
ADAPTING CURRICULA FOR SUCCESS

Transnational education (TNE) is big business: the Asian financial crisis saw an explosion of transnational delivery into Southeast Asia from Australian providers; currently, about 1 in 4 international students enrolled in Australian universities is not actually living in Australia; and statistics from the UK show that there are more international students registered for degrees offshore than in the UK. As more institutions look to branch out into the realms of TNE, one consideration, above all others is key: effective adaptation of the curriculum.

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International Branch Campuses (IBCs), generally regarded as the most resource-intensive application of TNE, are growing significantly. Whereas at the turn of the century there were only about 20 IBCs, today their number is estimated to be in excess of more than 230. Clearly, TNE is a growing phenomenon and countries are rushing to catch up with both enabling and controlling legislation.

beyond all of the aforementioned domains. Another major factor is the partner involved in a TNE operation. What are the motives of the partner and how well, in the light of a partnership, can educational delivery be under control of the home institution? Is the programme subject to multiple accreditation systems (at home and in the foreign jurisdiction), or does a new regime apply (only the

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Indeed, even in the absence of purposeful legislation, countries have found ways to innovatively permit foreign universities to operate within their jurisdiction.

CHALLENGES OF DELIVERY

There are a significant number of aspects to be considered in the delivery of education across borders. Williams, in his *Handbook for Reviewing and Improving Multi-campus Units*¹ identifies 15 delivery aspects that have given rise to the most challenges in the design, development, and delivery of education across multiple campuses. These included, among others, staff profiles, intended learning outcomes, learning opportunities and resources, learning and teaching spaces, assessment, and student profiles.

The *Handbook* was predominately written from the perspective of delivery within one jurisdiction. Thus, there are additional aspects that relate to TNE. These include legislative and cultural aspects that impinge on the delivery

foreign jurisdiction)? How does such a new accreditation affect the educational delivery? Are there new compulsory elements in the curriculum and how does this affect the overall programme? An often-practiced approach in this instance is to utilise elective space in the programme to deal with these new demands. However, does this not affect the overall quality of the programme and its outcomes? How can one deal with local values that prevent the identical (experiential) delivery of, for example, a course on alcoholic beverages in a hotel management programme?

PRESERVATION VS LOCALISATION

The preservation of the intended and achieved learning outcomes of TNE should be the first and foremost concern of any institution engaged in this practice. After all, the degree awarded to graduates from TNE programmes must reflect the same learning outcomes as the degree on the home campus. This acts therefore as a counter-opposing force in adapting



education to take into account local factors. The issue of the preservation of educational quality in the face of the various challenges most likely requires the bulk of attention from the home institution.

The extent to which a home institution defines the curriculum, and therefore the extent to which it may be adapted for TNE delivery, requires significant input and attention. Staff involved in delivering the education as TNE, may resort to ad hoc changes if the curriculum is too prescriptive. On the other hand, in a very loosely defined curriculum, without clearly defined learning outcomes, the graduate may not possess the same competences as those from the home campus. Clearly, this is not desirable and a way must be found to develop the curriculum to allow for TNE delivery.



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INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE CURRICULUM

There are basically two positions one can take on this, bearing in mind the need to preserve the integrity of the academic programme. The first is to resist any changes to the maximum extent possible and begrudgingly allow the TNE delivery to be somewhat different. The alternative position is to develop the curriculum through inputs obtained from the TNE delivery so as to create an internationally more robust programme that is capable of being delivered in more than one jurisdiction. Such adaptations can lead to a better curriculum in the face of advancing globalisation. This can be referred to as primary internationalisation of the curriculum.

The relevance of the programme is enhanced for students local to the TNE delivery and it may be argued that this will enhance the relevance also for international students present on the home campus. Notwithstanding curricular considerations (in the narrow sense of the definition of 'curriculum'), many other aspects can cause adaptation of the delivery. These can, and do, include the aspects defined by Williams in his *Handbook*.

It is not possible within the scope of this article to deal with all of these aspects and how they might affect the need or desirability to adapt a curriculum. A few examples will need to suffice. The educational methods, for example, may include the use of problem-based learning (PBL). Depending on the precise form, this method requires small groups of students to solve problems. Should the TNE delivery be to groups of students

of technology and other infrastructure? What about the informal curriculum? What is the make up of the student body at the TNE delivery site? How can these students interact outside the classroom? Are there similar opportunities in terms of physical infrastructure, student clubs and societies?

There is no doubt that the curriculum needs to be adapted to account for TNE delivery. The adage that 'here is there' and we do not need to adapt the programme is a testimony to ignorance. There are some provisos and they must be observed. The learning outcomes of the home programme must be preserved. However, the programme delivery can be enhanced through collaborative development of the curriculum by academics involved in its delivery from the home campus and from where the programme is delivered as

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that are smaller than the recommended size for effective PBL instruction, adaptations will have to be made. This may impact the quality of the PBL, and thus, learning experience. Other considerations include: Is the library at the TNE location of similar size and scope compared to the home institution? Are students able to avail themselves of the same diversity of books, and electronic resources? What about the learning spaces? Is the same level of resourcing applied to the learning spaces in terms

TNE. This leads to a more robust and internationalised curriculum with a greater level of relevance of the programme, wherever it might be taught. **E**

1. Williams, G. (2013). *Handbook for Reviewing and Improving Multi-campus Units*. Retrieved from: www.olt.gov.au/system/files/resources/LE8_817_Williams_Handbook_2013.pdf