

Then, under labor market results, fall earnings. Out of 11 topic categories for the texture of an EGS, “returns on education” (a more complex notion than earnings) becomes a complex creature in Europe, as tuition can be \$0 in a number of countries, and annual fees range from the nominal to \$400. In the EGS design priority surveys, return-on-investment ranked sixth among ministries, seventh among national rectors conferences, and seventh among research groups. This is not a very prominent position for an indicator of future status. European discussants have substituted “earnings” with “assessment of competencies received/acquired on the job,” i.e. they regard job-based knowledge and skills to be the equivalent of compensation. In contrast, the one metric on the US “Scorecard” that has vaulted over all others in attention by both institutions and the media is “average personal earnings 10 years after graduation,” by institution, however limited and rocky its sources.

In sum, we have two sometimes overlapping, but very different sets of measures tracing the lives of former degree recipients: one highly individualistic, the other far more oriented to broader social settings. The resulting metrics determine the shape of system accountabilities and the tone of assurances to students themselves. ■

Missing but Needed: Research on Transnational Education

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Why is there so little research being done on transnational education (TNE)? TNE, briefly described as “the mobility of higher education programs and institutions/providers across international borders,” is still a relatively young sector of higher education provision, but it is growing in scale, scope, and complexity. In many countries, it can provide 10 percent of higher education provision, and in others up to 40 percent. With significant new developments, challenges, and opportunities with TNE, it is time to be better informed about the research and analysis being done on TNE, and to encourage the next generation of re-

searchers to focus on program and provider mobility—not only student mobility.

The purpose of this article is to provide highlights from a recent analysis of more than 300 journal articles, book chapters, reports, and dissertations on TNE published since 2000. The main sources of references were the comprehensive ERIC database and the Australian Council for Education Research IDP Database of Research on International Education. The systematic review coded all academic references as to the type/mode of TNE provision, date of publication, research methodology, major theme, geographic focus, and source of reference. The review focused on various modes of program and institutional/provider mobility and thus did not address student mobility per se. Research on distance education was not included.

The most striking finding is the chaos and resulting confusion as to how different modes of TNE are interpreted and labelled. There are many terms used in the literature and practice to describe the same TNE mode. Conversely, one term applies to many different types of TNE. The inconsistent use of terms makes comparisons of TNE provision and research within and across countries challenging and often inconclusive. It also means that generalization of research findings is difficult and the analysis of internationally comparable TNE data questionable.

MODES OF TNE—INTERNATIONAL BRANCH CAMPUS, PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS, JOINT UNIVERSITIES, FRANCHISE

Given the inconsistency in TNE terminology, each reference was carefully reviewed and eventually categorized as to mode of program and provider mobility. The result reveals the following distribution of TNE research references: international branch campuses (IBCs), 29 percent; partnership programs (involving collaboration between host and sending countries such as twinning and joint/double degree program), 16 percent; joint universities (binational, cofounded, and codeveloped institutions), 6 percent; franchise programs (export programs from sending countries), 5 percent; and multi-mode/generic TNE research, 43 percent. Clearly, more research is focused on IBCs than on other modes. When geographic focus is factored in for IBCs, it shows that research from the viewpoint of the sending countries is most prevalent, and research from the host country perspective significantly underrepresented. With TNE representing a growing percentage of higher education in host countries, it is worrisome that there is little TNE research from the host country point of view.

MAJOR THEMES

Each reference was coded for the primary topic addressed. Ten major themes emerged from this analysis. The results show that about 28 percent focused on management and

development issues; 15 percent on trends and challenges; 12 percent on quality assurance; 10 percent addressed policies/regulations; 10 percent student issues; and only 5 percent each faculty perspectives, outcomes and impact, pedagogy and curriculum, rationales, and definitions. While it is encouraging to see the focus on management issues and quality assurance, it is troubling that outcomes and impact, as well as pedagogy and curriculum, receive such little attention. When the themes are linked with TNE modes, the quality assurance research focuses primarily on TNE in general and is not specific to one of the four main TNE modes. This raises the vexing question as to how quality assurance practices and issues differ among the modes. For example, with IBCs and franchise programs, the curriculum, qualification offered, and external quality assurance are the primary responsibility of the sending country. However, for partnership programs, the responsibility for these three aspects involves both the sending and host countries.

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RESEARCH METHODS

The type of research methods (empirical, descriptive, conceptual, and policy analysis) was noted for all references. Overall, descriptive methods were used for 52 percent of the references, empirical for 40 percent, conceptual for 8 percent, and policy analysis for 1 percent. Interesting to note is the very small percentage of research studies that are conceptual or theoretical in approach. This may shed light on why there is such inconsistency in the interpretation and use of TNE terms.

DATES AND SOURCES OF REFERENCES

It is promising to see the considerable increase in TNE research references during the last 15 years. Of the total references reviewed, only 7 percent were published from 2000 to 2005, but this increased substantially to 42 percent between 2006 and 2010, and to 50 percent from 2011 to 2015. A deliberate choice for the review was to include academic literature only, thereby excluding grey literature such as newspaper/newsletter articles and blogs. With TNE research still being a relatively young field, it is not surprising that there is more grey literature than academic litera-

ture. But because the analysis focused on TNE research, it was necessary to focus on traditional sources. The analysis shows that about 39 percent are book chapters, 39 percent journal articles, 15 percent reports, usually from commissioned research, and only 7 percent dissertations.

It is disappointing to find so few PhD dissertations, as these researchers are critical to the future analysis of TNE. TNE dissertations available on ProQuest appear in references starting from 2005. The majority (61 percent) of the 18 dissertations focus on IBCs. This is interesting, as currently there are about 250 operating IBCs around the world, while there are thousands of TNE partnership programs. Furthermore, the emergence of joint universities (which involves collaboration from both host and sending country institutions to establish a new institution) is a relatively new phenomenon and is worthy of more research, as they are radically different from IBCs, which are essentially satellite campuses of foreign parent institutions. All in all, TNE studies would benefit from more PhD students, especially in host countries, doing their research on the different modes and dimensions of TNE.

TNE is still a relatively young sector and certainly an underresearched one. There are probably three to four times more research publications on student mobility issues than on program and provider mobility topics. However, a first key step is to develop a "Common TNE Classification Framework," with terms and definitions which are robust enough to differentiate the major modes of TNE, but flexible enough to be used by the more than 100 host and sending countries increasingly involved in TNE. This is a fundamental step to improving TNE data collection and research. ■

The Complex Diversity of Southeast Asian Postsecondary Education

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Are there common elements in the higher education realities of Southeast Asia? In fact, the region may even be more divergent than convergent. This can be seen in the