

Transnational Education Partnerships: Empowerment or Exploitation?

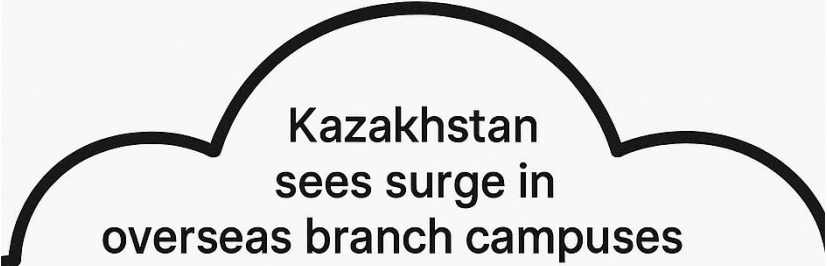
**A critical examination of UK universities' global educational partnerships through the lens
of knowledge management and cultural intelligence.**

By

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A Global Phenomenon

- ❑ Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were among the first countries to achieve education hub status, which required the establishment of international branch campuses (IBCs).
- ❑ Uzbekistan is the latest country to join the list of transnational higher education hubs.



Kazakhstan
sees surge in
overseas branch campuses

Dubai welcomes three new university branch campuses – Dubai's total number of overseas university branches to 40

China approves 46 TNE partnerships – China's existing TNE landscape of 15 international branch campuses, 333 joint colleges and 2,427 joint education programs

The TNE Gold Rush: A Global Phenomenon

- ❑ Transnational Education (TNE) has witnessed unprecedented expansion in recent years, with British universities actively forging partnerships across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East.
- ❑ TNE "gold rush" - a strategic imperative that promises mutual benefit through knowledge transfer and widened participation.
- ❑ Beneath this optimistic narrative lies a more “complex reality”.
- ❑ Critical questions have emerged about its true impact on partner communities and whether these arrangements genuinely empower local educational futures.

The Central Question

Are the communities we partner with genuinely better off and more empowered to define their own educational futures, or do such arrangements reinforce existing hierarchies of knowledge and power?

Theoretical Lens

- ❑ Knowledge management (KM) theory enables us to dissect the complex dynamics of knowledge flow, power relations, and institutional capacity building that characterise TNE arrangements.
- ❑ Employing KM theory alongside cultural intelligence (CQ) considerations aids the understanding of how universities might reposition themselves at the forefront of more equitable TNE practices.

The Knowledge Divide: Explicit vs Tacit

Explicit Knowledge

Codified and transferable through:

- Curricula and course materials
- Institutional policies
- Academic structures
- Assessment frameworks

Tacit Knowledge

Embodied in local contexts through:

- Cultural practices and traditions
 - Lived experiences
 - Contextual understanding
 - Indigenous pedagogies
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The Problematic Flow Pattern



UK Universities

Export explicit knowledge: curricula, qualifications, administrative systems.



Partner Institutions

Contribute tacit knowledge: local context, cultural insights, practical wisdom.

Evidence from TNE partnerships reveals that explicit knowledge flows predominantly from exporting institutions, whilst local partners' contextual tacit knowledge contributions are often undervalued or overlooked entirely.

The Undervaluation Crisis

- ❑ Local partners bring invaluable contextual understanding, cultural insights, and pedagogical wisdom rooted in their specific environments.
- ❑ However, these contributions are frequently marginalised in favour of standardised, exportable knowledge packages.
- ❑ This approach not only diminishes the quality of educational provision but also perpetuates power imbalances that position UK universities as knowledge producers and international partners as passive recipients, rather than co-creators of educational value.

Cultural Intelligence: The Missing Link

- ❑ Cultural Awareness - Understanding diverse educational contexts and values.
 - ❑ Knowledge Integration - Balancing explicit and tacit knowledge contributions.
 - ❑ Collaborative Leadership - Fostering genuine partnership rather than dependency.
 - ❑ Sustainable Development - Building local capacity for educational autonomy.
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Methodological Approach

- ❑ Document Analysis- Systematic examination of TNE policies, partnership agreements, and institutional frameworks.
 - ❑ Discourse Analysis - Critical evaluation of language and narratives surrounding TNE partnerships.
 - ❑ Case Study Integration - Comparative analysis of partnership models across different geographical contexts.
 - ❑ This research relies on documentary evidence and discourse analysis rather than empirical data collection.
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Findings

- ❑ TNEs does not necessarily contribute to building a knowledge economy going by evidence in Qatar or the UAE (Davidson, 2021).
 - ❑ They are primarily teaching institutions that do not contribute to innovation or knowledge creation; many institutions offer only a narrow range of programs that require minimal investment and which are profitable (Muratov and Wilkins, 2024).
 - ❑ TNE opens up a broader debates on commodification, branding, and international competition (Robertson, 2021).
 - ❑ Partnership requires access and raises critical questions that highlight exploitation and market logics (Schildermans and Tröhler, 2024).
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Towards Equitable TNE Practices

- ❑ Mutual Learning Recognition - Acknowledging that all partners bring valuable knowledge and expertise to the relationship.
 - ❑ Shared Governance Structures - Implementing decision-making processes that ensure equal voice and representation.
 - ❑ Local Context Integration - Embedding cultural and contextual knowledge into curriculum design and delivery.
 - ❑ Capacity Building Focus - Prioritising the development of local educational autonomy and sustainability.
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Conclusion: Redefining Partnership

- ❑ The KM-CQ lens reveals that current TNE practices often fall short of their stated goals of mutual benefit and empowerment.
 - ❑ Partnerships are proliferating, while genuine collaboration remains elusive when tacit knowledge contributions are systematically undervalued.
 - ❑ The path forward requires universities to embrace cultural intelligence as a core leadership competency, recognising that sustainable TNE partnerships must be built on foundations of mutual respect, shared governance, and authentic knowledge co-creation.
 - ❑ TNE partnerships despite their current limitations are vehicles for genuine educational empowerment and shared futures.
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Thinking about the Future of TNE

- ❑ QE-TNE Scheme (2021-22 - 2025-26) Informed by robust metrics, with the student experience as its focus. Supports collaboration between QAA and local higher education bodies to build and deepen mutual understanding, cooperation and trust.
 - ❑ How much does the current TNE structure consider local knowledge and language of host countries since most courses are designed and imported from the home country of the TNE provider.
 - ❑ To what extent does our partnership support capacity building and address the challenges highlighted by host countries?
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Q&A

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