



**University of
Sunderland**

Foster, Monika, Armstrong, Paul-Alan, Bhate, Seema and Janfeshar Nobari, Juila (2022) Business Educator Issue Two September 2022: Research and Scholarship: Building Sustainable Futures. University of Sunderland, Sunderland, UK.

Downloaded from: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/15140/>

Usage guidelines

Please refer to the usage guidelines at <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/policies.html> or alternatively contact sure@sunderland.ac.uk.

Business Educator

Working Paper Series

**Research Centre for Management Learning and
Business Education**

**Issue Two
September
2022:
*Research and
Scholarship:
Building
Sustainable
Futures.***

Copyright ©

Editors

Co-Editor and Centre Leader: Professor Monika Foster, Head of School Business and Management, PFHEA CMBE

Co-Editor and Deputy Centre Lead Dr Paul-Alan Armstrong, Senior Lecturer HRM and Leadership, VC Teaching Fellow SFHEA

Guest Co-Editor 2021-22: Dr Seema Bhate, Senior Lecturer Marketing

Publisher: Dr Juila J. Nobari, Senior Lecturer Accounting and Finance, FHEA



Co-editors' Introduction

Welcome to Business Educator **Issue 2 (2021-2022)**. This Working Paper series is for scholars, researchers, early career researchers, members of the PhD community and students whose research and scholarship are located within Management Learning and Business Education.

The purpose of this Working Paper series is to provide a peer-reviewed publication to support the development of high-quality outputs from research in the areas of:

- **Management Learning** including leadership and management development approaches; coaching; professional development; reflexivity; creativity and innovation in management learning; developing resilient and agile managers; internationalisation of management learning across cultures.
- **Business Education** including business pedagogies; creative approaches to learning and teaching; online and hybrid approaches; digital business education; the student experience; student as partners; collaborative approaches to business education; inclusive business education practices; work-based learning, experiential learning; internationalisation of business education.

We are delighted that this second issue reflects the breadth of the experience within the research community in the Faculty of Business, Law, and Tourism and beyond by including working papers from early career researchers, colleagues from University of Sunderland in London and established internationally recognised researchers.

Following the Call for Papers in October 2021, this issue contains three working papers and starts with a timely topic for all on '**Securing the future of work: an analysis on skill gaps between Business Education and industry needs in the UK**' by Dr Giuseppe Cantafio (Senior Lecturer (Academic Development APP and TEF University of Sunderland in London) and Awajioyem Miracle Ikoawaji (MSc International Business Management, University of Sunderland in London). This paper considers and reflects upon emerging technologies, disruptions and rapid evolution faced in the business environment. They present the case for new managers entering the market to acquire the skills needed to thrive and grow in a fast-changing environment.

This is followed by a paper from established researchers on **‘An exploration of the impact of TNE programmes on graduate employability using stakeholder approach’** by Professor Monika Foster (Head of School of Business and Management, University of Sunderland), Dr Yuan Zhai (Lecturer in Business, University of Teesside) and Dr Derek Watson (Associate Professor, University of Sunderland). This paper focuses on TNE student graduateness and career progression. They provide insights and outline informed guidance on the design and delivery of TNE programmes to further enrich graduate employability. This is followed by a paper by an early career researcher on **‘A conceptual study on the application of qualitative methods to the study of international master foundation students’ online engagement during the pandemic lockdown’** by Iris Ren. This paper presents an emerging conceptualisation of the experience of the impact of Covid-19 on teaching practice for a teacher whose cultural differences have presented unique opportunities and challenges for developing their praxis and teaching of international postgraduate students.

We would like to thank all the contributors for this issue including the reviewers of the working papers, the authors of the working papers and we look forward to future issues as we explore the shift in management learning in an agile, technology and digital enable world of work. There are challenges and opportunities for management and business education as we start to move back to on campus delivery. The global pandemic has changed teaching practice and even though there are those who have a romantic notion of returning to the ‘old ways’ it is important as educators we do not throw away the routines and digital skills, we have all developed. As educators should be aware of the potential for technology enabled practice and how this enhances our on-campus interactions with the learners. We welcome papers in future issues which consider, reflect, argue and debate transforming curriculum for UG, PG and Doctoral Learners; we encourage debates on transnational education; the debates on professions and career development in line with skills development for managers and employees within the digitally evolved and transformed workplace. We encourage papers on creativity, employer-led approaches, and experiential learning.

Co-editors

Professor Monika Foster
PFHEA CMBE

Dr Paul-Alan Armstrong
VC Teaching Fellow SFHEA

Guest Co-editor

Dr Seema Bhate

Publisher

Dr Juila J. Nobari, FHEA

Table of contents

Co-editors' Introduction

Table of contents

Business Educator Research papers 2020-2021: Issue two (June 2022) under the theme of '**Research and Scholarship: Building Sustainable Futures**'.

Securing the future of work: an analysis on skill gaps between Business Education and industry needs in the UK.

Dr Giuseppe Cantafio and Awajjoyem Miracle Ikoawaji

P. 1- 21

An exploration of the impact of TNE programmes on graduate employability using stakeholder approach.

Professor Monika Foster, Dr Yuan Zhai, and Dr Derek Watson

P. 22 - 41

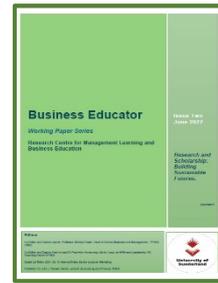
A conceptual study on the application of qualitative methods to the study of international master foundation students' online engagement during the pandemic lockdown.

Iris Ren

P. 42 - 63



Business Educator
Working Paper Series of the Centre for
Management Learning and Business
Education



Securing the future of work: an analysis on skill gaps between Business Education and industry needs in the UK.

Giuseppe Umberto Cantafio^{a, 1} and Awaijoyem Miracle Ikoawaji^b

^a *Senior Lecturer (Academic Development APP and TEF) at the University of Sunderland in London*

^b *Postgrad Student at the University of Sunderland in London*

Abstract

Keywords:

Work-based learning, technology, skill-shortage, business education, Higher education institution.

With emerging technologies, disruptions and rapid evolution faced in the business environment, organisations are now facing unprecedented changes in their workforce. There is now a need for new managers entering the market to acquire the skills needed to thrive and grow in a fast-changing environment. This research was carried out to explore how Higher Education Institutions (HEI), with the use of work-based learning, can help in the formation of future managers in the digital era. This study adopted and drew its conclusion from theories and primary data collected from actors in the UK business environment. The findings of the research revealed various challenges faced by business students entering the job market. The paper discussed the skills needed for the development of future managers in a dynamic business environment. Furthermore, from the study emerged how the inclusion of technology can help optimise the work-based learning model and gave suggestions on how to improve the HEI curriculum used by educators in business education. Based on the findings, it was recommended that to close the skill gap, HEI need to revisit theories used in business education and embed in their curriculum technology-oriented courses. Additionally, academic staff should ensure a good grasp of the digital skills required for educational purposes as it has been revealed to be essential for effective and efficient learning which in turn can positively impact the future employment of business students.

¹ Corresponding author: giuseppe.cantafio@sunderland.ac.uk

Introduction

The increase in the level of skill shortage at a global level has posed some new challenges for nowadays managers. In the contemporary uncertain scenario, there are many challenges for people who are entering the job market, including inflation rates hiking, temporary staffing, salary constraints, High demand for digital skills and salary issues for employees. Now more than ever before, there is a need for talented, skilled workers with the right skill set. In this scenario, it is beneficial to consider the rise of robotics technology and robot utilisation by companies that could replace boring and repetitive tasks instead of humans. This could also pose the threat of the phenomenon of technological unemployment that could especially impact the least specialised and low-skilled workers (Russon and Hooker, 2021).

The aim of the present paper is to explore how the higher education sector can help the formation of future managers. Given the new work-based learning scenario, students need to gain employability skills for a new changing working setting in the workplace. The objective of the paper is to carry out a systematic literature review and pose a survey to a sample of managers and actors involved across the business education world.

Research Questions

- RQ1: What are the current obstacles faced by business graduates entering the job market?
- RQ2: What are the new skills that higher education institutions need to include in the curriculum to create managers of the future?
- RQ3: To what extent can technology help for the development of work-based learning?

Outline of Study

Section 1 has provided an introduction for the study; section 2 will review the literature on the topic, section 3 focuses on the findings and discussion based on the responses gotten from participants. Finally, section 4 will summarize the work and provide some recommendations and suggestions for future studies.

Literature Review

The future of work is one that offers so many opportunities and with emerging technologies there's bound to be a significant change in the business environment for the present and future job markets. Actors in the business education world now need to strategically redesign the business knowledge ecosystem to accommodate multiple information, fast-changing industry expectations as well as learning alternatives. Could work-based learning be the key to developing certain skills that will best prepare the business student for uncertainties in the future?

Work-Based Learning and Business Education

Work-based learning in the workplace. Hence, the need for flexibility and malleability in their curriculum.

Looking at the higher education, the primary goal / target of every business school or universities offering business programs is to design their curricula in such a way that will prepare business leaders who can change the world (Bratianu, Hadad and Bejinaru, 2020). Moreover, while designing these curricula it essential to put into consideration that organisations are complex systems with complex process, and it will take more that direct fusion of classroom simulations and theory in discussing case studies to meet their needs. The future of work for the business student does not only require a knowledgeable worker but demands one who can contextualize these concepts in a practical changing environment. (Raelin, 1997) Such ability is developed in a work-based setting; this is where learning occurs. Organisations look for business leaders who are not just taught how to solve problems but are able to figure out how to solve their own problems which requires skills crucial in working in a dynamic environment accompanied with uncertainties (Gill and Lashine, 2003). Additionally, a close look at the curricula shows that some of the business concepts are taught in Higher Education are geared towards functional areas; hence leaving the student unprepared for cross-functional work which is common in a collaborative and dynamic environment.

Within this context, a wider approach is needed in the academic context to solve the problem of knowledge gap by creating more innovation networks, foster further collaboration among academic workers, scholars, and companies, and assessing the impact with key performance indicators (Jones et al., 2021).

The Role of Technology in The Development of Work-Based Learning

According to McKinsey and Company (2017), 49% of jobs have the potential to be automated and a prediction of about 60 % of these jobs can be completely automated technically. In the pursuit of making business education market-oriented, it is essential to take into consideration factors on the macroenvironment influencing the kind of skills organisations to require from business graduates/skills. Technology has proven to be one of the major factors in the macroenvironment that influences how the industry operates and the skills required. With emerging technologies, certain concerns have been raised about the future and what it entails as regards work. Technology pessimists believe that the concept of automation based on technological advancement could lead to the great loss of as opposed to technological optimists who believe there will be a transformation and evolution of the current jobs rather than a total elimination.

