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**The transformative nature of Transnational Education (TNE) in
Higher Education Organisations: Reviewing the potentials and
challenges**

Track: Organisational Transformation Change and Development (23)

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Summary

Transnational Education (TNE) has become a significant strategic investment in mobilising degree programmes for Higher Education Organisations. Curating and creating such partnerships, however, can prove particularly tricky if organisational change and transformation is not deeply rooted. In this paper, we review how TNE affects the transformation of organisations, industries, and societies. We look at what makes TNE successful in the context of a diverse cultural and regulatory global environment and explore the challenges and barriers that institutions face in transitioning to this new model of education.

Keywords: Transnational education development, organisational change, transformation, Higher Education Organisations.

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1. Introduction

The global higher education landscape has witnessed a remarkable transformation, driven by increased internationalisation and the demand for quality education beyond borders. UK HEIs are significant participants in the internationalisation of education through TNE. Almost 60% of institutions have active TNE partnership arrangements with education providers with over half a million students registered on TNE programmes (HESA, 2022). As UK institutions increasingly engage in TNE activities to meet the needs of an internationalised student population, the landscape of higher education undergoes a paradigm shift (Universities UK 2021). In response to the rising demand for cross-border education, institutions are experiencing significant change. This calls for a reassessment of how HEIs can capitalise and exploit such opportunities to provide sustainable and lasting impact to individuals and communities they serve.

As the global education market becomes more competitive, understanding the role of organisational change and development in the success of TNE becomes imperative. Currently UK HEIs are undergoing significant transformative shifts to contend with the rapid changes within the sector (Gore et al. 2022). To remain competitive in both national and international markets, UK HEIs are allocating greater resources towards comprehensive organisational restructuring and capital initiatives. The sector is experiencing heightened pressure on yearly surpluses, particularly as regulatory changes come into play, placing a sharper focus on efficiency and effectiveness (Advance HE 2019). Consequently, HEIs are prioritising risk, quality, time, and cost to maintain competitive advantage, which leads to a more structured and project-based approach (Garrett et al. 2016). Reviewing the literature on TNE, we propose a framework for establishing and sustaining successful and impactful partnerships. We also provide strategies on how educational leaders, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders can utilise TNE to navigate through the complexities of a changing educational system.

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2. TNE transformation for sustainable growth

Fostering strategies to harmonise curricula with international benchmarks, implementing robust assessment procedures, and ensuring uniform excellence across varied geographic regions aid institutions in foreign countries to sustain UK-standard programmes. Consequently, the pursuit of academic excellence emerges as a fundamental principle for institutions for the success of their TNE initiatives (Stanisic 2012).

Organisational culture is another significant success factor for TNE partnerships which includes trust, teamwork, communication, and knowledge sharing between the exporting and importing HEIs (Aronson & Patanakul 2013). For TNE partnership development where both countries' providers have effective teams, communicate efficiently, and share relevant information with each other, this leads the partnership to be successful. Social dynamics, including cultural disparities between the home and host nations of TNE collaborators, also play a crucial role. Recognising and respecting cultural differences and adapting educational content and delivery methods to suit diverse cultural contexts is crucial for the success and acceptance of TNE programmes in different regions.

Macro level factors can also impact the success of TNE partnerships. These encompass economic, political, social, technological, legal, and environmental dimensions. Economic aspects include factors such as inflation, interest rates, currency exchange rates, and economic growth rates. Developing a sustainable financial model that considers revenue streams, cost structures, and long-term investment strategies is essential for the financial viability and scalability of TNE initiatives (Li et al. 2021). Political influences may manifest through laws and regulations pertinent to TNE operations. Favourable governmental policies and support from both the UK government and the governments of host countries can significantly enhance the success of TNE initiatives. This support can include funding, regulatory frameworks, and diplomatic relations that facilitate collaboration in education (Ghali 2009).

Upholding ethical principles, promoting diversity and inclusion, and addressing social responsibility issues such as access to education and sustainable development contribute to the overall success and impact of UK-TNE efforts on a global scale (Merey, Alkan 2015). Furthermore, providing opportunities for international mobility, exchange programmes, and networking events enrich the educational experience of students and faculty participating in TNE initiatives, fostering collaboration and innovation (Li et al. 2021).

Additionally, utilising technological advancements and innovation in educational delivery methods, including online learning platforms and digital resources, can enhance access and effectiveness of TNE programmes, particularly in remote areas (Shohel 2022). Legal considerations involve regulations governing intellectual property in both the home and host nations. Ensuring compliance with legal requirements and regulatory frameworks in the UK and host countries is essential for TNE initiatives' success. This includes adhering to laws related to education, accreditation, immigration, intellectual property, and consumer protection (Hart 2019).

