

GLOBALISATION OF POSTGRADUATE LOGISTICS PROGRAMMES; CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

CONTEXT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate key challenges and issues relating to the sudden and rapid development of Transnational Higher Education, with particular emphasis on Logistics Education. Knight (2005) reflects, while the Observatory of Borderless Higher Education in the UK tracks recent developments and reports on them, there is still a real need to ensure that 'cross-border education reflects and helps to meet individual countries' educational goals, culture, priorities and policies'.

RESEARCH QUESTION/PURPOSE

The research question asks 'What are the challenges of cross-border education and what does this mean for the development of Logistics programmes involved in Transnational Higher Education? As already discussed by Zinn and Goldsby (2014), the merger of logistics, operations, supply management, and related disciplines into the broader field of supply chain management (SCM) has brought together academic fields with different professional identities and competing visions of what SCM ought to be; what students ought to be taught, and what the priorities for research and publication should be.

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Globerson and Wolbrum (2014) state that academia continuously struggles with the content identification of logistics courses, wishing to support industry's needs. As expressed by Gravier and Farris (2008), articles about logistics education had progressed from asking, "Who are we?" in the 1960s and 1970s, to asking "What are we teaching?" from the 1980s. The debate concerning the content of a logistics programmes will always be around since practitioners' needs are dynamic. These initial findings support the fact that an interest in logistics education has been growing, but the author has identified that a third dimension concerning transnational discussions is not apparent.

CONCLUSIONS

The study is work-in-progress. It will indicate potential benefits which higher education and industry can reap from cross-border collaborations and not necessarily where 'one size fits all'.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to investigate key challenges and issues relating to the sudden and rapid development of Transnational Higher Education, with particular

emphasis on Logistics Education. There has already been some interesting research conducted in this area, particularly by Knight (2005) who reflects, that while the Observatory of Borderless Higher Education in the UK tracks recent developments and reports on them, there is still a real need to ensure that 'cross-border education reflects and helps to meet individual countries' educational goals, culture, priorities and policies'. As discussed by Zinn and Goldsby (2014), the merger of logistics, operations, supply management, and related disciplines into the broader field of supply chain management (SCM) has brought together academic fields with different professional identities and competing visions of what SCM ought to be; what students ought to be taught, and what the priorities for research and publication should be.

Keywords: *Logistics, Transnational, Education, Culture*

Research Approach & Outcome

A systematic approach to review current literature has been adopted; two key areas have been considered. Firstly, the challenges of cross-border education and more importantly, what this means for Logistics and Supply Chain Management courses involved in the Transnational Higher Education arena. An initial search of databases using keywords such as 'transnational + logistics + education' appeared to indicate that not enough research had been conducted in this area. During the database search, only a limited number of journal articles pertaining to this topic were discovered. As a solid research base was not evident, this identified a gap in the literature.

The study has attempted to indicate potential benefits and pitfalls of transnational education. In addition, an awareness of cultural issues for higher education and industry have been made before they can consider reaping anything from cross-border collaborations and partnerships. An appreciation of culture-induced challenges has been noted; discussing barriers and approaches to maintain standards – with a common goal in sight and not necessarily assuming '*one size fits all*'.

Literature Review

Overview of the Transnational Higher Education (TNE) provision.

Higher education systems are expanding rapidly around the globe in order to satisfy the greater need and demand for access. Increased access to higher education enhances both individual opportunity and national economic development and competitiveness in an increase globalised world. Despite these developments, Blanco Ramirez and Berger (2013) state, there are on-going and perhaps ever increasing concerns about inequities and shortcomings in access to, quality of, relevance of, and investment in higher education. In this changing context, quality and accountability have received increasing attention from policy makers and higher education leaders. For instance, since the 1990s, almost every country in the world has developed quality assurance mechanisms, many of which take their cues directly from a handful of developed nations (Kells, 1999).