Jain and Ranjan (2020) highlight how the emergence of such technologies complements human cognition and boots performance in the workplace. A practical example will be the automation of certain tasks such as calculation functions of white-collar jobs in areas of accounting and bookkeeping, including other 21st century complicated activities like taking in data from multiple sources and analysing them to gain insight for resource planning. Although technology possesses a benefit in areas of “routine-based” tasks, there are also some reservations when it comes to “non-routine work.” Non-routine work is one that involves activities such as problem-solving, complex decision making and communication tasks; this in relation to the business education world highlights the need for broader skills in areas of flexibility, adaptability, ethical awareness, self-learning, and lots more.

Many studies have been carried out pre-pandemic on the employability skills needed to be taught in the HE sectors (Saunders, 2000; Preedy and Jones, 2015) However,

less works have been performed after COVID on the exploration of how the higher education sector can help the formation of future managers.

Methodology and Method

Research Approach

According to Saunders et al. (2019), there are three essential approaches that need to be put into consideration during research. These are deductive, inductive, and abductive. An inductive approach is the most appropriate for this study as it enables subjective interpretations of responses gotten from participants. The result gotten from the analysis will be used to form a theory often expressed as a conceptual framework.

In terms of time horizon, the researchers have employed a cross-sectional type of research.

Research Methods

Research methods consist of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The quantitative method is concerned with numeric data, while the qualitative is concerned with non-numeric data (words, images, video, audio etc.). The mixed method is a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques and analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). For this study, the mixed method is used.

Data Collections

For this study, an online survey was used to get responses from various actors across the business education world in the scope of the UK. The research had a total of 34 responses consisting of 12 educators, seven managers, nine students and six representing other business actors. All the participants were approached via emails and some via text message.

Data Analysis

The software Qualtrics was used to analyse the response gotten from the participants to extract themes for discussion.

Limitations

Limitations of the work is that with the current pandemic going on, it has been proved to be very difficult to interview in person the interested sample, as a result, the survey has been conducted mainly online and there is some missing communication to be considered, such as non-verbal communication when interacting online instead of in-person.

Findings and Discussion

A thorough qualitative and quantitative analysis was conducted to provide answers to the research questions. The following themes emerged from the response:

Current obstacles faced by business students in the job markets.

Based on the responses gotten, business students face a lot of obstacles which include a lack of understanding of the job market and how it operates, rapid changes and uncertainties in any business sector, too much reliance on grades.

“Shrinking economy in the middle section - greater expansion at the lower section of employment pyramid - due to loss of workers in the manual/semi-manual section of the pyramid due to Brexit” (Participant 8)

However, one obstacle that proved to be predominant is the fact that a lot of business students lack the experience necessary for the marketplace. The majority of the participants believe that this is a problem in the job market and business students do not have the real-time knowledge/understanding alongside practical skills required to work in a rapidly changing environment.

“Lack of practical skills and management skills. In other words, they do not engage enough on building their skills during their degree.” - (Participant 18)

“Too many entry level jobs require experience that recent graduates don't have yet” - (Participant 16)

“They are not always well equipped with the necessary graduate attributes for the competitive job market.” - (Participant 14).

In contrast with the above belief, one participant distinctively argued that the issue of lack of experience has a connection with the fact that the expectations of the actors involved (the business students/ graduates and employers) do not match the requirements laid down. In a more practical sense, some employers are not opened to accepting or training inexperienced graduates let alone accepting transferable skills which (Jain and Ranjan, 2020) agrees to be a necessity in a fast-changing environment.

“Employers are looking for experienced individuals, rather than offering training for a graduate” (Participant 12)

“Too many entry level jobs require experience that recent graduates don't have yet” (Participant 23)

“High competition, lack of self-confidence and experience in the sector (e.g., through internships), low-paid positions offered to graduates” (Participant 19)

Skills needed for the development of future managers

As discussed in chapter two, the modern-day business student is one who requires flexibility and adaptability. With the emergence of certain technologies and disruptions there are certain expectations in the business sector that higher education institutions and business students need to take into consideration when working, building, and engaging with curricula for the development of future managers.



Fig 2: RQ1 - What are the new skills that higher education institutions need to include in the curriculum to create managers of the future?

Responses from the participants highlighted several skills which include effective communication, innovation management, risk analysis, technological skills, commercial and cultural awareness, diversity and much more.

“Different types of organisational skills, time management, seminar discussions with problem-solving scenarios, assessment that involves business presentations, both individual and collaborative” (Participant 28)

“Focus on crisis management, practical knowledge and incorporating IT in all sectors.” (Participant 25)

Additionally, few of the managers critiqued the curricula used in business education and highlighted the need for higher education institutions to critique and update theories used in developing future managers. Some of these theories and models taught in the institutions are outdated. In support of this notion, (Mekić and Mekić, 2014) in their evaluation of one of the models used in business education, which is the porter’s generic strategy, argued that the model was a bit contradictory as it implied that its applicability had no limitation. But when such theory was placed in a more practical environment it was discovered that the theory did not work as promised by porter and huge conglomerates, as well as public companies, relying solely on one of the strategies, were finding it hard to gain much improvement.

“Change curriculum as per changing world, most curriculum are still taking about research done in 2000!!” - Manager

“More practical skills and work-based learning. Also, link the theory and practice but be up to date with theories as some of the models used are outdated. i.e., Porters five forces etc” - Manager

“Understanding of the marketplace in terms of labour market, society and interrelationship with technology give len capitalist models and MNCs” - Manager

The Impact of Technology in the development of work-based learning.

In the quest to understand how much impact the macroenvironment has on the business environment and the skills required of the business student, we discovered as seen in **Fig 3** that indeed the macro environment has a great impact. To put the discussion in perspective, on the macroenvironment we decided to zoom in on technology to find out how it has impacted the workplace and how can it help for the development of work-based learning.

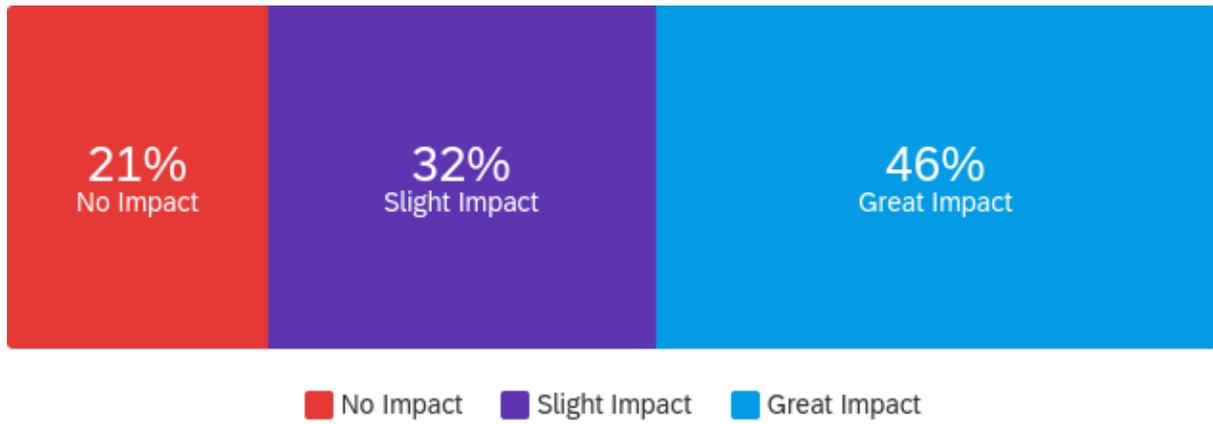


Fig 3: Has the macro environment affected business environment and the skills required?

Technology is one factor that does not just disrupt but also present opportunities. It is essential that higher education institutions leverage the right tools and systems to help optimise work-based learning for the formulation of future managers.

Technology now is a necessity.

“To a large extent. It is a necessity now” - Educator

“To a great extent as we can learn while working”- Student

Some Managers also believe that the incorporation of simulation in the development of work-based learning can help to develop certain interpersonal skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, team building etc. for a dynamic business environment. Technology also facilitates the concept of e-placements and assessment centres in a virtual environment as a new form of work-based learning that will take full shape in the future.

“It can help a lot providing that it is there for the students to use it. More stimulation games should be embedded on the curriculum to help student build their communication skills and team building skills” - Manager

“E-placements are a new form of work-based learning and possibly VR (in the future)” - Manager

Conversely, despite the strong impact technology have in the development of work-based learning some educators established the need for lectures / academic staff in higher education to take up the responsibility to ensure that they have a good command of digital tools not just for educational purposes but tools that are used practically in a business work environment. This is important as academic staff are usually the first contact of most business students and failure to set an example by using teaching and learning methodology effectively and efficiently may exert a negative impact on students' learning and respectively on the transferability to their current/future employment.

Conclusions

The present study recommends that institutions in order to close the skills gap with industry should focus on embedding in their curriculum more technology-oriented courses and adding more professional experiences such as internships in companies during their university studies. In addition, business and management students should be familiarised with courses that could enable their entrepreneurial skills, with a focus on improving their communication and critical thinking skills. The cultural and contextual obstacles hampering creativity should be eliminated since they can negatively impact the acquisition of skills in education institutions. Accordingly, students and learners should be exposed to programs that help liberate them from cognitive and cultural barriers. In addition, future empirical studies could focus on creativity and its impact on HEI (higher education institutions) learners in the UK.

References

Boud, D. and Solomon, N. (2001). *Work-based learning: a new higher education?*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Bratianu, C., Hadad, S. and Bejinaru, R. (2020). Paradigm shift in business education: a competence-based approach. *Sustainability*, 12(4), p.1348.

Gill, A. and Lashine, S. (2003). Business education: a strategic market-oriented focus. *International Journal of Educational Management*.

Jain, A. and Ranjan, S. (2020) 'Implications of emerging technologies on the future of work', *IIMB Management Review*, 32(4), pp.448-454.
doi:10.1016/j.iimb.2020.11.004.

Jones, P., Maas, G., Kraus, S. and Reason, L.L., (2021). An exploration of the role and contribution of entrepreneurship centres in UK higher education institutions. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*.

Major, D. (2016) 'Models of work-based learning, examples and reflections', *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 8(1). Available at:
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JWAM-03-2016-0003/full/html>
(Accessed: 6 February 2022).

Mekić, E. and Mekić, E., (2014). Supports and critiques on Porter's competitive strategy and competitive advantage. *Regional Economic Development*, 24, p.651.

McKinsey and Company (2017) *A future that works: automation, employment, and productivity*. Available at:
<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/Digital%20Disruption/Harnessing%20automation%20for%20a%20future%20that%20works/MGI-A-future-that-works-Executive-summary.ashx> (Accessed: 20 February 2022).

Preedy S. and Jones P. (2015) An investigation into university extra-curricular enterprise support provision. *Education+ Training* 57(8/9): 992–1008.

Raelin, J.A. (1997). A model of work-based learning. *Organization science*, 8(6), pp.563-578

Russon, M. and Hooker, L. (2021) 'UK 'heading towards digital skills shortage disaster' ', BBC News, 22 March. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-56479304> (Accessed: 20 February 2022).