Establishing bilateral agreements and treaties between the UK and host countries can provide a common platform for collaboration in education, facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications,

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and streamline administrative processes for TNE programmes (Jianxin 2009). Environmental factors, such as national regulations, climate change, and natural disasters, likewise impact TNE operations. Incorporating environmental sustainability principles into TNE programmes by promoting eco-friendly practices, reducing carbon footprint, and addressing environmental impact concerns can enhance the reputation and long-term viability of UK-TNE initiatives (British Council, 2022; Ilieva et al., 2022; Bush, 2019).

3. Challenges and barriers to TNE change

Cultural and societal

There are cultural differences between home and host countries which can impact TNE partnerships such as language proficiency among students, faculty, and staff can impede effective communication and understanding; misinterpretations or misunderstandings may arise due to language barriers, particularly in academic contexts where precise communication is essential. Differences in cultural norms, values, and social customs can affect relationships within TNE partnerships. Stakeholders' expectations based on cultural background may influence how information is interpreted and communicated (Healey 2018). Differences in educational systems, academic standards, and grading practices may lead to discrepancies in expectations regarding academic performance (McBurnie & Ziguras 2006).

Cultural differences in conflict resolution styles and approaches to problem-solving can pose challenges in resolving disagreements or disputes within TNE partnerships. Power differentials based on cultural, institutional, or hierarchical factors may impact communication dynamics and decision-making processes within TNE partnerships (Woodhouse 2006; Waterval et al. 2018; Sudhana et al. 2020). Addressing power imbalances and promoting inclusive communication practices are essential for fostering collaboration and mutual respect among TNE partners (Eldridge & Cranston 2009).

Legal and regulatory

The legal and regulatory landscape poses considerable challenges for institutions engaged in TNE. Ensuring compliance with different legal requirements can be complex and time-consuming. Obtaining regulatory approval and accreditation for TNE programmes can be challenging due to differences in regulatory systems and accreditation standards across countries (Trifiro 2018). Maintaining quality assurance in accordance with regulatory requirements is essential for ensuring the legitimacy and recognition of TNE offerings. Ensuring the recognition and equivalence of qualifications obtained through transnational education programmes is crucial for students' mobility and career opportunities. Variations in recognition procedures, standards, and regulatory bodies across countries may pose obstacles to the transferability and acceptance of qualifications obtained through TNE partnerships (Nhan & Nguyen 2020).

Organisational and structural

Engaging a diverse faculty and staff in TNE initiatives is a complex challenge that requires a strategic approach. Faculty and staff members need to be committed to the goals and objectives of TNE partnerships. Engaging them early in the planning process, communicating the benefits of collaboration, and ensuring their engagement are essential for fostering a sense of ownership

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and dedication to the partnership (Rowley & Skipper 2020). Providing faculty and staff with training and professional development opportunities related to TNE practices, intercultural communication, and internationalisation strategies can enhance their effectiveness in delivering TNE programmes. Building their capacity to adapt to diverse cultural contexts and pedagogical approaches is crucial for successful collaboration (Bordogna 2020). Clarifying roles, responsibilities, and expectations for faculty and staff members involved in TNE partnerships is essential for effective collaboration and coordination. Establishing clear communication channels and mechanisms for decision-making can help streamline operations and mitigate potential conflicts or misunderstandings (Holland et al. 2021).

Ensuring alignment with academic standards and quality assurance processes is crucial for maintaining the credibility and reputation of TNE programmes. Engaging faculty members in curriculum development, assessment design, and programme evaluation can help uphold academic excellence and standards in TNE partnerships. Encouraging faculty and staff members to innovate and collaborate across borders can lead to the development of new teaching methodologies, research projects, and interdisciplinary initiatives in TNE partnerships (Holland et al. 2021). Promoting a culture of collaboration, creativity, and knowledge exchange fosters continuous improvement and enhances the impact of TNE programmes. Recognising achievements, promoting career advancement opportunities, and acknowledging cultural sensitivities are important for sustaining faculty and staff engagement in TNE initiatives (Bordogna 2018).