Recent literature on the internationalisation of higher education shows a revitalised interest in quality practices including rankings and accreditation (Deem et al., 2008; Huisman, 2008; Marginson and van der Wende, 2007; Salmi and Altbach, 2011). A closer examination of quality assurance policies reveals, however, many of these practices fail to theorize what quality means (Harvey and Newton, 2004, 2007). While quality-orientated practices have become more frequently and intentionally pursued in the new national contexts, conceptualisations of quality have not advanced at the same rate (Harvey and Newton, 2004, 2007).

In order to protect against substandard transnational education provision, quality assurance resources have been developed at international, national and institutional levels (McBurnie, 2008). UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation), for example, has developed Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education (Stella, 2006). According to Zwanikken et al. (2013), UNESCO have develop guidelines regarding the quality of cross-border education, however, these guidelines are voluntary. Stella (2006) agrees, the Guidelines are voluntary but provide a framework for cooperation. They recommend responsibilities for both partners in transnational collaborations and aim to encourage quality of provision.

According to Zwanikken et al.(2013), the definition of quality assurance in HE has evolved in the last ten years. Woodhouse (1999), referred to quality assurance as relating “to the policies, attitudes, actions and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced”. Harvey (2012), after much discussion comments, “Assurance of quality in higher education is a process of establishing stake-holder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements”. Referring to UNESCO (2005), the following stakeholders in higher education can be distinguished: governments; higher education institutions/providers including academic staff; student bodies; quality assurance and accreditation bodies; academic recognition and professional bodies.

Zwanikken et al., (2013), have found that literature from the nineties onwards, increasing international mobility, and therefore international comparability, became an important issue, especially in Europe and the USA (Smith, 2010; Woodhouse, 1996). Stella (2006), states that national frameworks for quality assurance of cross-border education are not well developed. Bolton (2010), argues that existing quality assurance frameworks often do not allow accommodation of manageable risks associated with innovation, flexibility and experimentation in new market places. Billing (2004) suggested, especially in Europe, a ‘general’ model of quality assurance is developing.

Transnational higher education, also known as ‘franchised provision’. ‘offshore education’, ‘international collaborative provision’ or ‘cross-border’ education, plays an important role in contemporary higher education (Huang, 2007; Naidoo, 2009). In the international expansion of universities, the branch campus, also known as the ‘franchise campus’ and the ‘joint venture campus’, is perhaps the most intrusive yet least monitored form of cross-border educational provision. Generally designed as an offshore satellite of a Western university, branch campuses are located in an ever-increasing number of countries (Coleman, 2003). While the cross-border

movement of staff and students is not new (van Damme, 2001; Stella, 2006), the mass movement of programmes and institutions is a relatively new occurrence (Stella 2006).

Hill et al., (2013) state, that transnational education, primarily at the tertiary level, has been growing rapidly, bringing with it high hopes and expectations of benefits to institutions in the countries of origin and destination. The largest source countries of international branch campuses globally (where the parent institutions are based) are the USA, Australia and the UK (Becker, 2009). It has been estimated that by 2025 transnational education will account for 44% of the total demand for international education (Bohm et al., 2002). However, they say that these potential benefits come with a set of challenges which must be overcome. These challenges include the need to reconcile the often-conflicting objectives of the stakeholders involved, bridge learning traditions/styles and cultural divides, and harmonise cross-national standards.

Rapid expansion of transnational education has raised high expectations about its potential but comes with its own set of challenges. First, its close association with the globalisation process has led to education being viewed as a commodity with a price, subject to the laws of demand and supply (Simpson, 2011; Teichler, 2004; van der Wende, 1996). This commodification has blurred the lines between education as social capital and, as what is now referred to as human capital. Second, the rapid expansion of the education 'market' is proving a strain on the issues of quality and assurance (Bennett et al., 2010). At the same time, an increasing preoccupation with quality has elevated to prominence international comparative ranking such as those of the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES). Transnational education permits students of one country to acquire a qualification of a second country in a third country (Hill et al., 2013). Even if the qualification is of comparable quality to that of the conferring country, it is most likely the student experience is not. There is a danger, Hill et al., (2013) note that transnational education constituting solely an award-granting exercise rather than a learning experience.