Saunders, M. (2000) Understanding education and work: themes and issues. In: *International Encyclopedia Dictionary of Education*, Ed. S Brown, London: Routledge, pp 1003–1029.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2019) *Research methods for business students* 8th ed. Available at: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sunderland/reader.action?docID=5774742> (Accessed: 28 February 2022).

Strijker, D., Bosworth, G. and Bouter, G. (2020) 'Research methods in rural studies: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 78, pp. 262-270. doi:10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.06.007.

Appendix 1

1/31/22, 5:23 PM

Qualtrics Survey Software

Student Satisfaction

Securing the future of work: Closing the skill gap between business education and industry needs.

The aim of this survey is to explore how the higher education sector can help with the formation of future managers using work-based learning as a tool to help future managers gain employability skills.

The survey will take approximately 7-10mins .

Note: The survey is anonymous and will no way whatsoever be traced to you.

Thanks.

What is your role?

- Student
- Manager
- Educator
- Other

What is your age?

- 19-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+

https://sunduni.eu.qualtrics.com/Q/EditSection/Blocks/Ajax/GetSurveyPrintPreview?ContextSurveyID=SV_BuApwo2GYCSeFDU&ContextLibraryID=U... 1/3

What is your working sector?

- Business services
- Education
- Retail
- Construction & manufacturing.
- Other

Has the macro environment affected business environment and the skills required?

- Not at all Yes, greatly
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

How much does the change in the work environment impact business education?

- No impact Great impact
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Does educational systems play a major role in the building of future managers?

- No it doesn't Yes it does
- 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What are the new skills that higher education institutions need to include in the curriculum to create managers of the future?

What are the current obstacles faced by business graduates entering the job market?

To what extent can technology help for the development of work-based learning?

Powered by Qualtrics

Survey

- What is your role? (E.g., student/manager/educator/other)
- What is your age? (19-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45+)
- What is your working sector? (Business services, education, retail, construction & manufact., other)
- How much the macro environment has an impact? (1-5)
- How much does the change in the work environment has an impact? (1-5)
- How much the educational systems have an impact? (1-5)
- What are the new skills that higher education institutions need to include in the curriculum to create managers of the future?
- What are the current obstacles faced by business graduates entering the job market?
- To what extent can technology help for the development of work-based learning?

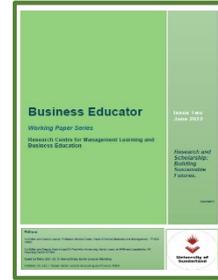
Author Biographies

Dr Giuseppe Cantafio (ORCID 0000-0001-5399-8300) is a Senior Lecturer (Academic Development APP and TEF) at the University of Sunderland in London. Prior to that, he worked as a Lecturer and researcher on the impacts and scenarios evaluation of Autonomous and Connected Transport at the University of Greenwich. He held posts at Northeastern University in Boston, San Diego State University and the Università' Mediterranea of Reggio in Calabria, Italy, where he was a researcher for the MAPS-LED Project, exploring multi-disciplinary approaches to plan smart specialisation strategies for local Economic Development. He has a background in engineering, urban planning, and economics and holds a PhD in Urban Regeneration and Economic Development along with a BSc and MSc in Environmental Engineering, and a PGCert in Higher Education. His research interests include Business and Management, Urban planning, Innovation, Sustainability, Decolonisation. He is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE (formally the Higher Education Academy).

Awajioyem Miracle Ikoawaji is a Postgrad Student at the University of Sunderland in London, in the MSc in International Business and Management. She has professional experience in the Tech industry as a developer. She is a UX designer with experience in Frontend development, UX research, strategy, and design.



Business Educator
Working Paper Series of the Centre for
Management Learning and Business
Education



An exploration of the impact of TNE programmes on graduate employability using stakeholder approach.

Monika Foster^{a, 2} Yuan Zhai^b, Derek Watson^c,

^a *Head of School Business and Management, University of Sunderland*

^b *Lecturer in Business, Teesside University*

^c *Associate Professor, Cross Cultural Management, University of Sunderland*

Keywords:

TNE

Graduate
employment

Employability

Quality of Higher
Education

Abstract

The certificate from British higher education can provide graduates from all over the world with strong employment competitiveness. Therefore, the model of British universities setting up TNE centres overseas to improve the employability of graduates has achieved great success. This conceptual paper proposes a forthcoming research investigation to identify the present graduate employability outcomes of the University of Sunderland's two major TNE programmes in Malaysia and Singapore. Employing a stakeholder-centric approach, this study aims to establish alumni graduates', academics and employers' perspectives concerning TNE student gradueness and career progression. The study seeks to provide informed guidance on the design and delivery of TNE programmes to further enrich graduate employability.

² *Corresponding author. monika.foster@sunderland.ac.uk*

Introduction

To make the high-quality British higher education system provide strong employment support for more international students, British universities have revised their strategic vision by establishing transnational education (TNE) centres (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2017). The University of Sunderland (UoS), with over 20 years' experience, was one of the first to the market in establishing over 24 TNE centres, across 15 countries. However, the market is becoming increasingly competitive in looking to affirm the value-added graduate employability. In response, the proposed research investigation seeks to identify the present graduate employability outcomes following the TNE study of graduates in both Malaysia and Singapore, seeking to establish students', academics, and employers' views on what more can be done in the offering of the UoS TNE programmes. So that students can engage and acquire key knowledge and skills to secure a career, one in which international employers recognise the added value in recruiting University graduates from the UoS.

Literature Review

Transnational education (TNE) and Educational Globalisation

University education has undergone significant changes in the last two decades, which can be characterised by periods of infiltration of economic capital into university education (Santos, 2020). As a result of globalisation, Kalfa & Taksa (2015) believed higher education institutions may become more actively engaged in international affairs because of economic, political, social forces and to cater for the international students wanting a British degree qualification. As the term implies, transnational education describes a situation where the country of the students receiving the educational program differs from the country of awarding institution (Bilsland, Carter & Wood, 2020). It has been suggested by Garrett (2017), that international campuses adopt global identities for the purpose of establishing legitimacy with stakeholders within their respective countries as establishing an international branch for an institution of higher learning can provide the host country with wealth, knowledge, skills, employment opportunities, and in many cases professional and social values (Ahmad, & Buchanan, 2017).

The importance of investigating students' motivations and selection criteria for selecting countries and institutions can be attributed to a variety of factors, (Foster, 2014). In evaluating a university, students consider institutional factors such as perceptions of quality education and recognition of the university's brand (Cheong et al., 2015). Students are incentivised to enrol in international campuses because foreign campuses are often regarded positively in terms of student experience and employability (Wilkins & Huisman 2014). A key attribute is enabling students to study at a foreign university without being required to travel to the country of origin (Hill et al., 2014). With its successful hybridisation of British and American higher education, Malaysia has become a leading centre for higher education worldwide (Ahmad & Buchanan, 2017). Furthermore, globally, most international campuses conduct instruction in English (Wilkins & Urbanovic 2014). A study conducted in Malaysia by Cheong et al. (2015) on employment of graduates from international campuses revealed higher levels of competency in language than those obtained from public and private institutions.

The quality assurance of transnational education is regarded by Hill et al., (2014) as a key challenge. Gerson (2010) observed that many professors on the TNE program believe that their students' English skills are average or below, and that many students receive inflated grades. In addition, there is a general concern that teachers and students from countries that do not speak English will not possess the language skills necessary to successfully navigate the transnational education market (Wilkins, 2017). In consequence, the reputation of western higher education institutions may suffer if graduates lack the language skills necessary to operate effectively in the local labour market.

Currently, graduate employment outcomes are measured in many countries and have different links with basic funds. For instance, the Graduate Results Survey in the United Kingdom examines the employment status of graduates 15 months after graduation (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017). The Australian Government conducted a Graduate Outcome Survey four months after graduation (Social Research Centre, 2018), which employed similar employment outcome measures. Data on employment outcomes are relatively easy to measure and communicate to external stakeholders (Spence, 2018), but they cannot provide a complete understanding of employability from the perspective of continuous improvement and

future development and sustainability processes (Tomlinson, 2017). This broader concept of employability is supported by Holmes (2013). Divan et al., (2019) argued graduates should possess a set of skills and "behave in a way that ensures they are thought to be worthy of employment". Ahmad & Buchanan (2017) agreed that to ensure economic success in the workplace, an educational system should focus on supplying students with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Moreover, human capital development is a common perspective on higher education. Peng, Zhang, & Gu (2016) pointed out that universities must provide students with the necessary opportunities to develop the skills needed for employment by providing learners with opportunities to study abroad. Spence (2018) argued that education providers cannot continue to rely on traditional methods but must redistribute their internal resources and change the length, content, and mode of teaching in order to develop a human capital-based approach. Kalfa & Taksa (2015) argued that in the context of the neoliberal agenda, English speaking countries are increasingly focusing on entrepreneurship and customer-oriented universities are increasingly focused on ensuring the "employment-readiness" of graduates. In addition, graduates who possess the required human capital will be rewarded with a great job and earn significantly more during their working career (Bilsland, Carter & Wood, 2020).

Higher Education Graduates' Employability

At the turn of the century, a new phase began, characterised by greater autonomy in institutions' activities and a more distant relationship with industry (Peng, Zhang, & Gu, 2016). Soft skills consist of capabilities such as communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and creativity, and referred to by Moore & Morton (2017) as 21st century skills. Graduates' employment market has been criticised for its changing nature. As a result of increasing student enrolment, higher education (HE) graduates from developed economies are increasingly facing a pool of potential recruits seeking entry-level positions (Productivity Commission, 2017). Despite the high number of graduates recruited, concerns remain about their job preparation (Deloitte, 2017). This has led to calls for the transformation of universities and the introduction of work-based teaching methods such as degree programs that consult with industry to better prepare students for future careers (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). As part of

this process, graduates are required to identify the optimum combination of skills, attitudes, and personal attributes that may enhance their employment prospects (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Many of these skills and abilities are not technically focused but are referred to as non-technical or general skills and include cognitive, social, self-management and management skills, abilities and attributes that graduate students need to be successful on the job (Santos, 2020).

Increasing numbers of employer reports provide information on the importance of graduates being flexible, adaptable, accepting new technologies, and able to transfer their skills across environments (Jackson & Tomlinson, 2020). Consequently, as Suleman (2016) argued, because of market saturation, many graduates may have trouble obtaining employment opportunities at the graduate level and may have to engage in jobs that are insecure and do not provide an adequate degree of protection in the labour market.

Hence, mobility is a function of globalisation, and it increases the demand for adapting to different situations and transferring skills and knowledge (Deloitte, 2017, Foster, 2017). Furthermore, graduates participate in a wide range of changing and broad occupations, and their career trajectory reflects their openness to mobility, their willingness to accept mobility across different environments, their professional activities and self-orientation influenced primarily by values rather than external forces (O'Leary, 2016). Developing a career is not limited to linear advancement within a few employers. Instead, it requires individuals to manage their careers independently. It requires adaptability, initiative, and a strategy for success (Suleman, 2016). Consequently, more graduates realised the lack of traditional careers and learned to cultivate thinking and skills to ensure effective identification and guidance of a career path that is appropriate for their environment, goals, and abilities (Dicker et al., 2019).

