

Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	External Quality Assurance Agencies Emerging Challenges
Topic	5.2 Cross-border Higher Education (CBHE)

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1. Introduction



The issue here is the emergence of borderless education, commonly referred to as Cross-border Higher Education (CBHE). You will learn about the growth of CBHE in recent years, the challenges to traditional forms of educational delivery, and the pro's and con's of CBHE.

Objectives: Cross-border Higher Education (CBHE)

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to

- define the terms 'transnational', 'cross-border' and 'borderless' education
- explain the growth of 'borderless' education worldwide and how it challenges traditional forms of education
- identify the varied views on the advantages and disadvantages of 'cross-border higher education' (CBHE)
- identify the issues of concern in relation to CBHE's growth in developing countries

2. The Growth of CBHE

The terms 'transnational', 'cross-border' and 'borderless' education are often used interchangeably, although they have different conceptual nuances. Knight (2003b) suggests that the first two are oriented to issues that arise when education crosses borders and hence emphasise the existence of borders while 'borderless education' implies the disappearance of borders. Another usage of 'transnational' denotes the arrangement where the student is in a different country to the institution that awards the qualification. In reality, all these usages allude in some way to a blurring of the traditional conceptual, disciplinary and geographic boundaries of higher education.

The term 'borderless education' was coined by a team of Australian researchers who were investigating the potential competitive impact on Australian higher education of developments in the domain of new media (Cunningham et al, 1998; CVCP & HEFCE, 2000; Middlehurst, 2002; Knight, 2003b). The size of the country and a scattered population prompted Australia to commit to developing distance education, which it implements with a range of different media. With unprecedented growth in

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information and communication technologies, and with their creative application to distance and e-learning education, geographic borders seem to be of little consequence and distance education becomes 'borderless'. The term now includes education that crosses national borders in any form, not just distance education. (In fact, in some definitions of 'borderless education', 'pure' distance education is excluded.)

As pointed out in a UK report on borderless education in 2000:

"...numerous articles have (recently) been published, particularly about so-called 'virtual' provision and about the possibilities provided by new forms of communication and information technologies for different forms of teaching and learning. Thus, awareness of the challenge is no longer at issue."

However, the new forms of education come with challenges, as the ways to handle them are complex and new to many countries.

As the growth of borderless education became significant by late nineties, international competition in the borderless education market became so unrestrained that the Australian government took notice. The research reported in Cunningham et al. (1998) was central to an investigation of Australian government concerns about an apparent threat posed by rapidly emerging 'corporate universities', and the supposed eagerness of media companies to enter the education market via their investments in new technologies.

The Australian Federal education department feared that international students, a vital revenue source for universities, would be lost to US media-education consortia, crossing borders via the web or satellite links to bring education directly to students in their home countries, thus eroding onshore Australian markets (Ryan, 2006).

The Australian study concluded that competition for traditional providers was more likely to come from the emergence of corporate and virtual universities than from global media businesses (although ten years on, neither type of organisation yet provides serious competition to Australian institutions). The investigation also highlighted worldwide concerns about accreditation and articulation, with many governmental, institutional, and educational organizations struggling to find solutions to the problem of identifying, assessing and accrediting courses and awards in a borderless market (Cunningham et al, 1998).

Building on this research, the government of Australia commissioned another study to examine a potential threat from corporate and virtual universities and to explore the growing commercialization of higher education. This report highlighted the changing nature of 'borderlessness'. The Australian report on the Business of Borderless Education (2000) noted that:

"...online education will be absorbed into conventional programs that offer both 'high tech and high touch. However, credible, wholly online programs will emerge alongside "shonky" operations; indeed that has happened already".

The report highlighted the nature of the borders that were disappearing. In 1996 when the Australian team started the first investigation, 'borders' were conceived as geographical and geopolitical boundaries, and boundaries of time and space. In 2000, the second study found that the real breach of borders was occurring between universities and corporations, between training and education, between universities and vocational colleges, between on-campus and off-campus learning experiences. The report noted that:

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"In the process, we have already seen the emergence of the corporatised university, learning the lessons of business. Our challenge is to forge a new identity, which preserves 'core business' while exploiting the potential of that blurring of borders."

Parallel to the second Australian study, the UK's Council of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) and Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned a study of the impact of borderless higher education on UK institutions, with similar findings and steps proposed for the UK higher education sector. The report recommended that institutions develop their strategic planning processes to acknowledge the development of borderless higher education. It emphasized that the unknown factors attendant to borderless development would require institutions to integrate appropriate forms of scenario planning and risk analysis into their strategic planning processes.

While the pioneering investigations cited above are specific to interpretation of the term 'borderless education', many articles and reports were published during that period referring to 'transnational' or 'cross-border' education. Principles, Guidelines and Benchmarks have been developed to address various aspects of cross-border education. Associations of higher education institutions (HEIs) and QA agencies have also made statements about how they would evaluate and report on the quality of cross-border education within their broader remit. In this topic, we will use the term cross-border higher education (CBHE).

3. Differing Views on CBHE

The UNESCO definition of cross-border higher education refers to:

"...higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, program, institution/provider, or course materials **crossnational jurisdictional borders**. Cross-border higher education may include higher education by **public/private and not-for-profit/for-profit providers**. It encompasses a **wide range of modalities**, in a continuum from face-to-face (in various forms such as students travelling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (using various technologies including e-learning)."

Reading: Cross-border Higher Education

The Framework developed by Knight in 2005 serves as a good way to highlight the various forms and movements within CBHE. Click the link below to learn more about this framework:

[Higher Education Crossing Borders: A Guide to the Implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services \(GATS\) for Cross-border Education](#), A Report Prepared for the Commonwealth of Learning and UNESCO by Jane Knight, 2006.