Findings for Logistics Education and Global perspectives.

It is important to understand what Logistics or Logistics Management is and what relationships exist with Supply Chain Management. A good example is given by Globerson and Wolbrum (2014): 'Logistics is that part of the supply chain process that plans, implements, and controls the efficient, and effective flow and storage of goods, services, and related information from the point-of-origin to the point-of-consumption, in order to meet customers' requirements' (Stock & Lambert, 2001). In addition to this, Globerson and Wolbrum (2014) state CSCMP – Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals, relates to the relationship between Logistics Management and Supply Chain Management. It states that 'Logistics management is that part of Supply Chain Management that plans, implements, and controls the efficient flow and storage of goods, services and related information between the point of origin and the point of consumption in order to meet customers' requirements'.

A review of the development of logistics can be found in Kent and Flint (1997) in Globerson and Wolbrum (2014). The evolution of logistics thought appears to fall into the following seven eras:

Era 1: Farm to market, starting around 1900's, in which the main focus was on transportation and distribution.

Era 2: Military and business, starting during the Second World War. Needs generated by the war gave a push to the development of functions such as transportation, warehousing, inventory and physical distribution.

Era 3: Integration of functions, started around 1960, focusing on the total system's performance, rather than on performance of individual functions. Logistics started to be taught as an area.

Era 4: Customer focus, starting around 1970, where customer service was regarded as the primary focus of the company.

Era 5: Logistics strategy, starting during the 1980s, where it has been considered as a critical component in the company's strategy. Emerging concepts are such as SCM, environmental logistics, reverse logistics, and a heightened awareness of globalization. Information technology as well as strategy concepts have had a significant influence.

Era 6: Integrated SCM, starting during the 1990s, where logistics processes are extended to the companies involved across the supply chains. It requires greater involvement with many functional areas within the organizations involved.

Era 7: International SCM, starting around 2000, where the chain crosses countries' borders, mostly due to the existence of very effective information technologies. We are currently in the seventh Era where courses, faculties, staff and students are crossing borders for programmes in logistics education.

Bernon & Mena (2013) state that Gravier and Farris (2008) conducted a review of the educational literature in logistics from the 1960s through to 2008, and identified 81 relevant articles. They categorised the publications in three primary themes: content and skills, curriculum development and deliver method. Of these three themes, curriculum had received the most attention, with 60 per cent of the papers. However, Globerson and Wolbrum (2014) state that academia continuously struggles with the content identification of logistics courses, wishing to support industry's needs. As expressed by Gravier and Farris (2008), articles about logistics education had progressed from asking, "Who are we?" in the 1960s and 1970s, to asking "What are we teaching?" from the 1980s. They also point out that two-thirds of the way into the first decade of the 2000s, the number of published articles that address logistics education, is greater than in any two consecutive previous decades, evidence for its growing importance. The debate concerning the content of a logistics course will always be around since practitioners' needs are dynamic. These initial findings support the fact that an interest in logistics education has been growing, but another dimension concerning transnational discussions is not apparent.

Wu (2007) noted that according to Lancioni et al. (2001b), some barriers encountered in the development and planning of logistics course and programmes include, but are not limited to, a lack of trained faculty to teach logistics; difficulty in integrating a logistics major in the current curriculum; general lack of student interest in logistics or supply chain management as a major; resistance of faculty on other departments as to the merit of logistics as a respectable area in business, resistance to the development of a logistics programme by certain departments within the school such as marketing, operations management, finance, accounting, management, economics, and statistics; a general lack of fit for logistics and supply chain management and the overall curriculum core of programmes.