Tomlinson (2012) found that students understand that the role of their education in the crowded labour market is declining, and that students recognize the need to create job advantages to improve employment prospects (Dicker et al., 2019). If employers' question graduate skills, it will have a negative impact on students' employability and the relationship between employers and higher education institutions (Suleman, 2016). Identifying and disseminating the high-quality attributes

identified by employers can help students use university services to upskill in graduate attributes (Tan & French-Arnold, 2012).

Employability is currently being understood as being not only to obtain employment, but also capable of finding a job (Wilkins, Balakrishnan, & Huisman 2012); demonstrating continuous learning and effective career management; and working in different cultures (Zhang et al., 2020). Employability skills can be considered the most important indicator of an individual's employability, and skill development in higher education is an important aspect of being employable (Jackson, 2013). There has been considerable research done on the concept of employability, and there are many differing views on how these skills may be developed in higher education institutions. Even though employability is seen as an educational goal (Pouratashi, 2019), for most students, it is their primary motivation and the reason to pursue higher education (Sin & Neave, 2016). In contrast, studies have demonstrated that the courses, teaching methods and educational aids used by universities are not directly related to the needs of the labour market (Abidin, 2021), and this results in unrealistic expectations for students regarding their employment futures. Therefore, despite the efforts made by higher education institutions to promote the employability of students, employers still claim that there is a gap between graduates and employers, a gap that needs to be resolved (Pouratashi, 2019).

Stakeholders Evaluation on Quality of Higher Education

It is difficult to define "quality" in higher education (Brockhoff, Huisman, & Laufer, 2015). Despite its multidimensionality (Abidin, 2021; Krause, 2012) and its dynamic and contextual nature, multiple stakeholders may have different conceptions of this complex concept (Schindler et al., 2015). Higher Education is dominated by three stakeholder groups, namely educational institutions, students, and employers (Abidin, 2021, Tan & French-Arnold, 2012). Nevertheless, educational institutions believe that quality must be examined from the perspective of social responsibility (value for money) and research results, in addition to the extent to which students' learning in higher education is in accordance with social needs.

There has been significant debate in recent years regarding the employability of graduates (Brockhoff, Huisman, & Laufer, 2015). The following two aspects are

helpful for understanding the literature. Firstly, there is employability - the ability of graduates to receive employment after graduation (Suarta et al., 2017). Secondly, there are the skills, attributes, and qualities which employers consider necessary to allow graduates to attain employment with them (Suleman, 2016). Universities endeavour to provide a unique perspective on employability that focuses on the graduates themselves and are committed to embedding employability and employability related skills in courses and plans (Suleman, 2016). The UK government's main report on higher education also emphasizes the role of universities in addressing the employability of graduates (Browne, 2010). Minocha et al., (2017) argued that there are two reasons to strengthen the discussion on the concept of graduates' employability: first, the government pays attention to graduates' employability and its importance to economic growth; secondly, employers emphasize the importance of developing graduates' skills and experience (Suarta et al., 2017). Inevitably, this raises the argument that in the era of rapid development of knowledge economy and globalisation, a core purpose is to train graduates ready for work (Teijeiro, Rungo, & Freire, 2013). The research of Brockerhoff, Huisman, & Laufer, (2015) emphasised that universities do not provide the right combination of skills to meet the needs of employers as there is often a mismatch between the demand for and supply of management skills (Mina & Probert, 2012); and in the cooperation between employers and higher education institutions (Douglas et al., 2015).

Over the past decade, industry and the government have conducted a series of studies aimed at measuring employers' satisfaction against the ability and personality of the graduates they hire (Minocha et al., 2017). The data suggested that universities as educational providers are often found to be insufficient to improve students' ability to work (Dicker et al., 2019). Many studies indicated that skill acquisition levels were below the required industry standards (Abidin, 2021, Tan & French-Arnold, 2012). Such a situation not only hinders graduates from obtaining satisfactory employment opportunities, but also inhibits the performance within organisations and ultimately the wider economy (Agrawal, 2014). Thus, there is to call for greater reform of the higher education curriculum, to ensure enhanced levels of "employment readiness" of graduates (Moore & Morton, 2017) and in developing 'Employer driven' initiatives to foster relationships between universities and

employers e.g. employer sponsored seminars, and internship models (Minocha, Hristov & Reynolds, 2017) as employers have raised concerns about graduate skill levels as one of the major challenges to effective recruitment (Mourshed, Farrell & Barton, 2012). For instance, McKinsey & Company conducted a survey of international employers in which half of them believing that new graduates were well qualified for entry-level jobs (Mourshed, Farrell & Barton, 2012).

In support, Abidin (2021) argued there is a wide gap between the views of education providers and that of employers. Even though employer focus on the capabilities and qualities of young people is not new (Douglas et al., 2015) a key concern is the level of poor student literacy and is often seen in conjunction with "an increase in political, moral and economic debate regarding community, culture, state, and economic direction," (Moore & Morton, 2017). To meet the needs of the knowledge economy and the globalised marketplace, universities in the UK are increasingly adopting principles of the market economy and a customer-centric entrepreneurial orientation (Douglas et al., 2015). In the current rapidly changing environment, there is a growing consensus that acquiring skills to adapt is imperative for people. Olojuolawe et al. (2019) have established the case for skill development to enable an individual to gain and retain work and there is general support that employability includes a variety of factors including knowledge and skills, learning ability, career management, and resilience (Minocha, Hristov & Reynolds, 2017). In consequence, Governments, universities, and employers will be encouraged to work together in order to provide advanced knowledge, skills, and abilities that students can apply to their careers (Kalfa & Taksa, 2015).

Interestingly, Jackson (2013) noted that the University was consumed by pressure from outside in order to improve employability. These new paradigms have also produced a conceptual pedagogy for higher education that aims to achieve the types of learning outcomes outlined by Oliver (2011), known as the "skills gap". This concept states that course content needs to include aspects that account for the "gap between industry needs and higher education provision" (Jackson, 2013). Considering this, it is recommended that the tasks and content in the "learning environment" and the "working environment" are as similar as possible to enhance the chances of the development and transfer of skills (Moore & Morton, 2017). To bridge this gap, Olojuolawe et al. (2019) indicated that experiential learning is the

most effective way to prepare graduates to work. However, Peng, Zhang, & Gu (2016) indicates that many university faculties and administrators believe the skills agenda is short-sighted, essentially mechanical, and incompatible with the purpose of higher education.

Research Gap

In recent years, British universities are keen to set up overseas TNE learning centers. However, there is a lack of research on how TNE education can help improve students' employability. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is primarily to determine how TNE education impacts the employability abilities of students. As a result of the summation of available literature, it is evident that in the traditional higher education system, the "golden thread" most notably manifests in a disconnect between students' education and their actual working abilities, which in turn arises from a failure to organize effective communication between higher education institutions and employers and industries. Most higher education institutions also place a strong emphasis on book education rather than teaching their students practical skills. Higher education offered by TNE has the advantage of offering students a more international perspective, which is consistent with the overall trend toward internationalization in higher education. This study uses the stakeholder model to include the views of the key players or stakeholders in the transnational education, TNE education institutions, students, and employers as stakeholders, to explore the employability of students in TNE educational institutions and to provide solutions to contribute to the internationalization of education.

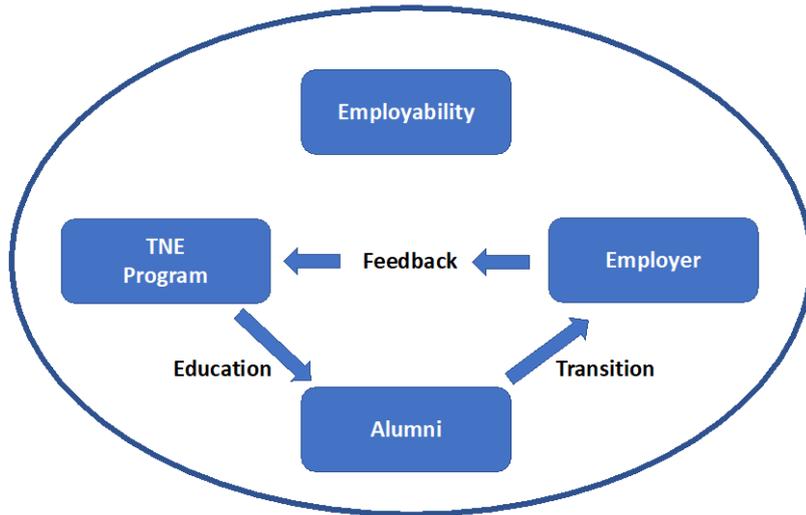


Figure 1 Conceptual Research Framework

The stakeholder model advocated by Freeman (1984) relies on the concepts of commitment, collaboration, and mutually beneficial employment enhancement strategies which are necessary to understand and address the perspectives of TNE centres, employers, and alumni stakeholders. As a stakeholder focused research approach, it is well suited to a study taking place in a TNE higher education environment, in which educational and sociocultural factors are different from those of the UK. Consequently, the adopted framework can build employability related knowledge that transcends skill possession related concepts of human capital, skill-based elements of work preparedness and social capital that TNE students are looking for from their academic investment. Besides including alumni in the conceptual framework, the central transitory positioning is also related to TNE centres, new employees, professionals, managers, and employers, this interactive role gives students critical insight into our research questions around understanding and supporting successful TNE programme.

Methodology

The research aim of the proposed investigation is to explore the impact of Transnational Education (TNE) on graduate employability utilising a stakeholder approach as explained above, (see Figure 1). Informed by the literature review, the following research objectives are proposed:

- To assess the strengths and limitations of employability prospects for TNE programme graduates at SEGi Malaysia and MDIS Singapore TNE centres.
- To investigate alumni SEGi and MDIS employability awareness and its effectiveness in seeking graduate employability.
- To examine international employer feedback in terms of the graduateness
- To synthesise a revised TNE stakeholder model to provide an enhanced bespoke offering to TNE centres in terms of employability with progression.

Data will be sourced via three key stakeholders namely two TNE centres, Employers and Alumni students. To achieve the breadth and depth of perspectives from the key stakeholders, a mixed method approach will be adopted including a survey, interviews and focus groups. Data will be analysed both quantitatively, namely ANOVA

with appropriate post-Hoc tests and t-tests. Hochberg's GT2 will be used for the post-Hoc tests due to different group sizes and appropriate non-parametric tests will also be run to confirm these results and qualitatively via NVivo thematic analysis.

