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**ASSESSING TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION:
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE RELATIONS BETWEEN
INSTITUTIONS**

Eugenia Diaz-Caneiro (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) University of A Coruña, Spain, eugenia.diaz.caneiro@udc.es

Abstract

Transnational Education is an innovative way of internationalising higher education which refers to the movement of higher education providers across national borders. This phenomenon is becoming more and more popular as it allows students to attend foreign programmes without leaving their home countries. Thus, most of the students who traditionally would have travelled overseas to study for an international qualification are now pursuing foreign degrees in their home through an array of collaborative arrangements with degree-awarding institutions from major education-exporting countries. Transnational Education supporters state it widens learning opportunities, it introduces institutional competition and it benefits home institutions through links with prestigious foreign institutions. However, several negative aspects have arisen. There have been problems associated with non-official, unregulated higher education provisions which remain outside official national quality assurance regimes as well as obstacles related with lack of adequate information and transparency available to potential students, employers and competent recognition authorities. Besides, Transnational Education institutions may play an unfair competitive role with respect to strictly regulated national providers and cause a loss of income to home institutions. Therefore, the aim of our study is to analyse whether Transnational Education has become a fruitful way of implementing Internationalisation at Home or if, on the contrary, it deteriorates not only the local higher education programmes but also the quality of those international ones offered abroad. By providing real data and experts' opinions, we will encourage readers to reflect on this phenomenon and its consequences to the future of education.

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Keywords: Globalisation, higher education, internationalisation, transnational education.



1. Introduction

International higher education has increasingly gained attention not only from professors and educators but also from policy makers as it offers long-term benefits of human capital development. With the strategic globalisation of higher education institutions, the nature of international higher education is also evolving (Hawawini, 2011). Students have more and more choices in selecting their desired foreign universities and some are even located in their home countries through international branch campuses. Thus, foreign university academic programmes have overcome national borders in order to allow international students fulfil the requirements of obtaining international degrees.

The term Transnational Higher Education first appeared in the early 1990s when educators wanted to differentiate between international students recruited to local institutions and those who were enrolled in degrees offshore (Knight, 2005). According to the Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education, written by UNESCO and Council of Europe (2000), Transnational Higher Education refers to all types of higher education study programmes in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based.

Transnational Higher Education is a great example of how innovative universities have turned into due to globalisation, as nations and universities are becoming more interconnected, stretching beyond their national borders (Marginson and Ordorika, 2011). As a consequence, higher education institutions have to reflect not only on the institutional and national agendas, but also on the broader global interests, and this can be done through different methods of Transnational Higher Education.

1.1. Modalities of Transnational Higher Education

Huang (2003) states there are six ways of developing Transnational Higher Education. Depending on countries' interests and resources, one might be more interesting than others, so institutions must consider all options when taking these decisions:

- Franchising: An education provider from one country grants another institution from another country the right to deliver educational programmes which belong to the former, so the qualification is actually awarded by this one.
- Twinning degrees: An education provider from one country collaborates with another institution in another by allowing students from this institution to transfer their course credits to the former institution, so part of the qualification is conducted in the first country and part in the second one.
- Programme articulations: Students attend part of a source country qualification in a host country and then ask for credit transfer to the source country institution to complete the qualification at the education institution in the source country.
- Branch campus: A campus is established by one country education institution in another country to deliver its own education programmes.
- Virtual learning: The education provider from one country delivers online the education service to students in another country.
- Corporate programmes: Some multinational companies have their own programmes of study and they are not affiliated with any national education system.

As McBurnie (2008) states, due to the geographical distance of Transnational Higher Education programmes from the home campus, there is a gap between academic and commercial priorities. Many institutions have shown their intention to become knowledge societies, where economic growth is driven by knowledge products and highly educated and skilled workforces. Luckily, rather than profit, they are motivated by the prestige and reputation gained from their international presence and the opportunity to create a global higher education brand. However, it is crucial to ensure the educational quality of the Transnational Higher Education programmes.

1.2. Quality of Transnational Higher Education programmes

In terms of quality of the Transnational Higher Education programmes, the most important document is the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education, which was developed by UNESCO and the OECD in 2005 after several consultations with national governments and institutions. The guidelines set out standards to provide an international framework to protect transnational students from low-quality programmes, so they also include International Association of Universities' (2004) policy statement Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders, which consists in a global statement of individual institutions operating across borders.

Therefore, higher education institutions are responsible for the quality and the social, cultural and linguistic relevance of their transnational education as well as the standards of the qualifications provided. According to the previous document, higher education institutions delivering Transnational Higher Education must follow the principles below:

- Assure that the plans they deliver inside and outside the country are of equal quality and that they besides consider the social and lingual sensitivities from the receiving nation.
- Arise, conserve or examine actual inner quality management schemes so that they fill up the competences by faculty members, administrators, scholars and alumni and take full responsibility for presenting higher education qualifications corresponding to standard inside and outside the country.
- Ensure the information and guidance provided by their agents is accurate, reliable and easily accessible when offering these transnational programmes to potential students through agents.
- Refer skilled quality assurance and accreditation structures and honour the quality sureness and accreditation schemes of the destination nation whilst delivering higher education across borders.
- Build up networks and partnerships to ease the formula for acknowledgement by recognising all qualifications as equal or comparable.
- Supply precise, authentic and easily accessible data about the standards and processes of extrinsic and intrinsic quality assurance and the academic and professional credit of qualifications they deliver and supply exhaustive descriptions of plans and qualifications, rather on descriptions of the knowledge, understanding and skills that an eminent pupil ought to develop.
- Ensure the transparency of the financial status of the educational programmes offered.