This report is recommended for further reading in general, or for an assignment related to the forms of CBHE that may exist in your country.

Of the various forms of cross-border education addressed in this report, movement of students across borders for education has a long history. However, cross-border education through mobility of programs and institutions is of recent origin (except in some traditional forms of distance education that use print media) and has increased significantly over the past two decades. Ten years ago, "student mobility" was used as a proxy for CBHE. With more and more programs crossing borders and institutions establishing overseas partnerships and branch campuses, student mobility is a less adequate catch-phrase for cross-border education.

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Whatever the form of CBHE is, there are differing views about the advantages and disadvantages. In the extreme, some view CBHE as a tool for capacity development in higher education, while others see it as a great disadvantage in developing countries.

Differing Views on CBHE

CBHE as a tool for capacity development

Those who argue in favour of CBHE cite as benefits – healthy competition, motivation for traditional institutions to innovate, establishment of professional networks, enhanced opportunities for access to HE, and so on. Those who support these views are concerned that even verifiably high-quality providers and programs that seek to cross national borders are being restrained by government due to general mistrust and a view that CBHE providers exploit learners. They argue that in the global market, learners have a right to quality education and should be empowered to make their own choices (although it is not clear how CGHE denies choice, unless the traditional providers reduce capacity).

CBHE is disadvantageous for developing countries

There is scepticism among some commentators that CBHE will only be a drain on a developing country. A fundamental or root issue here is the capacity of developing countries to participate effectively in the global trading system. Although mutual understanding and international co-operation in teaching and research rank high on many countries' internationalisation agenda, economic and revenue-generation agendas have become more important of late, and have sometimes become the primary concern. Today, CBHE is tilted toward revenue generation and thus is perceived as a commercial activity.

CBHE is a threat to national sovereignty

Those who hold that education is not a tradable commodity, and that higher education should remain a public good and public responsibility, view CBHE as a threat to national sovereignty and culture, and as a serious attack on the core values of the higher education system. A further reservation is that providers from the developing countries will be unable to penetrate the education market of the developed countries. Therefore CBHE will always be uni-directional and detrimental to the developmental strategies of developing countries. This argument typically refers to Australian, British and U.S. institutions operating in emerging economies.

CBHE: Issues of Concern

As CBHE operations increase in developing countries, the integrity of national values and the increasing amount of student fees that go to cross-border foreign providers (that are sometimes below minimum standards) are emerging as issues of concern to governments. Students who join programs offered by low quality cross-border providers do not qualify for government benefits. In addition, students face difficulties in translating degrees obtained from cross-border providers into national equivalents in many countries.

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If we take this last argument at face value, there is still a question of access, capacity, and quality in the traditional home systems. It is fair to ask if there are structural reasons for students to patronize CBHE.

Some cross-border providers aggressively market their courses by assuring equal treatment and recognition of their awards in the provider country. The student experience with many of these ventures indicates that so far the awards do not confer a competitive edge or benefit in further studies or employment in the provider country. More cases are being reported of questionable providers who collect the fees but are unreachable when the student discovers the deception. Thus, the issue of learner protection is real and governments are being pressured to take steps to protect the public. In many countries this calls for strengthening the national policy frameworks to handle CBHE issues.

A desk study undertaken for UNESCO in March 2004 and a survey conducted by the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) in 2005 indicated that (among the responding countries) only Australia, India, Malaysia and New Zealand had some mechanism in place to ensure the quality of the exports of their HEIs. For the import of educational services, there were mechanisms only in Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand and the Philippines. In many countries, the ministries of education had a regulatory role in CBHE services and the extent to which QA had a key role in these mechanisms was unclear. Surveys conducted among the APEC economies in 2006 and extended to the Brisbane Communiqué signatories in 2007, indicated similar results. In other words, the national frameworks for QA of CBHE in higher education were not well developed then and may be no better now.

To help countries address the challenges of CBHE, UNESCO and OECD jointly developed a set of Guidelines in 2005. These Guidelines address not only the QA agencies or governments but also selected stakeholders.

4. Discussion

Discussion: Cross-Border Education

Analyse the cross-border education activities that exist in the higher education sector of your country. Classify those various forms according to the scheme given in Knight (2005).

5. Discussion

Discussion: UNESCO-OECD Guidelines

Read the document UNESCO-OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Higher Education

1. In your opinion, what three recommendations have been, or would be, very difficult to implement in your country? Overall, where is your country in substantial alignment with the recommendations in the Guidelines?
2. Browse the information about two national EQA agencies and map their policies and practices to see to what extent they are in alignment with the recommendations given for QA agencies in the Guidelines.
3. Bring your analysis to a conclusion: To what extent do you believe that CBHE is being properly addressed in the policy and procedures of your national government and national QA agency? What changes, if any, would you recommend?

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6. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- Cross-border higher education refers to higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, program, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders.
- The growth of borderless education led to tough international competition. Both the Australian and UK governments initiated studies to investigate the impact of corporate and virtual universities.
- These studies highlighted the worldwide concerns about accreditation and articulation and the changing nature of borderless education and recommended that HEIs expand their strategic planning processes to take account of the development of borderless higher education.
- There are many different views about the advantages and disadvantages of CBHE. While some view CBHE as a tool for capacity development in higher education, others view it as a great disadvantage to developing countries. There are also groups that perceive CBHE operations as a threat to national sovereignty and culture.
- The following are some issues of concern regarding the growth of CBHE operations in developing countries:
 - Integrity of the national culture and values
 - Increasing amount of student fees that go into cross-border education offered by foreign providers which is sometimes below minimum standards
 - Difficulties in translating degrees obtained from cross-border providers into national equivalents
 - Learner protection in cases of questionable providers

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