

## **Challenges in Transnational Business Education: Learning and Teaching Perspectives from Australia and Singapore**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Management of learning and teaching in a transnational business education program can be a true challenge for institutions in both home and host countries, especially with leadership and governance. In this article, we seek to define challenges in engaging business students in a transnational education program operating in Singapore and Australia. From the interviews with students and staff, we identified feedback, communication, and transferability as important factors promoting engagement among students in the transnational program. We highlight learning strategies to support ongoing engagement among students in a transnational business education program. The findings suggest that contextualizing the local and international issues is crucial in the management of a transnational business education program if students are to develop global competencies.

**Keywords:** business, challenges, management, transnational education

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The proliferation of transnational higher education (TNHE) has contributed to the growth and expansion of international education in various locations and disciplines. It is one of the most important, if often neglected, aspects of the internationalization of higher education (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Levatino, 2017; Otten, 2003). In this article, the term TNHE draws on the definition posited by the Global Alliance on Transnational Education (1997): “Any teaching or learning activity in which the

students are in a different country (the host country) to that in which the institution providing the education is based (the home country).”

Modes of delivering TNHE vary, but primarily constitute virtual education, partnership programs, joint or double degree programs, study abroad, and/or international branch campuses (Altbach, 2009; Wilkins & Juusola, 2018). In this article, we apply the terms *international education* and *intercultural education* as adopted by Otten (2003), who refers to those terms as “product or output expected from internationalised educational institutions, students, and academics from both local and international institutions.”

### **The Rise of Transnational Education**

The rise of TNHE can be seen as a result of emerging economies globally, and subsequent demand for international skills and competencies. The expansion of TNHE arose in the 1990s in major exporting countries (e.g., United Kingdom, Australia, United States) when the higher education sector was included in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

The “academic capitalism” (Barnett, 2000) of TNHE seems to outweigh its educational and developmental benefits in the eyes of public, with critics questioning the educational quality and student experience. Similar to other forms of trade in education, TNHE also suffers criticisms on compromising quality, sustainability of the programs, and poor management (Cheng, 2002; Leung & Waters, 2013; Wilkins & Juusola, 2018) despite it affording students the opportunity to develop intercultural competencies, an essential trait for graduates to thrive in contemporary society (Hoare, 2013). Nonetheless, it is often argued that TNHE could constitute a way for countries, such as Singapore, to better retain their students and to become themselves destinations for students from abroad.

### **TNHE in the Australian Context**

Australia was an early adopter of TNHE, with the country’s strong reputation within the higher education sector making it a desirable place of study for international students (Fletcher & Coyne, 2017). Universities Australia (2017) reported that in 2014 that there were 821 transnational programs offered by Australian universities offshore with program lasting from 6 months to 5 years. The top five countries involved in Australia’s TNHE programs—Singapore, Malaysia, China, Vietnam, and Hong Kong—represent the location of institutions where students studied and not necessarily the nationalities of those students (Lim & Shah, 2017).

In 2016, there were 391,136 international students studying in Australian higher education courses, with the most popular broad fields being: Management and Commerce (57%), Engineering & Related Technologies (10%), Society and Culture (8%), and Information Technology (7%). Around 29% of those students were studying offshore, with 65% pursuing bachelor’s degrees and 22% master’s degrees. There was little difference in age and gender between offshore students and international students in Australia, with most between 20 to 24 years of age in 2016 (Australian Government, 2018b). The sector has experienced low-growth rate over

recent years due to factors including increased competition arising from supply of quality education by local and regional providers; increased competition from UK universities; proliferation of online-learning offerings; and very few new branch campuses (Lim & Shah, 2017; Ziguras, 2016). In 2017 the Australian higher education sector generated \$20.7 billion in export income (68.4% of total on-shore earnings; Australian Government, 2018a). Despite competition from the United Kingdom and the United States and questions over the sustainability of the sector, Australia still attracts a significant number of international students.

## **Theoretical Background**

### ***Management of Learning***

Due to the decrease of international students in the TNHE programs in Australia as well as the stiff competition among higher education institutions worldwide, management of learning in TNHE can be a challenge for institutions in both home and host countries, especially with leadership and governance (Stafford & Taylor, 2016). Literature in this area suggests a number of problems related to learning and teaching, including the contextual challenges of mutual expectations and diverse epistemologies of knowledge generation, deep disciplinary knowledge creation, and student-centered pedagogies (Barnett, 2000; Bovill et al., 2015; Lamers & Admiraal, 2018; Otten, 2003; Zhou et al., 2005).

