

# Chapter 5

## A Curious Case of Formative Assessment: A TNE Perspective in EAP and Beyond

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### ABSTRACT

*The educational value of formative assessment (FA) has been widely acknowledged within higher education. At the same time, there is little consensus on what FA entails, or how it should be defined and understood when looking at the Western education system; this is even more problematic when adapted by TNE institutions. This chapter looks at the definition issues together with key characteristics of quality formative feedback, including the role of the student in co-creating feedback, something that is particularly challenging within the context of this chapter, TNE in China. It looks at the most apparent challenges that are associated with FA implementation within a Chinese higher education context, such as educational heritage and a deep-rooted collectivist approach to learning. It also ventures to propose an alternative conception, formative routines framework FRF), to emphasise the importance of student and teacher training when engaging in formative tasks and using these to support the ongoing development of curricula.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*An intercultural interaction is neither a question of maintaining one's own cultural frame nor of assimilating to one's interactant's cultural frame. It is rather a question of finding an intermediary place between these two positions – of adopting a third place. In so doing the participant in the interaction is an experiencer, not an observer of difference (Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco, 1999, p 5).*

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## ***A Curious Case of Formative Assessment***

It has been suggested that the demand for higher education programmes around the world will continue to grow and will quadruple its current numbers to 414 million students by 2030 (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2013). This presents an opportunity to countries with well-established and emerging international education industries, including China, to ‘export’ their ‘educational products’ to international students (Education at Glance, 2013). This business opportunity comes with inherent pedagogical challenges that are often the result of the characteristics of the target culture, and the business model that frames how educational institutions operate. For instance, a stronger emphasis on profit or revenue generation rather than contributions to society and educational gains is surprisingly proven to be more effective in the long term within the application of Transnational Education (TNE) business sustainability (Dyllick and Muff, 2015). Something that may have a negative effect on the quality of the pedagogical gains for the target students.

TNE in China can be divided into three sector settings:

1. Chinese-foreign cooperation universities (e.g. University of Nottingham Ningbo China, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University and New York University Shanghai)
2. Chinese-foreign cooperation second-tier colleges (affiliated to Chinese universities; e.g. Sydney Institute of Languages and Commerce at Shanghai University)
3. Chinese-foreign cooperation programmes (Joint Undergraduate Program in Accounting between

Wenzhou University, China and Kean University, the United States) (Hu, Eisenclas and Trevaskes (2019, p. 308)

With 9 Chinese-foreign cooperation universities, 79 second-tier colleges and a further 1024 cooperation programmes, it is not difficult to understand both the scale and impact of such collaborations (Centre of Research on CFCRS, 2018). However, a number of joint ventures have been stopped by China’s education ministry. For instance, 30% of 149 Australian and 25% of the 245 UK cooperation programmes opened since 1994 have now been terminated for a number of reasons including a mismatch between foreign staff, students and local authorities’ expectations (Sharma, 2018). This suggests that establishing and maintaining a successful TNE initiative can be challenging and does not always lead to successful outcomes.

Several authors (Briguglio, 2000, Heffernan et al., 2010, Mok and Han, 2016, Hu, Eisenclas and Trevaskes, 2019) have suggested that TNE has evolved into a phenomenon across the global borders of internationalization; however, TNE often falls short of its vision. This might be due to the various stakeholders’ differing understanding of ‘educational success’ and the best way of achieving it. In other words, the differences between host and partner-country in governance, management of staff (Stafford and Taylor, p. 2016), student support (Bhuiyan, 2016) or implementing foreign clerical support systems by professional services (Henderson, Barnett and Barnett, 2017) could be seen as problematic. Echoing the opening quote, Hu, Eisenclas and Trevaskes (2019, p. 307) stated that the key challenge to address, mainly by host countries, is ‘how to assure the quality of transnational higher education on the one hand and how to maintain a national identity and character on the other’. This can be further complicated when students within a TNE context have minimal exposure and opportunity to interact with other cultures, something that has been increasingly visible throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. These aspects can visibly influence how certain pedagogical initiatives and tools are both understood and implemented by teachers and students.

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