There is evidence to suggest that different regions view logistics skills and education differently. Walton et al. (1998) in Wu (2007) state that logistics managers operating in the EU rather than the USA will necessarily be more broadly skilled individuals who will be confronted by a variety of customer requirements overlaid with a diversity of cultural and linguistic difficulties. Wu (2007) adds that such varied requirements may require a tailored logistics programme that fits the local demand. However, it must be noted in contrast to these suggestions, the current trend within TNE is the franchising of programmes – taking an existing programme ‘*as it is*’ and allowing international partners to deliver the content, according to the programme and syllabi as validated in the home institution. The home institution in this case is also the awarding body. Little evidence is currently apparent of programmes being tailored, designed, contextualised or adapted for local trends, cultural variations and norms. Wu (2007) concluded, no studies have been undertaken to provide an overall picture of the current logistics curricula from an international perspective. This has resulted in a prominent gap in the literature given the growing trend of globalisation and the importance of logistics education in shaping a competent logistician. To concur, Wu made this statement in 2007, and still today in 2015, little progress appears to have been made in addressing the issues of logistics education and globalisation.

Mok & Xu (2008) in Djerasimovic (2014) state that whilst the last decade has seen a proliferation of various TNE arrangements, this does not mean that the sector has not been faced with various problems and concerns. One of the most commonly raised issues across TNE literature being the experience and effectiveness of cross-cultural teaching and learning, especially where this involves teachers with little experience of the new cultural context. Djerasimovic (2014) adds that tied in with this issue is the often debated general appropriateness and adaptability of educational programmes, or the assurance of standards of the ‘exporter’ institution in sometimes quite radically different contexts with different expectations, learning trends, cultures of communication and assessment styles. Chapman and Pyvis (2013) in Djerasimovic (2014) state the frequently used term ‘partnership’, which implies a degree of equality, often hides a power hierarchy constructed by both sides, a lack of respect reported by host academics and (Dobos, Chapman and O’Donoghue, 2013 in Djerasimovic (2014)) even a rhetoric of colonialism employed by some of the onshore academics in describing this relationship.

Although partnership exists in many organisational guises (Drew et al., 2008; Knight, 2005), they are underpinned crucially by financial sustainability. Yet, it is not solely restricted to the financial arena but also to the question of academic credibility and institutional direction. When entering into an international partnership – a necessary

factor of the multiculturalism of higher education - several factors must be taken into account. There must be an element of trust; both sides must be prepared for compromise, to a point, and for mutual interaction. One-sided approaches can lead to misunderstanding and eventual resentment. What may seem attractive on the onset, namely, the introduction and partnership of a Western or international university can be viewed as an obstacle for real development if not properly managed (Hill et al., 2013).

Conclusion

Tensions are part and parcel of any collaboration, transnational education is no different. Collaborations endure, if these tensions, especially between the parties to the collaboration, can be managed effectively. Hill et al., (2013) warn, where these tensions cannot be managed, perhaps because priorities change, collaborations are terminated. Divergent objectives of different collaborating parties are at the heart of these tensions but tensions also exist within institutions such as between government policies and their implementation, as well as among stakeholders within the educational institution. The most important of all tensions is that relating to the substance of that collaboration, with the management of the respective collaborating institutions each interpreting that collaboration from a self-interested perspective. Since fee-setting, student management, staff management, academic management, curriculum management and quality assurance are key dimensions of collaboration, they are sources of tension (Hill et al., 2013).

McBurnie (2008) notes, due to the geographical distance of transnational higher education programmes from the home campus, there are tensions between academic and commercial priorities, and opportunities for slippery academic standards. The need for robust quality assurance systems is great. Students deserve high-quality educational experiences, and importer countries want to ensure that graduates from these programmes fulfil the 'nation-building' requirements that initially led them to welcome international education providers into their country (McBurnie, 2008).

To conclude, as outlined in an example by Djerasimovic (2014), Chinese universities are increasingly attracting international students from the region. What is the culture they will be imposing? Whose culture is it? It may be that Appadurai's (2003) 'repatriated differences', with the original ideologies and discourses being recontextualised, transformed, and hybridised and returning as such to their place of origin, to be the subject of further appropriation, recontextualisation and transformation in the course of an ongoing global cultural revolution. One size, most definitely, does not fit all.

Copyright: The initial findings and paper have also been submitted towards the 20th Proceedings of the Annual Logistics Research Network Conference, titled: *Transnational 'Logistics' Education; Global Perspectives and Challenges (June, 2015)*, not yet published.

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Biography

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