

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

0245

P8 | Caldicot

Chaired by Yann Lebeau

Thu 12 Dec 2019

16:45 - 17:15

Enhancing Transnational Education (TNE) Programmes: Understanding Student Motivations, Satisfaction and Attainment in Anglo-Sino programmes

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**Research Domain:** International Perspectives and context (IPC)

**Abstract:** Transnational Education (TNE) continues to be a trend across Higher Education (HE), with many UK institutions, such as Coventry University (CU) expanding their overseas partnerships to offer UK degrees abroad. Whilst UK-TNE partnerships may be perceived as reciprocally positive for those involved, this is usually framed at an institutional level and there are limited studies on the actual experiences of students studying on TNE programmes, particularly in China. Examining why these students opt to study in their home country on a UK-TNE programme, rather than studying abroad, remains an under-researched area.

This paper offers preliminary findings of the motivations, preferences and experiences of students at two Chinese-CU TNE partnerships. Drawing on comparative case study methodology, involving questionnaire and interview data, insights into the choices TNE students make in selecting their courses, what they like and dislike about their experiences and implications for quality enhancement of TNE will be shared.

### **Paper: Introduction**

This paper shares the findings of an ongoing research project about Chinese students' motivations, preferences and experiences of studying on TNE programmes provided by Coventry University (CU) at two of their partner universities: Southwest University of Political Science & Law (SWUPL) and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS). Conducted between January and June 2019, this comparative case study research specifically examines Chinese students' motivations when selecting a course and why they chose a UK TNE programme as opposed to studying at a local Chinese University or studying overseas. The paper also explores preferred learning approaches and experiences in relation to Anglo-Sino pedagogies and the perceived differences students report in

teaching styles between local Chinese tutors and overseas tutors. Also included is an exploration of how issues such as social background, gender, and prior educational experiences intersect and impact learning experiences.

### **Context**

It is claimed that TNE is 'a win-win situation' for institutions due to the opportunities it provides for the home country to broaden its global reach and for the host country to expand access to higher education (HE) (Knight & McNamara, 2015: 4). In parallel, students also are viewed to benefit from TNE due to the relatively low cost compared with that of study abroad (Mellors-Bourne, 2017). This is the case in China, which has become one of the most attractive receiving countries for TNE due to its rapid economic growth and increasing demand for HE (British Council, 2016).

Historically, research on TNE has been mainly concerned about processes, with little attention paid to student motivation, attitudes and experiences (Miliszewska & Sztendur, 2010). Wilkins, Huisman & Balakrishnan (2012), Ahmad (2015), and Skokic, Rienties, & Lockwood (2016) have explored student satisfaction and perceptions within 'typical' TNE arrangements around the world, but China's style of delivering TNE through joint programmes differs sufficiently to warrant further attention.

This study is unique in relation to the methodology adopted and the UK-China TNE collaborative model. Preliminary findings to support strategic planning when considering student experience and quality of educational provision for CU and their two major Chinese partner universities will be presented. Furthermore, the study is timely, for whilst attitudes towards UK education remain positive, the quality of domestic education in China and within neighbouring Asian countries continues to grow. As Mellors-Bourne (2017:79) argues, "...the changing demand for transnational partnership and collaborative provision should be researched from an individual country perspective ... such analysis might better advise UK universities on both growing and declining market opportunities".

This research is also undertaken amidst a backdrop of increased scrutiny of TNE partnerships by the Chinese government, with over a fifth of foreign partnerships being terminated in 2018 (Feng, 2018). Issues such as the quality and satisfaction reported by students on these programmes is therefore of paramount importance to the feasibility of continuing to offer (UK)TNE programmes in China.

### **Methodology**

Adopting a comparative case study methodology, using a mixed-method approach, data has been captured for the project using an online questionnaire followed by interviews. The questionnaire captured data on demographics, motivating factors relating to course choice, opinions on teaching styles between Chinese and UK lecturers and general attitudes towards teaching and learning. Questions were mostly kept to simple multiple-choice answers or responses on a 5-point Likert scale. The tool, used in a previous study (Liu, 2017) and consisting of 40 questions, drawing on student satisfaction frameworks as developed by Elliot & Shin (2002), was translated into Mandarin by a Chinese Research Assistant (RA) and piloted. The questionnaire was completed by 328 students, with

101 GDUFS respondents and 227 SWUPL respondents, with data analysed using SPSS.

Following the questionnaire, 40 in-depth interviews (20 from each university) were conducted, to further understand student motivation and satisfaction whilst studying on a TNE programme. These interviews were conducted in Mandarin by Liu, with the transcription and translation handled by the RA and further checked by Liu for accuracy. The qualitative data are being analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis will be cross-referenced with the results of the questionnaire for each institution, before considering any stand-alone or cross-case themes. Recommendations arising from the study will help to better understand TNE students' motivations, preferences and experiences.

### ***Preliminary Findings***

Three themes are offered here as example findings.

#### *Study choice*

Initial findings identify that the majority of the participants were female (64%), with almost half (48%) wanting to undertake study in the UK as part of their degree. The majority of the questionnaire respondents were from SWUPL (70%), studying on a law programme. Overall, participants appear to choose their programme through personal interest and the prospective employment opportunities their programme would offer. Almost two thirds (61%) noted that a TNE programme offered a transitional period to better adapt to potential of future study abroad. Parental influence repeatedly appeared as a key factor in students' choices.

#### *Perceived effectiveness*

Minor differences were perceived in the effectiveness of the Chinese and UK academics. The only area where UK staff were perceived as delivering a 'better experience' was around the assessment processes, with students interestingly valuing a more western approach. There were also differences reported in terms of the quality of written feedback and usefulness of feedback by Chinese and UK staff on digital platforms.

#### *Satisfaction*

Across both courses, students reported positive satisfaction around the skills developed throughout their programme, particularly in relation to subject knowledge (92%) and employability (84%).

The students were more enthusiastic about the interactive lecture approach used by UK staff teachers, compared with the traditional Chinese way of teaching, with a preference for exams and essays for assessment. Some prominent cultural differences, such as attitudes about deadlines for work submission, appointment-making and preferred ways of communication (Email vs. WeChat) were also evident.

It was noted that overall satisfaction levels differed between the two institutions, with SWUPL students reporting an 82% satisfaction with their institution, with GDUFS reporting 72%, which is

being further analysed, aside from skills development and pedagogical practices.

## Conclusions

There are many nuances to unpack and understand within the data undergoing analysis, which the full paper will examine. Interim analysis has highlighted a number of baseline issues around attitudes and motivations, study choice, perceived effectiveness and with that student satisfaction. As two case studies it will be interesting to explore aspects of similarity and difference. Thematic analysis of the interview data will be the crucial next step in this endeavour including exploration about the ways in which social background, gender, and prior educational experiences intersect and impact learning experiences.

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