Conclusion

The competitive environment witnessed within the higher educational system is both global and unrelenting. The TNE model aims to provide a successful gateway into international markets to help alleviate the domestic crowded UK student market. However, the challenges in nurturing graduates with enriched learning and much need employability skills within UK universities have also been exported within the TNE models. Employers on a global scale remain concerned at the lack of commercial insights and essential employability skills. The remedy is further compounded by the lack of research about the impact of completing TNE courses on students graduate prospects. The proposed research approach uses stakeholder approach to reach a comprehensive view of the impact of the TNE programmes and to achieve relevant and timely recommendations. Hence, the validity of the research project in assessing the TNE model in terms of the graduateness of exiting students into the world of work will lead to key recommendations to inform universities and meet the needs of both student and business expectations.

References

- Abidin, M. (2021). Stakeholders Evaluation on Educational Quality of Higher Education. *International Journal of Instruction*, 14(3), 287–308.
- Agrawal, T. 2014. "Skill development in India: an examination", *Journal of Education and Work*, 27, 6, pp.629–650.
- Ahmad, S. Z., & Buchanan, F. R., 2017. "Motivation factors in students' decision to study at international branch campuses in Malaysia." *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(4), pp.651–668.
- Bilsland, C., Carter L., & Wood L., 2020. "Beyond the degree: graduate transitions from a transnational campus in Vietnam". *Higher Education*. 80: pp.1103–1120
- Brockerhoff, L., J. Huisman, & M. Laufer. 2015. "Quality in Higher Education: A Literature Review." Ghent: Centre for Higher Education Governance.
- Browne, J. 2010, "Securing a sustainable future for higher education", an independent review of higher education funding and student finance, Available at www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report (accessed 18 October 2021).
- Cheong, K. C., C. Hill, R. Fernandez-Chung, & Y. C. Leong. 2015. "Employing the 'Unemployable': Employer Perceptions of Malaysian Graduates." *Studies in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/03075079.2015.1034260
- Deloitte. 2017. "Soft skills for business success." Melbourne: DeakinCo.
- Deloitte. 2018. "The 2018 Deloitte millennial survey." London: Deloitte
- Dicker, R., Garcia, M., Kelly, A., & Mulrooney, H. 2019. "What does "quality" in higher education mean? Perceptions of staff, students and employers." *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(8), pp.1425–1441.
- Divan, A., Knight, E., Bennett, D., & Bell, K. 2019. "Marketing graduate employability: understanding the tensions between institutional practice and external messaging." *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 41(5), pp.485–499

Douglas, J. A., Douglas, A., McClelland, R. J., & Davies, J. 2015. Understanding student satisfaction and dissatisfaction: an interpretive study in the UK higher education context. *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(2), pp.329–349

Farrugia, C. A., and J. E. Lane. 2013. “Legitimacy in Cross-Border Higher Education: Identifying Stakeholders of International Branch Campuses.” *Journal of Studies in International Education* 17 (4): pp.414–432.

Foster, M. and Killick, D. (2021) *Learner Relationships in a Global Higher Education: Critical*

intercultural pedagogy for a multicultural globalising world. Routledge ISBN 9780367271145

Garrett, R. 2017. “International branch campuses: curiosity or important trend?”. *International Higher Education*, 90, pp.7–8.

Foster, M. (2017) *Exploring the impact of international student mobility on cross-cultural learning adaptation. Empowering 21st Century Learners Through Holistic and Enterprising Learning*. Springer ISBN 978-981-10-4241-6 DOI: 10.1007/978-981-10-4241-6_16

Foster, M. (2014) *Student destination choices: Brazilian students’ attitudes to study in the UK*. *Journal of Research in International Education* Vol 13(2) 149-162 ISSN: 1475-2409

Gerson, J. 2010. “Inflation of Grades is Widespread, Study Says.” *The National*, 24 January. Accessed 20 July 2021. <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/education/inflation-ofgrades- is-widespread-study-says>

Haasler, S. R. 2013, “Employability skills and the notion of self”, *International Journal of Training and Development*, 17, 3, pp.233–243.

Higher Education Statistics Agency. 2017. “NewDLHE: The future of graduate outcomes data”. A synthesis. Cheltenham: Author.

Hill, C., K.-C. Cheong, Y.-C. Leong, & R. Fernandez-Chung., 2014. “TNE – Trans-National Education Tensions Between National and External? A Case Study of Malaysia.” *Studies in Higher Education* 39 (2): pp.952–966

Holmes, L. 2013. "Competing perspectives on graduate employability: Possession, position or process?", *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), pp.538–554.

Jackson, D. 2013. "Business Graduate Employability – Where Are We Going Wrong?" *Higher Education Research & Development* 32 (5): pp.776–790.

Jackson, D., & Tomlinson, M. 2020. "Investigating the relationship between career planning, proactivity and employability perceptions among higher education students in uncertain labour market conditions." *Higher Education* (00181560), 80(3), pp.435–455.

Kalfa, S., & Taksa, L. 2015. "Cultural capital in business higher education: reconsidering the graduate attributes movement and the focus on employability." *Studies in Higher Education*, 40(4), pp.580–595.

Krause, K.-L. 2012. "Addressing the Wicked Problem of Quality in Higher Education: Theoretical Approaches and Implications." *Higher Education Research and Development* 31 (3): pp.285–297.

Levatino, A. 2017. "Transnational higher education and international student mobility: determinants and linkage". *Higher Education*, 73(5), pp.637–653

Mina, A. & Probert, J. 2012. "Enhancing Collaboration Creating Value: Business Interaction with the UK Research Base in Four Sectors", London: Council for Industry and Higher Education.

Minocha, S., Hristov, D., & Reynolds, M. 2017. "From graduate employability to employment: policy and practice in UK higher education." *International Journal of Training & Development*, 21(3), pp.235–248.

Mok, K.H., & Wu, A.M. 2016. "Higher education, changing labour market and social mobility in the era of massification in China", *Journal of Education and Work*, 29(1), pp.77–97. doi:10.1080/13639080.2015.1049028

Moore, T., & Morton, J. 2017. "The myth of job readiness? Written communication, employability, and the 'skills gap' in higher education." *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(3), pp.591–609.

O’Leary, S. 2016. “The Opportunities and Challenges for Employability-related Support in STEM Degrees.” Horizons in STEM Higher Education Conference: Making Connections and Sharing Pedagogy, University of Leicester

Oliveira, E. D., & Castro Guimaraes, I. 2010.” Employability through curriculum innovation and skills development: A Portuguese case study. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 22(2), pp.83–101.

Oliver, B. 2011. “Assuring Graduate Outcomes”. Strawberry Hills, Australia: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

Olojuolawe, R. S., Amin, N. F., Latif, A. A., & Arsat, M. 2019. Employability skills of higher education graduates: A review and integrative approach. TVET Towards Industrial Revolution 4.0: Proceedings of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training International Conference (TVETIC 2018)

Peng, L., Zhang, S., & Gu, J., 2016. Evaluating the competency mismatch between Master of Engineering graduates and industry needs in China. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(3), pp.445–461.

Pouratashi, M. 2019. “Higher education and activities to improve students’ employability skills.” *Journal of Education for Business*, 94(7), pp.433–439.

Productivity Commission. 2017. “Shifting the dial: 5-year productivity review.” Canberra: Australian Government.

Santos, G. G. 2020. “Career boundaries and employability perceptions: an exploratory study with graduates.” *Studies in Higher Education*, 45(3), pp.538–556.

Schindler, L., S. Puls-Elvidge, H. Welzant, and L. Crawford. 2015. “Definitions of Quality in Higher Education: A Synthesis of the Literature.” *Higher Learning Research Communications* 5 (3): pp.3–13

Sin, C., & Neave, G. 2016. “Employability deconstructed: perceptions of Bologna stakeholders”. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(8), pp.1447–1462.

Social Research Centre. 2018. “Graduate outcomes survey”. Retrieved from <https://www.srcentre.com.au/our-research/graduate-outcomes-survey>

Spence, C. 2018. "Judgement' versus metrics in higher education management". Higher Education. doi:10.1007/s10734-018-0300-z

Suarta, I. M., Suwintana, I. K., Sudhana, I. F. P., & Hariyanti, N. K. D., 2017. Employability skills required by the 21st century workplace: A literature review of labor market demand. International Conference on Technology and Vocational Teachers (ICTVT 2017).

Suleman, F., 2016. Employability skills of higher education graduates: little consensus on a much-discussed subject. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 228, pp.169–174.

Tan, L. C., & French-Arnold, E. (2012). Employability of graduates in Asia: An overview of case studies. Bangkok Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education: UNESCO.

Teijeiro, M., Rungo, P., & Freire, M. J., 2013. Graduate competencies and employability: The impact of matching firms' needs and personal attainments. *Economics of Education Review*, 34, pp.286–295.

Tomlinson, M. 2012. "Graduate Employability: A Review of Conceptual and Empirical Themes." *Higher Education Policy* 25: pp407–31.

Tomlinson, M. 2017. "Introduction: Graduate employability in context: Charting a complex, contested and multi-faceted policy and research field." In M. Tomlinson & L. Holmes (Eds.), *Graduate employability in context: Theory, research and debate* pp. 1–40.

Walker, M., & Fongwa, S. 2017. "Universities, employability and human development", London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wilkins, S. 2017. "Ethical issues in transnational higher education: the case of international branch campuses." *Studies in Higher Education*, pp.1-16.

Wilkins, S., and J. Huisman. 2014. "Factors Affecting University Image Formation Among Prospective Higher Education Students: The Case of International Branch Campuses." *Studies in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/03075079.2014.881347

Wilkins, S., and J. Urbanovič. 2014. "English as the Lingua Franca in Transnational Education: Motives and Prospects of Institutions that Teach in Languages other than English." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 18 (5): pp.405–425.

Wilkins, S., M. S. Balakrishnan, and J. Huisman. 2012. "Student Choice in Higher Education: Motivations for Choosing to Study at an International Branch Campus." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 16 (5): pp.413–433.

Zhang Z., Heydon R., Li W., and Malins P. 2020. "Association Literacies and identities in transnational education: a case study of literacy curricula in a Canadian transnational education programme in China." *The Curriculum Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 132–156

Authors Biographies

Professor Monika Foster (ORCID 000-002-224-1003) is the Head of School, Business and Management, working with students as partners, Monika has had a transformational impact on student experience including enhanced transitions for mature and international students in the UK, and the development of internationalized curriculum in the UK and internationally. She has been recognized the impact of her work with the students with the award of National Teaching Fellow. Monika's external profile includes the award of Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, an advisory role with HEA to develop a national Framework for Internationalisation, and a title of Visiting Professor from the Shandong University of Finance, People's Republic of China. Monika's research interests lie in cross-cultural management, employability, internationalization of higher education, intercultural aspects, and leadership and change management. Furthermore, her research interests lie in international mobility, study destination choices and internationalisation of the curriculum. Monika has published her research internationally and in the UK. She has been an Editor for a selection of academic journals.