There is, however, little empirical evidence regarding the extent to which such challenges are felt by TNHE staff and little is known about the practices that staff adopt to improve learning and teaching (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006; Lamers & Admiraal, 2018). The most challenging aspects of learning and teaching in TNHE programs are related to cultural issues, such as communication styles, learning and teaching styles, challenges of governance (quality control and local regulatory systems), and stereotyping (Bovill et al., 2015; Heng, 2018; Wilkins & Juusola, 2018; Ziguras, 2008). While no definite conclusion can be drawn as to what constitutes an ideal definition of *culture* (and appreciating the heterogeneous factors within population groups), this article applies the UNESCO (2001) definition that "... culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group."

### ***Culture and Learning***

TNHE is a complex site of intercultural engagement (Leask, 2008; Otten, 2003), which is distinct from what and how staff teach in home universities (Debowksi, 2008; Lamers & Admiraal, 2018). Hoare (2013) contended that transnational teaching has the capacity to transform educators, especially if they are cognizant of cultural diversity in the teaching and learning process. Nevertheless the literature suggests that transnational teaching deals with institutional structures and policies, occurs in short intensive intervals, and covers large units of curriculum with students regarded as passive, rote learners, lacking in autonomy and unfamiliar with the academic culture of host universities (Heng, 2018; Hoare, 2006; Wilkins & Juusola, 2018).

Many studies (Bovill et al., 2015; Debowski, 2008; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Lamers & Admiraal, 2018; Leask, 2004; Wilkins & Juusola, 2018) concur with the view that the intensive nature of the transnational classroom requires home and host staff to display a distinctive set of skills and expertise in structuring and delivering these sessions to meet the intended learning outcomes. Thus, academics have to work with students who bring a diverse set of characteristics, epistemologies of knowledge generation, learning needs, and expectations (Barnett, 2000; Zhou et al., 2005).

Differences in home and host cultures can require the development of skills and knowledge for students and teachers in the programs. For instance, when it comes to students' personal learning situations, it is not uncommon to observe the presence of cultural stereotypes that suggest students in the TNHE programs are often academically deficient and in need of correction (Brydon & Liddell, 2011; Heng, 2018; Wilkins & Juusola, 2018). Asian students, who form a large group of transnational students in Australia's higher education institutions, tend to be conceptualized in negative terms. Based on perceived epistemologies of knowledge generation, students or staff may assume that these students have a preference for rote and surface learning, are passive, lack critical thinking skills, fail to understand what constitutes academic scholarship, and rely excessively on authority, especially the lecturer and/or tutor (Barnett, 2000; Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Heng, 2018; Zhou et al., 2005).

### ***Curriculum***

Another potential challenge teaching staff may experience in the TNHE environment is the provision of curriculum, which still sparks heated debates over the best design for delivery practice. One view advocates for an institutional ethnocentric approach with fixed and unmediated curricula, imposing the standards matching those of the exporting universities (Debowski, 2008). It is thought that students deliberately engage with a Western degree because they wish to receive an insight into Western outlooks and practices (Dunn & Wallace, 2006), expecting difference in what and how they are taught. Yet, this transnational approach is criticized to take form of a "cultural colonialism" that transfers Western business theories and products indiscriminately to the transnational environment (Ziguras, 2008). Equity pedagogy is purported to be a process that empowers students to develop competencies so they can function effectively in society (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Saint-Hilaire, 2014). This requires educators to have an integrated and contextual knowledge encompassing multicultural, pedagogical, and sociocultural dimensions that reflect the complexity of real-life interactions and relationships.

TNHE has led to increased innovation in the design and delivery of programs and courses that develop cross-cultural capabilities among students. Activities such as study abroad, visiting academic staff from the partnered institutions, or exchange programs can help students understand and build their cross-cultural competencies (Joy & Poonamallee, 2013). However, there is still a need to define and understand the challenges that students face in the TNHE program to learn cross-cultural skills with their peers from another country. In order to understand these important issues, we consider these key questions in Australia and Singapore.

