

Advantages and disadvantages (challenges) of transnational education (TNE) projects

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There is considerable chatter in the Sector about the possibilities offered by Transnational Education (TNE) options. There are considerable advantages in developing initiatives – but it must also be said there are some disadvantages (challenges) that it would be wise to consider from the outset. A recent missive from the national regulator highlighted the transnational opportunities in Thailand.

My personal experience with transnational projects has been a positive one – but I think it wise to get involved with ‘eyes wide open’. If I have a take-away – choose your partner very carefully.

Advantages

For students and staff

Wider access to education - students can obtain an international qualification without relocating abroad.

Lower costs - tuition and living expenses may (and usually are) lower than completing an entire degree overseas.

Improved graduate opportunities - students gain intercultural awareness, global networks, and skills valued by international employers.

Cultural exchange - students and staff encounter different perspectives, teaching methods, and professional practices.

For institutions

International collaboration - partner institutions can share teaching expertise, research, technology, and curriculum resources.

Capacity building - local institutions can strengthen teaching quality, administration, infrastructure, and academic standards.

Institutional growth - Education providers can expand into new markets, increase enrolments, and enhance their international reputation.

Local relevance with global standards - programs can combine international academic expectations with regional knowledge and industry needs.

The advantages are significant and quite persuasive.

There are, however, some issues and challenges that need to be considered and addressed.

Disadvantages/Challenges

For students and staff

Recognition concerns - employers or professional bodies may not recognise every transnational qualification equally.

Communication difficulties - distance, time zones, language differences, and unclear responsibilities can (and do) weaken coordination.

Equity issues - although cheaper than studying abroad, fees may still exclude students from lower-income backgrounds.

Staff workload and development needs - teachers may require additional training and support to deliver unfamiliar curricula effectively.

For institutions

Quality assurance challenges - maintaining consistent teaching, assessment, and student-support standards across locations can be difficult.

Cultural mismatch - imported curricula or teaching approaches may not suit local expectations, languages, or learning styles.

Unequal partnerships - the overseas institution may control decisions, branding, and revenue, in turn limiting the local partner's influence.

Regulatory complexity - projects must comply with different accreditation, visa, taxation, and education systems.

Commercialisation risks - financial objectives may be prioritised over educational quality or student welfare.

Dependence on partners - Changes in funding, government policy, institutional strategy, or political relations may threaten continuity.

Overall, though, transnational education projects can expand access to internationally oriented learning - but their success depends on equitable partnerships, strong quality assurance, cultural adaptation, regulatory compliance, and sustained student support.

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