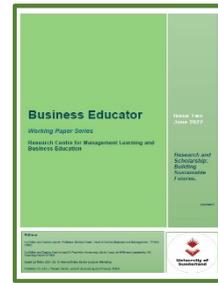
Dr Yuan Zhai (ORCID 0000-0002-4753-3758) joined the higher education sector in the UK since 2021 as a lecturer in business. Throughout my career, I have been involved in several social science research activities across several countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, China, France, Brazil, India, and Russia. My research interests include, but are not limited to, enterprise strategy, operation and supply chain management, and enterprise internationalization. I have considerable experience conducting social science research outside the university setting. In addition to doing social science research, my role as a consultant for enterprises and social organizations helped me facilitate a few projects for Chinese enterprises and universities, as well as educational and training projects for UK universities.

Dr Derek Watson (ORCID 0000-0002-1944-3544) is an Associate Professor and Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, founder of the faculty 'Business Clinic' and the Doctoral lead for the University's 'Research Fridays' programme. Dr Watson has extensive links and networks because of sourcing and embedding external engagement opportunities across the curriculum, with an international portfolio of clients and contacts, such as the British Cabinet Office, Indian Government Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, Dubai Police and Canon International. His research focuses on Food Safety Cultural

Compliance and Academic-Industry collaboration, investigating the impact of knowledge exchange on practice in both the classroom and the workplace. He actively documenting his consultancy experience via international academic journals and has delivered lectures and seminars at universities and symposiums on a global scale. He has been appointed on the editorial board for the 'International Journal of Academic Research in Management'. Dr Watson is also a Doctoral External Examiner, academic reviewer of several international journals and currently employed as 'External Examiner' for Staffordshire and Chester University DBA programmes. In addition, his is also a Visiting Professor at the University of Panama in Food Culture and a Senior Research Fellow at the Cyprus Business School.



Business Educator
**Working Paper Series of the Centre for
Management Learning and Business
Education**



A conceptual study on the application of qualitative methods to the study of international master foundation students' online engagement during the pandemic lockdown

Iris Li Ren ^{a, 3}

^a *Academic Tutor, University of Sunderland*

Keywords:

International Master Foundation Level students, Engagement, Online teaching and learning, Research paradigm, Ontological assumption, Epistemological assumption, Qualitative research method, Mix method

Abstract

Covid-19 pandemic has affected teaching and learning in many perspectives. This paper is emerging conceptualisation experience on the impact of Covid-19 on teaching practice. As a conceptual paper, it discusses the qualitative method used on the study of factors influencing international master foundation level students' online engagement and review the limitations and issues it caused; Comparing to the mix method, this paper from ontological and epistemological assumption perspectives critically reflects and analyses the effectiveness, validity, and the limitations of the qualitative method applied in the research, and thereby benefiting other studies investigate online teaching and students' online engagement efficiency in research method application.

³ Corresponding author. iris.ren@sunderland.ac.uk

Introduction

In the earlier stage of doing research, one of the key decisions researchers need to make is about the approach the research project should use. In the research process, the researcher will bring his/her philosophical assumptions to the study, which influences their research design and strategies. Here, the philosophical assumptions are always related to researchers' beliefs and attitude to look at the social issues and phenomena, and therefore decide the approaches and methods/tools to do further investigation. There are 3 research approaches, i.e., quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods; reviewing the methods used in other research in the titled area, the mixed method might be considered as an overarching methodology, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) consider mixed methods research reside in the middle of this continuum because it incorporates elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, it is also noticed mixed method research has been argued from 2 perspectives, i.e., the researcher's epistemological commitment and incompatibilities between the 2 paradigms. This conceptual study uses one of my recent research projects which investigates the 'factors influencing international students' online engagement during the lockdown time' as an example, from the ontological and epistemological perspectives to explore the value and limitations of using qualitative method interview as the tool to answer the following two research questions in that study, one is '*What are the factors having impact on international business students' online study during the lockdown?*', and another is '*Among all factors studied, to what extent the cultural perspectives are related to those international students' online Research Method study during the lockdown?*' Also, although many researchers and scholars consider the mixed method is controversial, this paper discusses on whether it can address some of the issues raised by qualitative method and semi-structured interview.

Literature Review

Researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research. Creswell (2013) explains that qualitative researcher collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, or interview participants. Antwi and Hamza (2015) asserted that

qualitative researchers do not believe the world and its phenomena will be measured by applying quantified properties; instead, they believe that the reality exists in different views from people, and their assumption is that the objective way to study a particular phenomenon does not apply. Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issues or problem under study. Although the qualitative researchers are the interpreter of human behaviour observed and the participant in social events and activities, the challenge exists here is to know the origins of their thoughts, i.e., the philosophy of questioning and giving assumption which based upon their belief and value than knowing their data collected. Hughes and Davies (2014) argued that any researcher is prone to a partial perspective, influenced by their own background and prior position on a topic. This background here can be related to researcher's native culture, education background and life experience, and all these will shape researcher's positionality. Positionality describes about individual's world views and position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context (Foote & Bartell, 2011, Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 and Rowe, 2014, cited in Holmes, 2020). One distinctive difference comparing to quantitative researchers is that qualitative researchers will always involve themselves by playing more participating roles in their research process and writing out their belief and those to what extent their beliefs interpret the world, especially the data collection.

Methodology

Qualitative method research- using semi-structured interview

The research studied the 'factors influencing international students' online engagement' origins from my daily teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown time. During this period, universities moved most of their teachings online, so as a teaching practitioner, I focus on students' engagement to their online lessons and do some observations on international students from daily work, especially the effective motivations and encouragement on their online engagement with teachers and other peer students. Adopting constructivism view (see the diagram in Appendix-1), therefore, my research collects the information from the teaching and learning

activities that international students and I participated as the rationale of doing the research.

As an organiser and participant in the teaching and learning process, my ontological and epistemological assumption supports me to start with two questions, which are *'what roles I played and if my roles have any impacts on international students' online engagement; if there is/are, from which perspective?' and 'what affect international students' engagement to their online Research Method study for them to have better learning effectiveness and do good research?'* Considering teaching and learning as a communication process and in this process, teachers are the knowledge message encoder and sender, I evaluate my impact on students' learning; at the same time, students, as the decoder and recipient of the same knowledge message, I consider students are qualified to give their perceptions and opinions. For this reason, I conduct semi-structured individual interview to international students with the questions referenced the theoretical model (engagement) from other scholars, such as Kahu's (2013) conceptual framework of engagement, antecedents and consequences; Heffernan's (2018) online engagement framework; Conole's (2004) framework for e-learning, and cultural perspectives from Chen (2012), Hofstede (1986), and Liu, *et al.* (2010), and together with my daily teaching reflections, I could have their different views and opinions on the factors affecting their online study engagement, especially from cultural perspectives to interpret and summarise to what extent teachers' roles are related to.

More importantly, reviewing other researchers' reasons (philosophical and practical) and considerations why the qualitative methods adopted can enlighten me to reconsider the value and significance in practice of using qualitative semi-structured interview, especially considering the ethical issues of doing this research during the lockdown time. However, it is noted that most of the research articles reviewed only introduce what is used and how it is conducted to have the data collection results rather than clarifying the philosophical reasons behind, which is also identified by Uzuner (2009) in his methodological insights that most papers reviewed using qualitative method no one explained how themes and categories were developed, what verification processes were used to confirm validity, or how triangulation was achieved.

Based on the five interview genres from Langley and Meziani's (2020), as explanatory research, the semi-structured interview with international students is via Team online. Supported by Liu, *et al.* (2010), the way to record their one-to-one interviews, either by phone or by Team online is asked in advance with their preference and had their consent. 10 international students participated with their consent on a 45min – 60min interview recorded for research data analysis purposes but agreed not to save on school's sharing drive. According to Saunders, *et al.* (2019), semi-structured interview has advantages after considering the research objectives, the nature of the research question, and the significance of setting up the personal contact.

Findings and Discussion

Advantages vs Limitations of Doing Semi-structured Interview in Research

The advantages of doing semi-structured interview in this research can be summarised as follow (more details also see Appendix- 2):

- *Direct collection of non-verbal communication data*

Interview (face-to-face or online), except the in time response after the question asked (but it is also argued as a disadvantage), another key advantage is information collected and interpreted from non-verbal communication, such as body-language, facial expression, hand gesture, and even the computing sign/language (using emojis); In practice, online interview for my research is with less advantages during this lockdown, which is discussed detailed in later limitations and pressures from technology session.

- *Power gaining from the interview questions frame (prepared in advance), but flexibility of developing further questions based on participants' feedback and answers*

The semi-structured interview has the flexibility to follow up the interviewees' views and opinions with other deeper questions. Power here is an interesting acknowledgement in doing interview research; it is realised as 'double-edged' sword; on one hand, the designed questions for all interviewees keep me on the track of focusing on the research questions; on the other hand, they require me good

interview skills and techniques to come back to the main line of the interview from the interviewees' feedback to previous further following-up questions.

Every coin has 2 sides, the decision of using semi-structured interview is not exceptional. Using semi-structured interview in my research are also with practical problems:

Language competency

Language competency is considered as one of the key dilemmas in using semi-structured interview for the reason that it is the carrier and tool to express and be understood. Although Usnier, *et al.* (2017) consider "interviews are less popular in cross-cultural research than they are in domestic settings because language is often a significant barrier" (p.78), in my research, English is used during the interview because those students are doing UK's master's degree and the program English entry requirements give me an assumption that interview in English will reach the same effectiveness in communication. Among these 10 international students, they are from 6 countries, which are Nigeria (3), China (2), India (2), Egypt (1), Lebanon (1) and Uganda (1).

They are all at Master foundation level and doing their research portfolio as the key assessment.

In practice, there is a big gap existed between them, especially looking at this issue from the continent they are from. The overtime interview for the Lebanese student and Chinese student spent on clarifying their meaning; but for two Indian students and one Nigerian student longer time used to make sure what they exactly explained because of their heavy accent and dialect.

Continent	Competent English in interview	Incompetent English in interview
Asia	Indian students	<div data-bbox="657 412 1008 517" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> English Level in between Chinese students </div> Lebanese student
Africa	Nigerian students	<div data-bbox="657 560 1027 645" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> English Level in between Uganda students </div> Egypt student

Table - 1 Interviewees' (International students) English competency (Summarised by the researcher)

Limitations and pressures from technology (Team/ Internet/Electricity)

During the lockdown, universities were shut, so students do not need to appear in classroom on campus. Technology and the Internet provide people possibilities of doing as much as normal time. However, relying on them to do online semi-structured interview, I learnt more practical issues to concern in future research rather than advantages, such as the instability of the internet in students' home countries, asynchronous sound, and image during the interview and even the limited electricity supply time in Nigeria.

Losing control of online interview environment

Doing research during the lockdown time is challenging, especially for collecting data by doing online interviews. Face-to-face interview, the interviewer could communicate with the interviewees to agree with one venue that appropriate for discourse with formal but relaxing atmosphere. In practice, the online semi-structured interview in my research, students stayed in their normal study environment, most of them were at home. The distractions from children, pets, outside street projects and etc were happened without planning.