Considering all these guidelines must be taken into consideration and that globalisation includes the economic, political and societal forces that have pushed higher education institutions toward greater international involvement (Altbach and Knight, 2007) we will try to assess the positive and negative effects of Transnational Higher Education.

2. Problem Statement

During the last decades, many developing higher education institutions have developed and implemented a range of internationalisation policies and strategies. These strategies have included engaging in cross-border collaborative arrangements, developing programmes that are delivered using English as a Medium of Instruction and establishing branch campuses in foreign countries. This Transnational Higher Education is becoming more and more usual among universities but the educational community seems unaware of the impacts between university institutions. Academic, economic and socio-cultural implications must be addressed in order to continue promoting it or to refuse it.

3. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- In what ways can the concept of globalisation explain the development of Transnational Higher Education?
- How did transnational cultural and educational interactions shape the development of higher education systems?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are to produce findings on the impacts of Transnational Higher Education and to promote awareness and understanding of these implications from the educational perspective as well as to broaden the frontiers of knowledge on this topic so that the impacts of Transnational Higher Education are understood by policy makers and students.

5. Research Methods

This study was developed by the International Relations team from the University of A Coruña. This Spanish higher education institution organises an International Summer School, which includes a list of courses taught using English as a Medium of Instruction and focused on international students to come. These courses receive over one thousand applications every year from students wishing to come to A Coruña, Spain, and to know a little bit more about this institution. However, many of them cannot come due to Visa problems, economic difficulties or personal reasons. Therefore, the International Relations team wanted to know the positive and negative effects of developing Transnational Education and, thus, promoting the University of A Coruña all over the world.

In undertaking the data compilation, a literature search was conducted. In order to develop an overview of the scope and scale of Transnational Higher Education, we followed data collection strategies

consisting of source like speeches, governmental policy documents, and institutional records of universities as well as reports and articles written on this topic. These multiple sources helped us triangulate the data for variability and accuracy. The criteria we used were the transnationality of educational exchanges and partnerships, the role of the implied actors and the availability of substantive data that can be interpreted and verified. However, our main research method was surveying International Summer School's participants, both lecturers and students. They know first-hand their countries' situation so they were asked whether they would attend the same International Summer School back at home and the positive and negative effects this would have on their home university institutions.

6. Findings

After analysing the collected data, we have found several negative and positive impacts we should become aware of. In terms of negative implications of Transnational Higher Education, we must point out the risk of brain drain, as it creates competition for students and staff with local institutions and there is a low commitment of fly-in faculty. Besides, we appreciated limited campus student experience and several professors were not aware of it or, even worse, they were sceptical of new transnational programmes.

Moreover, programmes are usually Western-centred, so their curriculum content is not locally sensitive and there was an overuse of English as a Medium of Instruction and a lack of official local recognition and accreditation. Regarding students, these programmes imply higher costs compared with local ones, they find problems associated with non-official, unregulated higher education providers who remain outside official national quality assurance regimes and are not subject to internal or external monitoring processes and they have also difficulties associated with lack of adequate information and transparency. However, we have found many positive implications concerning Transnational Higher Education

- **Quality:** Considering it builds international relations and mutual understanding between countries, it improves the overall quality of higher education provision, not only of the sending institution but also of the receiving country. Thus, it challenges traditional education systems by introducing more competition and innovative programmes and delivery methods so quality corresponds to the academic reputation, academic and social support and flexibility and diversity of course delivered. It benefits home institutions through links with prestigious foreign institutions as well as it is an opportunity to access new sources of income for the sending ones. To sum up, it includes aspects such as resources and teaching skills and the curriculum is in tune with economic, social, political, cultural and environment realities of the local country and the whole world.
- **Employment:** It refers to the value of a destination country's qualifications within the local and global labour markets, and to this extent it includes both the ability to obtain employment as well as the relative return within the labour market over a period of time. As it increases access to higher education for local students, it strengthens their international outlook and, therefore, it addresses skills gaps in the labour market widens learning opportunities by providing more choice for citizens. Furthermore, it both generates income for sending institutions and supports receiving economies.

- **Affordability:** Transnational Higher Education means an affordable alternative to full-time studying abroad for an international qualification. Instead of facing the costs of living and tuition fees in a particular study destination, they can meet the demand for international education through programme and provider mobility and not through student mobility.
- **Accessibility:** It is defined as the ease of access to institutions and programmes offered by a particular destination country. Besides, these innovative teaching techniques promote intercultural understanding, enhance English language skills and, thus, it increases the awareness and knowledge about international issues and events.

7. Conclusion

To conclude, after going through the analysed written documents, we have seen that developing governments encourage the improvement of Transnational Higher Education programmes as an advance to diminish the number of pupils going abroad to study. While pupils study locally in a foreign plan instead of studying overseas, they withdraw less cash from the nation, bolster the development of the local training frame and they are more loath to emigrate once they have finished their tests. According to our International Summer School's students and instructors, transnational projects likewise consider those pupils who want a foreign education but cannot travel because of family or work commitments or because of the considerable costs involved in studying abroad.

Higher Education institutions, along these lines, can benefit from the noteworthy venture that they have made throughout the years in infrastructure, staffing and curriculum development by extending programs to serve a bigger understudy populace based abroad. In short, transnational activities and, in this manner, our International Summer School abroad, can help in recruiting future students and staff as well as provide existing educational community with international engagement opportunities not accessible on the home grounds. We firmly recommend governments to bring issues to light of this sort of training institutions to develop such programmes and students to enlist these courses as it will suggest an extraordinary open door for their future profession.

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