

Exploring Freedom and Control in TNE practice: Reflections on the Lived Degree and Placement Experience. (0296)

Sarah Montano<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Horton-Walsh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Birmingham, UK

<sup>2</sup>Coventry University, UK

The global education market is becoming increasingly competitive and HEI's are increasingly seeking to expand their educational offerings by investing in TNE (Transnational Education) programmes. For example, in Singapore the Singapore Institution of Management offers 80 degree programmes delivered via 11 overseas universities ([www.simge.edu.sg](http://www.simge.edu.sg)). Whilst, TNE degrees offer great opportunities for overseas students who are able to gain an education from high ranking universities without the expense of overseas living, nonetheless these opportunities also create tensions and challenges with both programme delivery and student experience.

One significant complication and challenge is that often these degree programmes will include student work placement options and embedded employability skills into degree programmes. Despite the importance of such skills there is little research examining TNE programmes, employability skills and the student experience as noted by Mellors-Bourne et al. (2015). When delivering TNE and work placements there are multiple stakeholders (including HEI's and their partners; QAA (or local equivalents); Governments; Students and Employers) that have an interest in the successful delivery of such programmes. In this paper we contend that a critical content analysis of TNE programmes with their comparable UK equivalent programmes, is required to explore the equivalence between both provisions, in order to develop our understanding of how employability skills are embedded into such curricula. In addition, we seek to carry out interviews with alumni as essentially, only alumni can decide if they have gained such employability skills from TNE institutions and how their lived experience matches such statements.

### **Objectives:**

To explore and compare the employability promises between two UK HEIs and Singapore TNE HEI partners.

To understand if the employability promises made to students and lived experiences are reflected by TNE alumni.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Transnational Education**

Mellors-Bourne et al. (2015) note the critical lack of literature in understanding TNE and the provision of employability skills in students. A further gap is an

analysis of how students perceive their educational experience post graduation, as delivered by TNE providers. We seek to address the gaps in such literature.

It is noted that there is not just domestic but rather a global concern around the employability of graduates. Indeed, Luekitinan (2014) identified that new graduates may be entering the Asian workplace without the desired employability skills. Within the UK, since the Dearing Report (NCHIE, 1997) employability skills have become a key aspect of programme delivery (Wilton, 2008). As UK universities expand and become TNE providers this provision of employability is also exported, yet may not be delivered or may be perceived differently by students.

Placements are a key way in which universities seek to embed employability skills into the curricula. And as Luekitinan (2014) points out it is the role of the educational establishment to guide students and help them gain employability skills. Yet, as noted above there are competing stakeholders that seek to influence, this process.

### **Student Experience**

A further complication as noted by Koenig-Lewis et al. is that an understanding of the student experience is “theoretically underdeveloped” (2016:59). We seek to develop this understanding of the lived student experience and the development of employability skills by carrying out interviews with post-graduation alumni. The student experience is often cited by brochures/ websites as a promise made by institutions. For example Birmingham notes that students will gain a high quality “academic experience” ([www.birmingham.ac.uk](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk)), and a partner TNE to Coventry states the degree course “is the same as that offered at the UK home campus” ([www.psb-academy.edu.sg](http://www.psb-academy.edu.sg)). Additionally, the UK government noted that the student experience is one of the essential criteria in determining the success of such programmes, including TNE ([webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk)). The CMA documentation notes that students are likely to be covered by the definition of ‘consumer’ when they are acting for purposes relating to their individual or personal need ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). Therefore, students maybe seeking a quasi type of consumption experience. Yet this student experience is undefined however, Verhoef et al. (2009) argue that customer experiences are holistic. Whilst, this is a definition of consumer experiences the authors offer valuable determinants of experiences that may be applied to the student experience of employability skill development. Thus, furthering our understanding of such experiences. Hence, we seek to establish how alumni reflect on their and define such a holistic experience and if such an experience did indeed deliver employability skills.