Cross-cultural communication

The researcher needs to be aware that the manner in which he/she interact with the interviewees and ask questions will impact on the data collected (Saunders, N.K., M. *et al.*, 2019, p.445). Asking questions without taking interviewer's personal and cultural bias is always easy to say, learning myself and shadowing on the questions I asked in the research is hardly anticipated in advance, the dilemma is in terms of afterwards realisation.

Power floating between 2 parties, but 4 roles

Another dilemma existed is related to the relationship (hierarchical if it is appropriate to use here) between me and students and our 4 roles played in the interview. i.e., the research interviewer also their module teacher and the research interviewees (participants), the module students (visualised in Diagram – 1 below). Students from different cultural backgrounds interpret the relationship with varied hierarchical sense and the power existed in between is differently.

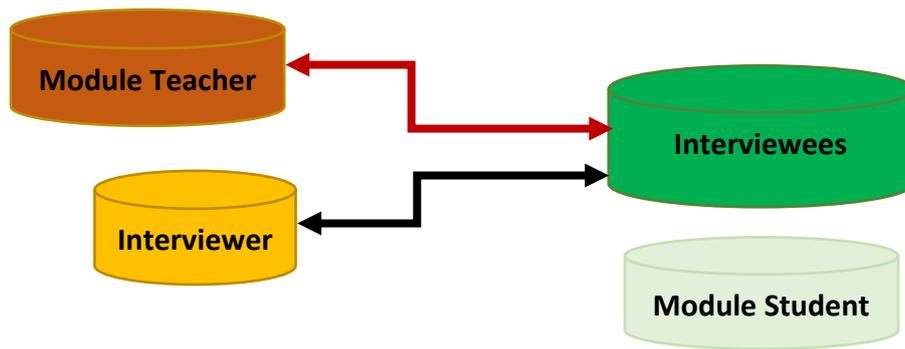


Diagram – 1 Cross-roles for participants in the interview (summarised by researcher)

Furthermore, through their interviews it is more interesting to notice that previous continent model to learn their English competency is hardly relevant here. For example, although Asian culture is considered with higher power distance (Hofstede, 1986), both Chinese and Lebanese students acknowledged me as their module teacher first then interviewer, but they interpret this acknowledgement in to different extents- Chinese students consider me as their teacher from 'long-time future' point of view, i.e. their future assessment marker; but the Lebanese student would like to cooperate and participate me, the module teacher as another academic task teacher gave. Quoted in Uzuner (2009), Liang and McQueen (2000) explain Asian students "tend to hold back their thoughts when they perceive the teacher will not favourably receive messages that are contrary to what they want to hear". Relying on interview only, it is a critical sample issue for my future research which affects data reliability and validity, especially if the participates are the students I teach.

Ethical issues of using interview method

Ethical issues go through the entire process of an interview investigation, the researcher should give the concerns from the start of the project. Except those ethical issues in limitations mentioned previously, such as school's consent on interview research, the way of doing video and audio record and the storage of the data collected and etc are communicated in advance with interviewees to have their consent, there are other considerations as below:

- a) Sensitive and private questions to one but not another. This is related to ethical implications in the different strategies of gaining international students (interviewees) trust, the questions to Chinese students are acceptable and helpful to build trustful relationship but might be related to private issue for students from Nigeria.
- b) Confidentiality and anonymity of interviewees, and this will need to be communicated clearly beforehand, a list document is considered to prepare and to go through with each interviewee in earlier stage, but more importantly is to fulfil those promises. As Rabionet (2011) states crafting the interview protocol can establish rapport, create an adequate environment and elicit reflection and truthful comments from the interviewee. Mason (1958) argued it

is hardly to fulfil it since the actually rich and personal nature of the data generated from qualitative interviews by saying that “such data can usually be recognised by the interviewee whether or not you attach the interviewee’s name to them and also they may be recognisable to other people” (p.93).

- c) Making sure the quality of the questions in the interview. Rich sources of literature reviewed are the way used in the research to minimise impact from personal bias, but it is a critical issue what strategies could be effectively reflected on the interview questions perceived by the interviewees as being respectful and culturally sensitive.
- d) Recoding the interview (audio and video). Asking interviewees’ preference of being recorded is with risk, the flexibility brings complexity while putting data together for analysis. Two interviewees are not preferred to be image recorded, respectful to their option, I did only do audio record of their interview, but it caused me complications at data analysis to clarify what from whom.

Regarding to the above ethical issues, some of them are considered if other methods can help.

Considering a Mixed-method research

Saunders et.al. (2019) defined mixed methods research as the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedures either at the same time (concurrent) or one after the other (sequential). Since 1980s, mixed method research has been increasing, especially in business and education research, such as, Troconis, T. M *et al.*, (2019), and those 8 out of 27 employed mixed methods reviewed in the work of Uzuner (2009), for instance, Ku and Lohr (2003), Selinger (2004), and Wang (2007) etc. Using more than one method in research sometimes referred to as triangulation, but it is not as simple as it first sounds (Grix, 2018, p.132). As mentioned previously, most of the mixed method research did not explain the way of triangulations clearly. The exact mixture that is considered appropriate will depend on the research questions and the situational and practical issues facing a researcher (Antwi and Hamza, 2015). The popularity of

using mixed method in research is accompanied with some arguments. Bryman (2016) points out that there are 2 main arguments about using mixed method in doing research, which are about:

- The research methods carry epistemological commitment
- Quantitative and qualitative are separative paradigms

In this case, some researchers argued that pragmatic is another research paradigm, it focuses more on research questions rather than methods. Pragmatism is always considered working best for the particular research problem that is being investigated, and it is associated with mixed methods. Parvaiz, et.al., (2016) explains pragmatist conducts mixed method research believes one should stop asking questions about the laws of nature and reality (ontology) and theory of the knowledge (epistemology). Creswell (2018) considers individuals holding an interpretive framework based on pragmatism focus on the outcomes of the research- the actions, situations, and consequences of inquiry- rather than antecedent conditions (p.28). Differentiating with multiple methods approaches, Fetters and Molin-Azorin (2017) consider it include using more than one method of data collection that can be all quantitative, all qualitative or a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods; in consequence, they classify the mixed research approach as one form of the multiple methods approaches. Diagram 2 below is based upon their clarification, 'mixed research' is considered to apply to the research, which includes interview and Focus Group. Woolley (2009) explains the focus group method provided a means of accessing group meanings processes and norms (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, and Robson, 2001) and is particularly valuable for exploring and understanding why people think as they do (Morgan, 1988). A focus group interview of 5 or 6 students in each group together with individual interviews can be considered to those teachers/tutors teaching the similar modules to the same level international students, and therefore this way could avoid the 'hierarchical way' of perceiving interviewer' role as interviewees' teacher More.

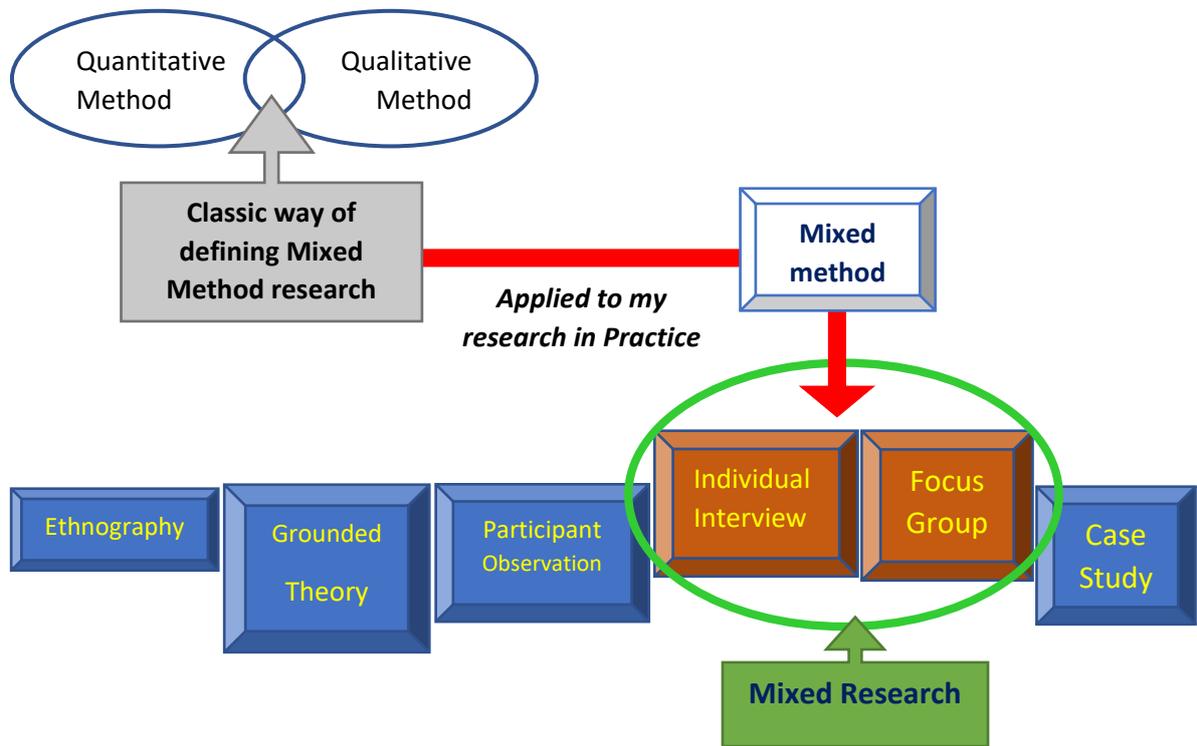


Diagram – 2 A Mixed Research (based on Fetters and Molin-Azorin: 2017, created by the researcher)

Meanwhile, using focus group interview of international students together with individual interviews conducted to some teachers will help with overtime due to some interviewees' language incompetency. Also, if I arrange individual interviews first then follow by those frontline teaching staff's views and opinions, this will give me inspiration and instructive information on focus group interviews. However, if I use focus group interview to students, I need to pay attention to the relationship between participants and dominating roles played by one or few interviewees or one culture than the other due to their cultural differences in a group environment, as Zhao and McDougall (2008) found that some of the Chinese learners "hesitated to ask questions and some even gave up on a discussion or contributed fewer messages when their opinions conflicted with those other participants" (p.72). Also, another issue will raise, i.e., how the data collected by individual interview could be linked and combined with those collected by focus group interview and how to respect privacy and confidentiality from individuals in the focus group interview.

Conclusion

This paper gives an opportunity to review and re-consider the research methodology and approaches used for the research from both philosophical and the paradigm perspectives. The qualitative paradigm is based on subjectivism and interpretivism. Interview in qualitative research used is with both advantages and limitations, especially during this lockdown time. Good qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews relies on the knowledge, skills, vision, and integrity of the researcher doing that analysis. Training and experience are crucial for this endeavour (Dingwall, et al., 2002, quoted in Rabionet, 2011). Reflective learning in qualitative research practice is critically helpful for 'knowing myself and thinking why I assume so', which are the vital prerequisite of designing interview questions.

