

Chapter 11

Collaborative Online International Learning to Enhance Employability Skills at TNE Institutions: A Case From a London–Based University

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ABSTRACT

Employability skills such as intercultural exposure and communication are well established in most business education degree programs. However, there is little knowledge of how these skills are developed in transnational education (TNE). Employability will play an increasingly important role in education as working patterns and skills have changed in the wake of Covid-19. This chapter aims to explore the lived experiences of local and non-local students at TNE partners who engaged in international learning experiences and understand how these projects develop employability skills in terms of intercultural communication. Findings suggest students value these international, interactive projects to develop awareness of the home institution and enhance cross-culture exposure.

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INTRODUCTION

International education continues to be lucrative for Western, and more recently, non-Western Higher Education Institutions (HEI) despite Covid-19 preventing student mobility and severely affecting how curriculums are taught (Galloway et al., 2020). For example, in 2019 international education was Australia's third largest export category (Chowdhury, 2022), and in the UK the volume of higher education exports is expected to reach £35billion per year by 2023 (Department for Education and Department for International Trade, 2021). Aside from the short-term impacts of Covid-19, rapid technology enhancements and increasing strategic importance of Transnational Education (TNE) had led to distinctive changes in how HEIs provide the service to their customers. Widely implemented solutions such as flexibility in mode and place of study, cross-border curricula sharing, and flying faculty (Wylie, 2021) have been complemented by newer innovations such as distance and multi-site learning, dual degrees and individually tailored programs and routes to qualifications. These innovations have created new opportunities for both home and host institutions. With internationalisation becoming an integral part of the business and management curriculum, current student expectations go beyond an internationally recognised degree, with virtual and collaborative international experiences taking priority irrespective whether studies are taken at home or host education providers (Gorgodze et al., 2020). This book chapter aims to shed light on the impact of these changes using a case of TNE relationships of a London based University.

Predominantly, TNE relationships have been transactional with programs taught at host institutions mirroring the home institution curriculum. Common TNE models included articulation agreements, flying faculty, validation, franchise, and foreign campus arrangements (for full definitions please see Henderson et al., 2017). The emergence of new TNE models and innovations created more opportunities for HEIs, but required significant investment to ensure the governance of quality assurance maintained a positive student experience whilst enhancing financial sustainability. Additional benefits to institutions derive from the opportunities around nurturing deep institutional connections, facilitating meaningful staff and student exchanges, instilling high academic quality, and enhancing student experience (Henderson et al., 2017) and international reputation.

Alongside these developments in TNE the perception of student experience has also evolved, meaning that obtaining an internationally recognised degree alone was not sufficient to make students competitive on the global labor market. Students at host institutions have been expecting more from their education providers, especially in terms of transferrable skills and international exposure to enter global graduate careers (Whitsed & Green, 2015). The ban on international travel during Covid-19 meant traditional internationalisation activities such as field trips and exchanges became impossible. However, in a way despite the added complexity to the TNE operation, it offered HEIs ample opportunities for innovation and enabled participation of those students who would not normally be able to access international opportunities.

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has been one of the innovations which have spearheaded HEIs response to student demands for internationalisation during the pandemic. Although COIL projects have been utilised for internationalisation by home institutions before the pandemic, they gained strategic prominence after the ban on international travel. The premise of COIL is virtual mobility, enriching student international experiences and improving cross-cultural literacy through experiential design in the virtual setting (Orsini-Jones et al., 2017). When the content of these projects is co-created among the participants, COIL projects also offer a way for students to form an international peer network while having legitimate cross-cultural experiences (Ryabova, 2020)

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