1. What are the challenges for students in the TNHE international business program to develop their cross-cultural skills?
2. To what extent can we promote learning support in order to build cross-cultural skills in the international business TNHE program?

## **METHOD**

The research design used a qualitative research methodology in order to explore the perspectives and the experiences of different stakeholders in an Australian–Singaporean transnational management undergraduate business program. The study draws on phenomenology theory to explore the nature of transnational programs from diverse perspectives (Zhou et al., 2005), namely those of students and academic teaching staff. With the focus being on the participants’ personal knowledge and assumptions taken at face value, this study aimed to celebrate individual views and interpretation of participants’ lived experiences. A case study methodology was perceived as most appropriate to investigate the research agenda as it retains “the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2003).

In this study, the research team set up two projects for students enrolled in international business subjects. A similar course was offered in Singapore and Australia at the same time. The students in each location were supervised by the local instructors. At the same time, the instructors requested them to co-develop their project and assignments with their international counterparts.

Students in Australia collaborated virtually with peers in Singapore, engaging with the study of business management through small group projects and simulation exercises. Embedded in the tasks were sufficient complexity and self-reflexive activities over a 12-week period that enabled students to develop intercultural competence within the context of international education and business management. In order to overcome cultural differences as a barrier to group learning (Kolb, 1984; Treleaven et al., 2007; Zhao & Coombs, 2012), the instructors applied a systemic approach to the group task with integrated and rotational student roles. Different team members were asked to take turns leading the conversation when they conducted teleconference meetings with their international peers.

The study data is triangulated from three units of analysis—Australian-based academic staff, local Singaporean academic staff, and students from both sites—aimed to portray “what it is like” to be engaged with a transnational course in Singapore; “to catch the close-up reality” of teaching and learning on these courses; and to present “thick description of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for [their] situation” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 254). Data were gathered through two sources: a quantitative course experience survey (CES) comprising 10 questions (see Table 1) administered to students each semester by the Learning and Teaching unit of the university, as well as qualitative interviews. Participation in the CES was voluntary. We randomly analyzed the responses of 100 students who completed the CES (see Table 1).

For the qualitative interviews, a total of 41 participants aged over 21 volunteered to participate: seven Australian-based tutors (three men, four women); six local

Singaporean tutors (four men, two women); and 28 students (14 men [seven from Melbourne, seven from Singapore] and 14 women [seven from Melbourne, seven from Singapore]). All interviews took place in small group discussions. The academic staff had extensive experience teaching in TNHE environments. To protect the anonymity of participants in the qualitative interviews, pseudonyms were employed. Interviews with all participants were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The explanatory themes identified in the data and also present in the literature were perceptions of the TNHE program, challenges experienced in learning, and the learning and teaching culture. Hence, conversations around students' and tutors' experiences and situations as well as their life stories became key elements in the analysis process. The qualitative data analysis was iterative in that ideas emerging from the data were mirrored against the literature with a constant comparative approach post observation, providing a way to review data with emerging categories and test out our provisional hypothesis (Silverman, 2005).

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Data

#### *Students' Perception on Learning in the Transnational Management Program*

We evaluated the CES results to better understand how undergraduate students studying in the Global Learning by Design program in Melbourne and Singapore value their learning experiences in the development of cross-cultural competencies and skills. The CES questions explored core learning themes of course content and assessment (Questions 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7); impact of tutor instruction (Question 3); experiences with peers: feedback (Questions 5 and 10); and cognitive learning through peer interactions (Questions 8 and 9). Table 1 presents a summary of students' evaluations.

**Table 1: A Summary of Student Course Experience Survey Evaluations**

| Q | Learning aspect   | Agree | Disagree | Neutral |
|---|---|-------|----------|---------|
| 1 | The content in my course is illustrated with examples that help me to understand cross-cultural issues. | 57    | 13       | 30      |
| 2 | I would prefer to study more on international than local issues with international peers.               | 50    | 16       | 34      |
| 3 | In my course, my tutors provide me with instruction on cross-cultural teams and learning.               | 52    | 18       | 30      |
| 4 | Groupwork in my course provides me with an opportunity to learn about cross-cultural teams.             | 54    | 18       | 28      |
| 5 | I learn from my peers' feedback from another country.   | 41    | 27       | 32      |