Meanwhile, focusing more on 'what will work' for my research questions and objectives to find the factors related to international students' online engagement and to what extent related to teachers' role from the practical situation, I consider the views and opinions from other teachers teaching similar modules to the same level international students are important too. The advantages of using mixed methods are different methods are complementary to each other. Based upon what Fetters and

Molin-Azorin (2017) and Johson and Christensen (2012) acknowledged, mixed research is as more accurate than mixed method for my research since the debates about classic mixed method research are mainly about philosophy (Marrouf, 2019). Therefore, focus group interview to internationals students together with individual interview to teachers are considered to use to avoid some issues raised from interview. It does not mean the complementary mixed research will have no disadvantages or limitations; instead, how to make them compatible with each other and maximise their roles in research has become a new round topic.

References

Alise, A. M., and Teddlie, C. (2010) 'A continuation of the paradigm wars? Prevalence rates of methodological approaches across the social/behavioral sciences', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(2), pp.103 – 126.

Antwi, K. S., and Hamza, K. (2015) 'Qualitative and quantitative research paradigms in Business Research: A Philosophical Reflection', *European Journal of Business and Management*, 7(3), pp. 217 – 225.

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*, 5th edn. Oxford University Press, p. 636

Creswell, J. W. (2013) *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches*. 3rd edn. SAGE Publications, Inc. p. 28 - 34

Chen, M. G., (2012) 'The Impact of New Media on Intercultural Communication in Global Context', *China Media Research*, 8(2), pp. 1-10. Available at: https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1012&context=com_facpubs (Accessed: 04/04/2021)

Conole, G., (2004) 'E-learning: the hype and the reality', *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*, (2004) 12, pp. 1-19, Available at: URL: <http://www-jime.open.ac.uk/2004/12/> (Accessed: 03/04/2021)

Creswell, J. W. and Creswell, J. D. (2018) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. 5th edn. SAGE Publications, Inc., pp. 3-15

Fetters, M.D. and Molina-Azorin, J. F. (2017) 'The Journal of mixed methods research starts a new decade: The mixed methods research integration trilogy and its dimensions', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 12 (9), pp. 291 – 307, Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1558689817714066> (Accessed: 03 April, 2021)

Grix, J. (2019) *The foundations of research*, 3rd edn. London: Red Global Press, p.132

Heffernan, A., (2018) 'An online engagement framework for higher education', online Learning Journal, 22(1), pp. 183 – 204. Available at: <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=477288e1-9f74-4f8b-ac4847c1c8d60b16%40sessionmgr102> (Accessed: 05 April 2021)

Hofstede, G., (1986) 'Cultural differences in teaching and learning', International journal of intercultural relations (10), pp. 301 -320. Available at: <https://www-sciencedirect-com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/science/article/pii/0147176786900155> (Accessed: 05 April 2021)

Holmes, A. G. D., (2020) 'Researcher positionality- A Consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research – A New Research Guide', International Journal of Education, 8(4), pp.1 – 11.

Hughes, N. and Davies, M. (2014) Doing a successful research project: using qualitative or quantitative methods, 2nd edn. Palgrave Macmillan, p184

Johnson, B., and Christensen, L. (2012) 'Educational research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches', 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage publications.

Kahu, R. E. (2013) 'Framing student engagement in higher education', Studies in Her Education, 38(5), pp. 758 – 773.

Langley, A. and Meziani, N., (2020) 'Making interview meaningful', The journal of Applied Behavioural Science. Available at: <https://journals-sagepub-com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/doi/pdf/10.1177/0021886320937818> (Accessed: 05/04/2021).

Liu, X., Liu, S., Lee, S.-h., & Magjuka, R. J. (2010) 'Cultural differences in online learning: International student perceptions', Educational Technology & Society, 13 (3), pp.177–188. Available at: URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/jeductechsoci.13.3.177> (Accessed: 05/04/2021)

Maarouf, H. (2019) 'Pragmatism as a supportive paradigm for the mixed research approach: conceptualising the ontological, epistemological, and axiological stances of pragmatism', International Business Research, 12(9), pp. 1 – 12.

Mason, J. (1990) 'Qualitative researching', SAGE, pp.92 - 96

Parvaiz, S. G., Mufti, O. and Wahab, M. (2016) 'Pragmatism for mixed methods research at higher education level', Business & Economic Review, 8(2), pp. 67 – 79.

Rabionet, S. (2011) 'How I learned to design and conduct semi-structured interviews: An ongoing and continuous journey', *The Qualitative Report*, 16(2), pp. 563-566.

Sauders, N.K. M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2019) *Research methods for business students*. 8th edn. Pearson Education Limited, pp. 437-438, p445

Troconis, T. M., Alexander, J. and Perez, F. M. (2019) 'Assessing student engagement in online programmes: Using learning design and learning analytics', *International Journal of Higher Education*, 8(6), pp. 171 – 183.

Usnier, C. J., Herk, V. H. and Lee, A. A. (2017) *International & Cross-cultural business research*, London: SAGE, p.78.

Uzuner, S. (2009) 'Questions of culture in distance learning: A research review', *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 10 (3), pp. 1 -19.

Woolley, M. C. (2009) 'Meeting the mixed methods challenge of integration in a sociological study of structure and agency', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 3(1), pp.7 – 25.

Zhao, N. X., and McDougall, D., (2008) 'Cultural influences on Chinese students asynchronous online learning in a Canadian university', *Journal of Distance Education*, 22(2), pp. 59 – 80. Available at: <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.ncl.ac.uk/docview/214482762?pq-origsite=primo> (Accessed: 05/04/2021).

Appendix – 1 Paradigm in Qualitative Research

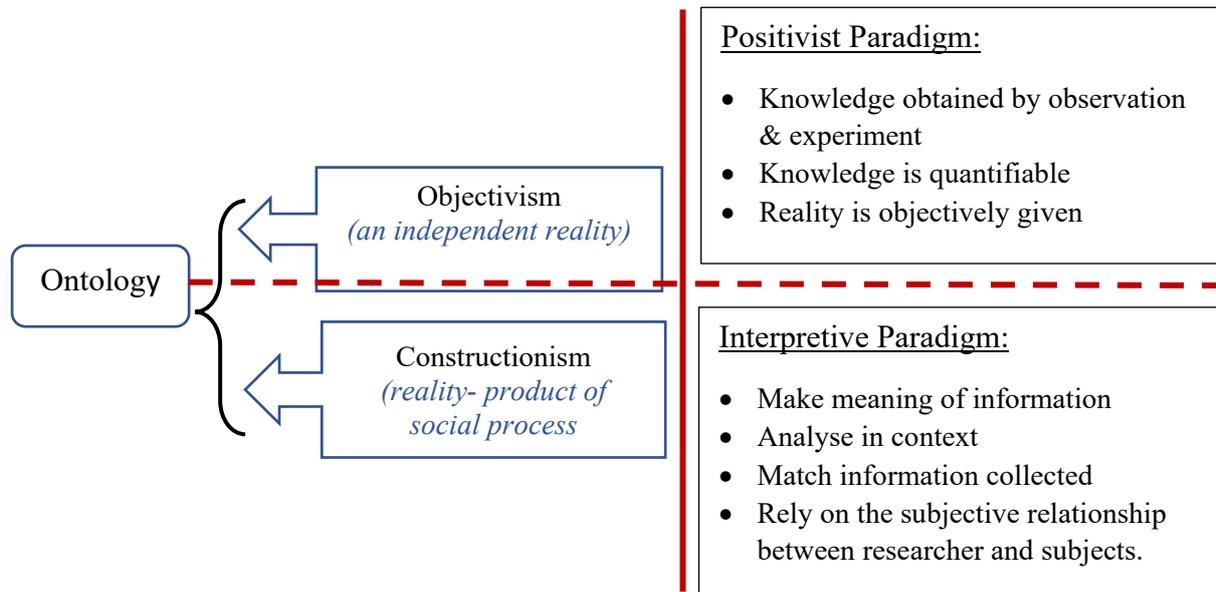


Diagram 3 –Ontology’s Two Positions & Paradigm (derived from Antiwi and Hamza: 2015)

Appendix – 2 Advantages vs Disadvantages on Different Types of Interviews

Way of Doing	Qualitative Research <u>(Interview)</u>		
	Structured Interview	<u>Interview (Semi-structured)</u>	Un-structured Interview
<p>Face-to-Face Interview</p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u> </p> <p>To gain direct insight, make clear about the important focuses to participants, great opportunities given to researchers to listen and observe</p> <p><u>Disadvantages:</u> </p> <p>Sensitive issues or questions evoke stronger feelings, Be more susceptible by personal bias from both interviewer and interviewees</p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u></p> <p>Direct and focused; high responding; The respondent's immediate response and answer</p> <p><i>(Also, this could be a 'black-box' from people's immediate feedback as a disadvantages)</i></p> <p><u>Limitations:</u></p> <p>Power shifting: 1st thoughts and idea expressed by participants, which</p> <p><i>(Also, as advantages)</i></p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u> </p> <p>Easy to probe more questions and information track, add depth and validity to research data, to conduct an ease style interview environment</p> <p><u>Disadvantages:</u> </p> <p>“Risk of not eliciting form the junior researchers the topics or themes more closely related to the research questions under consideration” (Rabionet, E. S., 2011).</p>

<p>Face-to-face Interview (Remote way/Online)</p>	<p><u>Advantages:</u> Saving time, wellbeing issue and social distance during the lockdown time </p> <p>Plus, those in  + those similar to</p> <p><u>Disadvantages:</u></p>	<p>Advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct and focused; high responding. - 1st thoughts and idea expressed by participants <p>Limitations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethical issues (recoding the data/data storage) - Internet & Technology (instability and asynchronous of non-verbal communication and vocal expressions) - Distraction of the interview environment (due to the Covid-19 lockdown) 	<p><u>Advantages:</u> Time saving, wellbeing issue and social distance during the lockdown time, Using software or Apps to record/store data (need consent from participants)</p> <p>Plus, those in </p> <p><u>Disadvantages:</u> those +  similar to</p>
----------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Table - 2 'T shape' model for Advantages and Limitations of Semi-structured interview

(Designed and summarised by the researcher based on the research example)

Author Biographies

Iris Li Ren (ORCID 0000-0001-5595-2410) teaches undergraduate students Management Thoughts & Practice and Contemporary Developments Business Management in University of Sunderland. At postgraduate level, she teaches International Business Management (IBM) and Master's in Business Administration (MBA) students about professional competencies and research methods, as well as supervising their research projects. Iris also co-leads the 'research writing cafe' for the Centre for Management Learning and Business Education. She also teaches university's Extended Master students for International Business Management and students at master foundation level.



Publisher for Business Educator: Dr Juila J. Nobari, julia.j.nobari@sunderland.ac.uk