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emerging Market• Friendly Relation• Global Expansion	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local Universities• Strict Rules• Staff resistance to change• Global Competition• Cross-Cultural Adaptability

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