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|----|--|----|----|----|
| 6  | Assessments in my course are framed in international scenarios.                  | 78 | 10 | 12 |
| 7  | Assessments in my course help me to apply international skills to the task.      | 52 | 19 | 29 |
| 8  | I socialize with students from different cultures in this course.                | 50 | 32 | 18 |
| 9  | I struggled while I was working with students from different countries/cultures. | 46 | 28 | 26 |
| 10 | Feedback from peers help me to develop cross-cultural understanding.             | 52 | 18 | 30 |

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With the role of course content in building cross-cultural skills, the results (Questions 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7) show that just over half (average = 58%) of the students agree that the course content builds cross-cultural skills, with examples and international scenarios being an important factor. Half of the students (52%) considered assessment to be an important contributor to their development (Questions 4, 6, and 7). However, about one third of students (30%) were neutral, and a further 13% disagreed. Groupwork (Question 4) in particular was seen as a useful opportunity to learn about cross cultural teams (*agree* = 54%; *neutral* = 28%; and *disagree* = 18%). Assessment (Question 6) with both formative and summative feedback in the course was designed within international scenarios. This component of the course rated high agreement ( $n = 78$ ) as a factor in developing cross-cultural skills, with 12% of students being neutral, and 10% disagreeing about its impact. Half of the students ( $n = 52$ ) agreed that to the positive impact of tutor instruction (Question 3) on cross-cultural development, with about one third of students (30%) being neutral, and a further 18% disagreeing. Feelings toward experiences with peers in terms of working in the team, peer feedback, and cognitive learning (Questions 5, 8, 9, and 10) rated less significantly, with less than half of students in agreement (47.25%) that these factors aid the development of cross-cultural competencies. However, one quarter of students (26.5%) were neutral, and an equivalent number (26.25%) disagreed. Of note are the low levels of agreement with peer feedback as a learning tool for cross-cultural development (*agreement* = 41%; *neutral* = 32%; *disagreement* = 27%). A similar pattern was shown with cultural interactions between students (Question 8) with half (50%) of students indicating they socialized with students from other cultures in the course, 18% being neutral, and a third of students (32%) in disagreement. This was also borne out in responses to group work with students from other cultures (Question 9) where less than half of the students (46%) indicated they struggled with working with students from other cultures, one-quarter were neutral (26%), and just over one quarter disagreed (28%).

The data confirm certain important aspects of learning in the transnational context. Students in the transnational education programs perceive that learning through an international lens that shifts beyond their local context can help them to be “international.” Learning through the international cases and issues helps them to understand cognitive, motivational, and behavioral adjustment. Points from Question 2 confirm that experiences in transnational education enable students to modify their ethnocentrism and work effectively. Having said that, the lack of face-to-face

interaction among students across campuses should be improved by the providers of TNHE programs.

## **Qualitative Results**

The qualitative data were coded by researchers, and the codes were then organized into clusters that share a common theme. The following subsections discuss each of the clusters of coded data in more detail, to provide a basis for discussion in the final section.

### **Feedback**

In the qualitative interviews, different opinions from the quantitative results emerged in relation to feedback. Feedback from peers was considered favorably to promote students' knowledge dimensions of cross-cultural competence. Feedback from their international peers was a new approach of learning for most students in the TNHE program. Peer feedback as part of assessment was given on their quality of work, the development of team action plans, and even that personal interactions among students from different countries helped them create openness, self-monitoring, and listening skills. Within the context of this study, it seems reasonable to expect that participants acknowledge the value of feedback and can use it constructively to reinforce the desired competencies of their international peers.

The merits of feedback were supported by some students from Singapore ( $n = 14$ ) who agreed that feedback from their Australian peers helped them to understand the concept of negotiation and business engagement, a core element of the course content and cultural differences in behavioral traits.

Assessment and feedback were generally seen as intertwined and, at their best, dialogic. Students hoped to be able to discuss their work with their tutors. Although peer feedback is not new among participants in this study, they seem to question the value of peer feedback, regardless of the location of their peers. According to a tutor from Singapore, "I asked my students (in Singapore) to provide comments to their peers. Some of my students were reluctant to do. In Singapore, students might prefer feedback from their teachers."