### **Methodology:**

We offer a comparative analysis of students in the UK and Singapore in order to address this critical deficit in literature. Singapore is chosen as a key country of study as firstly, it is noted to be a global schoolhouse (Waring 2013). Secondly, it is noted that Asia is the centre for the world’s leading economies this century (Mok and Cheung 2011). The UK is chosen as comparative country as it is a key

exporter of TNE e.g. University of London; University of Stirling and University of Warwick.

Our research will use a multi-method research strategy (Layder 1990). Firstly, we propose qualitative content analysis of the experience-based promises made to students via the UK and TNE HEIs (Krippendorff, 2013). This method will develop our understanding of the precise promises made to students regarding their experience and development of their employability skills. Secondly, semi-structured interviews will be undertaken with 10 alumni (2+ years graduation) each from UK and Singapore institutions to understand if the promises have been delivered. A purposive sampling strategy will be applied to identify and recruit participants for this study (Symon and Cassell, 2012). The interviews will allow alumni to critically reflect on their TNE experience and if their degree did indeed develop their employability skills.

### **Research Outcomes:**

We offer two key research contributions. Firstly, an analysis of what experience promises TNE universities make to students. Secondly, we address a key gap in the literature by establishing how alumni perceive TNE employability skill delivery. To conclude, our research will further our understanding of the challenges and possibilities embedded within global education and precisely how much freedom and control universities have to deliver such TNE programmes.

### **References:**

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/index.aspx> Accessed 24th June 2016.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/428549/HE\\_providers\\_-\\_advice\\_on\\_consumer\\_protection\\_law.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/428549/HE_providers_-_advice_on_consumer_protection_law.pdf) Accessed 24th June 2016.

<http://www.psb-academy.edu.sg/universities/united-kingdom/coventry-university/bachelor-of-arts-with-honours-in-advertising-and-marketing#/overview> Accessed 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016

Koenig- Lewis, N.; Asaad, Y.; Palmer, A.; Peterstone, E.; and Kuhr West, E. (2016). The Effects of Passage of Time on Alumni Recall of 'Student Experience.' Higher Education Quarterly, 70(1), 59-80.

Krippendorff, K. (2012). Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Layder, D. (1990). The Realist Image in Social Science. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Luekitinan, W. (2014). Employability and Job Mobility: Critical Skills for New Graduates in Asean. Global Journal of Business Research, 8(5), 1-8.

Mellors- Bourne, R.; Jones. E. and Woodfield, S. (2015). Transnational Education and Employability Development. The Higher Education Academy.

[https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/tne-and\\_employability\\_development.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/tne-and_employability_development.pdf) Accessed 21st June 2016.

Mok, K. H., & Cheung, A. B. (2011). Global aspirations and strategising for world-class status: New form of politics in higher education governance in Hong Kong. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33(3), 231-251.

National Employer Skills Survey for England (2009); Key Findings Report  
NCHIE (1997) Higher Education in the Learning Society [Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education: The Dearing Report] Norwich: HMSO

[http://www.simge.edu.sg/gePortalWeb/appmanager/web/default?\\_nfpb=true&st=&pageLabel=pgPartnerUniversities&fid=DiscoverUniversities](http://www.simge.edu.sg/gePortalWeb/appmanager/web/default?_nfpb=true&st=&pageLabel=pgPartnerUniversities&fid=DiscoverUniversities)  
Accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2016

Symon, G. & Cassell, C. (2012) *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Waring, P. (2014). Singapore's global schoolhouse strategy: retreat or recalibration. *Studies in Higher Education*. 39 (5), 874-884.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20091109114357/http://www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/publications/Higher-Ambitions.pdf>

Wilton, N. (2008) Business graduates and management jobs: An employability match made in heaven? *Journal of education and work*, 21 (2), 143-158. ISSN 1363-9080

Verhoef, P.; Lemon, K.; Parasuraman, A.; Roggeveen, A.; Tsiros, M.; and Schlesinger, L. (2009). Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies; *Journal of Retailing*. Vol. 85 (1), 31-41.