4. Demystifying the TNE transformation process

Strategic alignment and leadership

Strategically a key determinant of success for TNE partnerships lies in harmonising an institution's TNE strategy with its global and overarching institutional strategies, accomplished through strategic leadership and effective project-based approach. This fosters seamless integration between the administration of TNE initiatives and institutional governance and administration (Middlehurst 2013). A correlation exists between strategic leadership and project management, wherein strategic leadership includes the broader concept of establishing partnership goals and objectives and devising strategies to attain them. On the other hand, strategic initiatives involve aligning with broader organisational objectives and implementing tactical processes encompassing planning, execution, and maintenance of projects or partnerships (Elkhedr 2019). Viewing TNE from this angle can prove effective as it ensures alignment of partnerships with the organisation's overarching strategy under the guidance of strategic (Angouri 2023). Establishing effective management of time, cost, quality, risk, and resources within a partnership enhances the bond between TNE partners, fostering a successful collaboration (Tran et al. 2022).

Stakeholder engagement and expectations

Typically, there are certain key stakeholders involved in both home and host countries' TNE partnership. In TNE, the main stakeholders include the home university, the partner organisation, the host government, and students situated in the host country (Healey 2021). In TNE, stakeholders from both the home and host organisations possess distinct incentives for

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establishing a partnership. These may include benefits such as facilitating knowledge and technology transfer through collaborative research initiatives and staff-student exchange programmes, enhancing financial stability by diversifying income sources, strengthening international reputation, prestige, and global positioning, as well as gaining access to recruiting international students, among other benefits (Bennell, Pearce 2003; British Council 2022; Che 2023).

Regulatory compliance and continuous monitoring

Ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements is crucial in establishing TNE partnerships that uphold legal integrity, academic excellence, student-centred, and long-term sustainability. Neglecting to adhere to these standards can result in legal, financial, and reputational repercussions, posing risks to the success and viability of TNE endeavours (Rowley, Skipper 2020; Shams 2017; Wilkins 2018). Continuous monitoring and evaluation play a vital role in ensuring the success of TNE partnerships by facilitating quality assurance, strategies alignment, risk management, resource optimisation, stakeholder engagement, and continuous improvement. Integrating these processes into TNE partnership management enables institutions to boost the overall effectiveness and influence of their international education endeavours.

5. Towards an emerging conceptual framework of TNE transformation for sustainable growth

Figure 1 illustrates the key elements shaped by TNE. This transformative process serves not only as a pathway to an objective but also as the mechanism for driving organisational change and development. The framework facilitates HEIs in comprehending the development and management of TNE partnerships, fostering a deeper understanding of the success factors and challenges involved in TNE partnerships. The TNE transformation process empowers HEIs to address the challenges present in partnerships and deliver outcomes conducive to associated success factors.

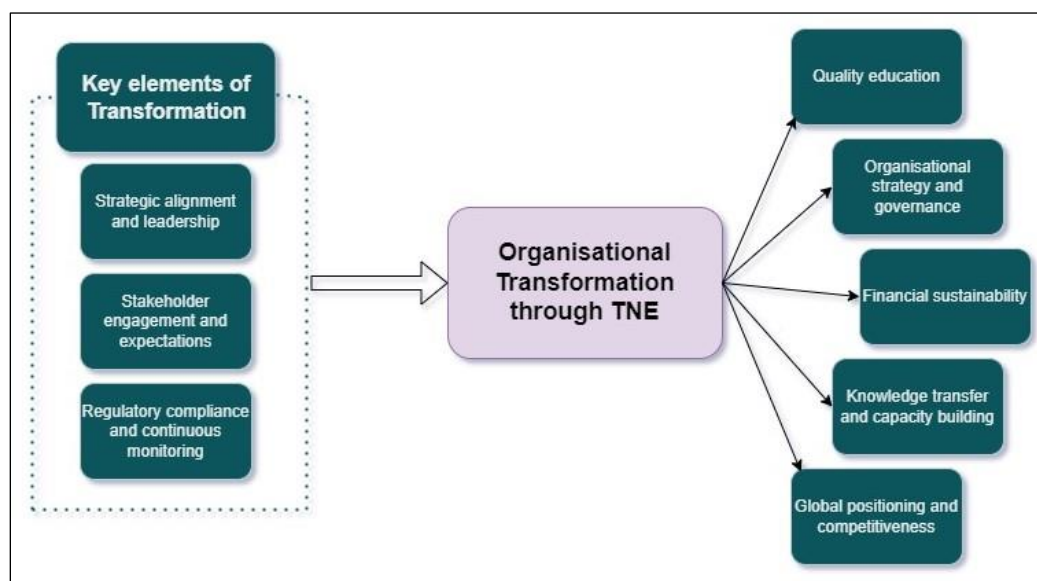


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for organisational transformation through TNE

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