All teaching staff from Melbourne and Singapore suggested that peer feedback can help students to learn to listen actively, understand the cultural points of communication and project management, and promote ideas to work collaboratively in the virtual learning environment. This insistence was also supported by their observations of student development over the course of the semester. Tutor feedback was rated higher than peer feedback where there were concerns of cognitive bias.

### **Communication**

The issue of intercultural communication and interaction was explored and the extent to which students in the program communicated with each other. Both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that most students agreed that communication with their peers from another country, or with those who spoke an

alternate primary language other than English, was a key challenge. However, this challenge was perceived more than a “language” issue. In fact, most students refer to “approach in cross-cultural communication” when they undertook groupwork with other students in the program. Factors that were frequently mentioned included consistency in normative values such as communication, politeness, and personal versus team communication. According to a male student from Singapore,

Communication is always a big factor when completing any group assignment. Being able to communicate in an effective manner with one another means keeping continual lines of conversation running while ensuring the maximum amount of understanding is achieved. This means reiterating things that have already been said and explained to make sure every individual understands what is happening, and what their roles and responsibilities are.

A number of students also referred to the importance of their ability to communicate and manage students’ competing priorities across countries. Since team members live in different corners of the world, members often found it difficult for them to manage issues such as deadlines, meetings, and accountability. A female student from Australia described, “Within our transnational group, we attempted to set guideline dates and times for individual task completion, around the deadline provided for our assessment tasks.”

Learning with students from different countries and cultural backgrounds was found to promote students’ cross-cultural communication experiences, but it required the guidance of the expert tutor in navigating the complexities inherent in this. A number of students in the program suggested that tutors should be able to help them with training on “strategies to work” in the cross-cultural/virtual context. Since most communication activities in the program occurred in the virtual space, students reported that they felt inadequate to start some formal communication with their counterparts from another country, without knowing the nuances of that culture. A male student from Australia suggested, “It will be helpful if we could attend cultural and communication training and some programs such as how to prepare memo, e-meeting protocol before we work with [the] Singaporean team.”

Under this theme, we also found that staff from the host country struggled with strategies to communicate business cases and lessons from the nonlocal contexts to the classroom. Similar to other empirical studies (Barnett, 2000; Bengtson, 2018; Debowski, 2008; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003), the teaching on these programs occurred in intensive bursts over the weekends with large student groups. Many teaching resources were condensed to be delivered by using various teaching and learning practices with didactic transmission practices prevailing, building on the baseline knowledge students possessed.

Issues regarding the epistemological imbalance are also prominent. Teaching in the transnational context was further marked by divergent opinions and experiences concerning curriculum and pedagogy. Teaching staff were divided about the extent to which curriculum should be accommodated when transferred from one educational system to another. One view, supported by most Australian-based tutors and

Singaporean tutors, was the design and transference of an unmediated Australian curriculum to the transnational setting. As one male tutor from Singapore stated, "I feel that we only use Australian materials without having some important local context for our students. Curriculum should be co-designed by staff from both sides."

Local Singaporean staff also addressed issues on power, or lack of, and the way they were expected to manage and teach in the transnational management education program. When we listened to the views from some Singaporean instructors, their views on the exclusion of Singaporean business and management context emerged as a negative consequence of power and its effects in transnational education. Epistemological power from the host country's institutions can also lead to the lack of local voices in the curriculum development. According to a female tutor from Singapore, "I don't have a lot to do at the program design phase. In fact, my team from Melbourne did everything and asked me to follow the ideas." A male tutor from Singapore shared this view, "When I expressed my views on assessment to my Australian colleagues, they did not quite accept the ideas. I then decided not to voice my opinion in the future."

Miscommunication among students and staff in the host and home countries can be created by the perception of power from the home country. All staff who manage and teach this program referred to words such as "equality," "power," "inequality," "manipulation," and "leader." When we asked them to identify their experiences and feelings in relation to the management of the program, they overwhelmingly perceived themselves as subordinate, as the "follower" in the program managed by the Australian counterparts. Hence, they reflected that they lacked authority or autonomy to adapt the curriculum, materials, and content to promote local-context learning. Their perceived lack of power presents a potential long-term problem for the sustainability of the program.

### **Knowledge Transferability**

De Vita (2002) hypothesized that group function is based on the average ability of group members, as opposed to outcomes based on the ability of the least or most able member. This is confirmed when group assessments for cross-cultural cohorts are poorly thought through. However, this is disputed when the behavioral implications are pre-designed, and attention is given to students being guided through their skill development in co-operative cross-cultural workgroups. A male Australian student described,

As a result of workgroup participation, it is believed we developed a greater understanding of the ways in which others interpret situations and how cultural differences can have an impact on perceptions. This hurt us in the earlier weeks, but as we began to understand what everyone's individual needs and preferences were, we began to work together more effectively.

We also learned from the instructors in the program that activities in the classroom that focus on learning, rather than teaching, are rated as important for students to improve their cross-cultural skills in business. Students reported that simulation, such as business games and activities that replicate cross-cultural

scenarios, supported them as they adapted to new cultural contexts. The learning activities that engaged students from the two diverse locations to work together were also found to reduce ethnocentrism among this cohort of students. A female Australian student explained, "I learn a lot from creating of the virtual international team in this course. It helps me to understand how to approach people across culture and not face-to-face."

Students reflected upon the open nature of TNHE where they were required to interact with students from culturally and contextually different countries while simultaneously working on the same ideas and task. Their ability to provide feedback to their international counterparts, as previously reported, promoted their understanding of cross-cultural communication and negotiation. They also dealt with cross-cultural conflicts and management with their colleagues and tutors. In the reflections of their experiences of working with team members from another country and campus, most students in the program agreed that because of the support given by their tutors, as well as the assessment requirements, they progressively felt more at ease in culturally diverse environments. A male Singaporean student supported this, saying,

Feedback on the assessment was crucial as it allowed each part of the assessment to be evaluated by the group. This meant that everyone in the group had an opinion on each part and if the group felt any part of the assessment was under-par it could be modified.

The final point regarding this issue was the transfer of Australian assessment, teaching, and activities to the Singaporean context. The transfer of assessment criteria and marking appeared to pose further pedagogical and administrative problems. Some Australian-based tutors identified some learning scenarios when local Singaporean tutors were reluctant to apply the assessment criteria set by the Australian course coordinator when allocating grades. As one Australian male tutor noted, the local Singaporean tutor "was sometimes giving quite high marks to students ....and I did push some of those marks down a bit." To ensure consistency in grading of assessment and adherence to the criteria and commensurate academic standard, this Australian tutor entered into conversation with her Singaporean colleague to discuss and mediate the assessment criteria and marking system. These observations raise important questions about assessment practices as many Australian-based tutors spoke of relying on Singaporean local tutors to introduce students to the assessment criteria and expectations. If students are to succeed in developing cross-cultural competency through assessment, it is important they receive consistent guidance and support with the assessment process, requiring co-management and co-delivery by Australian and Singaporean staff.

## **DISCUSSION**

The representation of higher education institutions as an ongoing work environment cannot be replicated within the undergraduate TNHE learning environment within an institutional ethnocentrism toward business and management education (Johnson et al., 2006; Ledwith & Seymour, 2001). We contend that it is not sufficient to undertake

a surface approach, to merely show that culture does matter in organization activities, but a deeper construct of developing cultural competence for competitive advantage is required. This, however, requires the academic to be able to accept the existence of a relation based on mutual understanding and interaction, to operate in an interculturality framework, which goes beyond mere tolerance of the other. In order for effective engagement, it requires creative innovation to the challenges inherent in an era of supercomplexity.

This also implies a level of behavioral adaptation through cultural consciousness and competence, which can be taught, and to deliberately foster engagement between local, international, and offshore students (Johnson et al., 2006; Summers & Volet 2008; Treleaven et al., 2007). Both qualitative and quantitative data from this project help us to understand that engagement among students in the TNHE programs cannot be effective without infusing the local context.

Students from cultures with strong “power distance” and “uncertainty avoidance” can display different expectations of their tutor, reflecting a difference in cultural values (Hofstede, 1994 in Ledwith & Seymour, 2001; Johnson et al., 2006). Additionally, different communication styles across cultures can be misinterpreted by tutors and other students within their work group within the dominant culture as the student being academically inept (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001), or favoring a “reproductive or surface approach to learning” rather than a deep learning approach that is necessary for academic success. Ledwith and Seymour (2001) suggested that these “monocultural (co-national) bonds are of vital importance to foreign students,” and should not be disregarded.

We constructed this theme from students and instructors’ experiences and expectations in how to transfer management knowledge in the learning and teaching process. Students based in Australia tended to focus on learning activities and learning outcomes from the activities designed by their instructors, more so than their Singapore peers. Most students from Australia (both local and international students) referred to the innovative culture of cross-cultural pedagogy that is reflected in its design and delivery. This difference could be attributed to differences in epistemologies of learning. An innovative culture in teaching and learning of cross-cultural management where students and tutors are required to engage with two-way reciprocal adaptation (Volet & Jones, 2012) can equip students and staff with new experiences and approaches (e.g., immersion in intercultural interactions, two-way dialogue, personal transformation), although Reid and Garson (2017) debated the level of positive intercultural interactions through intercultural learning.

Asian international students are shown to culturally adapt to Western education approaches and are academically engaged debunking the stereotypes about their monocultural learning style (Andrade, 2006; Tiong & Yong, 2004). Many Asian students have been found to place high value on group discussions in classrooms with a diverse student cohort as an opportunity for enhancing their intercultural competence, such as improving their English-language and interpersonal communication literacy, and understanding different cultures (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001).

Despite evidence for monocultural bonding (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001) the opportunity for the enhancement of language facility disconfirms the negative

perceptions that are reported about cross-cultural student groupwork. Cultural conditioning has been found to affect learning styles and the learning environment, which may be ineffective in contrasting culture-based educational experiences (De Vita, 2001). Chinese and Hong Kong students in higher education are typically from a surface-learning environment where summative and teacher-directed assessment tasks prevail (Jackson, 2005) with a reliance on rote learning. This has resulted in a lack of transferable academic skills to international environments resulting in not only linguistic and conceptual problems for them but suboptimal English literacy and interpersonal skills with high levels of dependency on their tutor (Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2005).

Learning different cultural norms and expectations takes cognitive, motivational, and behavioral adjustment, and enabling student groups to modify their ethnocentrism and work effectively and cooperatively in cross-cultural workgroups has proven to be a challenge (Chizhik, 2001; Johnson et al., 2006; Ledwith & Seymour, 2001; Pathak, 2018; Summers & Volet, 2008; Sweeney et al., 2008; Wood, 2003), despite evidence that cross-cultural group work has a positive effect on the individual average grade of all students (Sweeney et al., 2008). With learning outcomes from group assessment, benefits are shown in experiencing active and deep learning, and building individual accountability and psychological ownership (Sweeney et al., 2008). With its “student interactive” approach (Wood, 2003) such as the Global Learning by Design program, which demanded a deeper approach to learning, student commitment and reward of individual effort within the group, both negatively and positively, were clearly enhanced.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that contextualizing the local and international context is crucial in the management of transnational business education programs if students are to develop cross-cultural competencies. The data suggest that integration of experiences, practices, and processes in the host environment with experiences, practices, and processes in the home environment will assist the attainment of teaching and learning outcomes in all students and, in particular, our stated goal of developing cross-cultural competencies. Students’ responses highlight the importance of them being empowered prior to the formal engagement within the transnational education experiences. Institutions in both host and home countries will need to equip both students and teaching staff with skills to be able to learn successfully in diverse cross-cultural contexts. We learn from this study that inclusive curricula, pedagogy, and feedback from various sources, as well as cross-cultural training for tutors in the TNHE, will help students to develop cultural competency.

An internationalized course design will better equip students with the requisite organizational knowledge to effectively operate in diverse organisation settings. This case study resulted in transportable, transferable, and culturally relevant curriculum; improved student engagement through application of educational technologies; validation of cultural diversity in organizational practice; and curriculum expansion that applied diverse examples across contexts. As internationalization and TNHE can raise issues of equity and parochialism (Otten, 2003), particularly when group

composition is diverse, an equity teaching and learning paradigm was applied to meet these challenges.

Another important issue in the management of cross-cultural learning in TNHE programs is management and training of staff from both home and host countries. Universities need to create opportunities for academic staff located in different cultural contexts to share how and what they have learned about moving into a “third” place—about others, with others—within the context of seeing one’s role through a different lens (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). This could occur initially during induction sessions structured to provide extended opportunities for intercultural discussion of teaching and learning issues and responses, but should also occur in other activities such as the curriculum design, materials, and creation of learning activities.

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