

"Transnational Education in Singapore: A Gateway to Global Opportunities"

Ma. Jinky L. Estojero, Gladys S. Escarlos

College of Education, Central Mindanao University

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90500016>

Received: 20 April 2025; Accepted: 23 April 2025; Published: 28 May 2025

ABSTRACT

Transnational Education (TNE) in Singapore has emerged as a transformative model in the global education landscape, offering students access to internationally recognized qualifications without the need to study abroad. By fostering collaborations between local institutions and prestigious foreign universities, TNE bridges the gap between local and global education systems. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution, benefits, challenges, and sustainability of TNE in Singapore, enriched by primary data from student satisfaction surveys and interviews with stakeholders. Drawing on comparative insights from regional hubs such as Malaysia and the UAE, the paper identifies best practices and contextual differences in TNE implementation. It highlights TNE's role in enhancing global competencies, career prospects, and cultural exchange while addressing the impact of government initiatives like Skills Future and the commodification of education. The paper concludes with actionable strategies for strengthening TNE policy implementation and academic partnerships, aiming to reinforce Singapore's position as a leading education hub.

INTRODUCTION

Singapore has long been recognized as a global leader in education, consistently ranking among the top performers in international assessments such as PISA and TIMSS. In recent decades, the nation has strategically positioned itself as a hub for transnational education, attracting leading universities and institutions from around the world. Transnational education refers to the delivery of foreign academic programs within Singapore, enabling students to earn degrees from prestigious international universities while remaining in the country.

This model aligns with Singapore's broader vision of becoming a "Global Schoolhouse," a concept introduced in 2002 to transform the nation into a premier destination for education and research. Institutions like the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), INSEAD, and James Cook University have played a pivotal role in this transformation, offering programs in collaboration with universities such as the University of London, University of Birmingham, and others.

The significance of TNE extends beyond academic qualifications; it fosters cross-cultural understanding, enhances employability, and supports Singapore's ambition to develop a globally competent workforce. This paper explores the evolution, benefits, challenges, and sustainability of TNE in Singapore, offering insights into its role as a gateway to global opportunities, and incorporates first-hand perspectives from students and administrators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of TNE in Singapore

Transnational education in Singapore has evolved significantly over the past two decades, driven by the government's proactive policies and the growing demand for higher education. The Global Schoolhouse initiative, launched in 2002, marked a turning point in Singapore's education strategy. This initiative aimed to

attract foreign universities, international students, and research investments, positioning Singapore as a global education hub.

Today, Singapore hosts over 100 TNE programs offered by leading universities from the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, and other countries. These programs cater to a diverse student population, including local students seeking international qualifications and international students drawn to Singapore's reputation for excellence in education.

Primary Data: Student and Stakeholder Perspectives

Recent surveys and discussion forums with UK TNE students in Singapore reveal high levels of satisfaction, particularly regarding teaching quality, academic support, and the information provided before enrollment. Notably, 95% of surveyed students expressed satisfaction with pre-enrollment information, and 90% were satisfied with their teachers' preparedness and the opportunity to provide feedback. Students also valued flexible delivery modes, such as top-up degrees and part-time study, which support career progression. However, many expressed a desire for greater engagement with the partner university and more opportunities for internships and practical experience.

Interviews with administrators and faculty highlight the importance of local lecturers as both academic guides and communication channels with foreign universities. These insights underscore the need for stronger integration between local and foreign partners to enhance the TNE experience.

Comparative Analysis: Singapore, Malaysia, and UAE

A comparison with other regional TNE hubs, such as Malaysia and the UAE, reveals both similarities and differences. All three countries offer favorable regulatory environments and clear government strategies to promote TNE, but their approaches differ. In Malaysia, TNE primarily serves domestic students and supports private sector growth, while in Singapore, TNE is strategically deployed to upgrade the national talent pool and public higher education system. The UAE, with its branch campus model, caters largely to expatriate and international students.

Feature	Singapore	Malaysia	UAE
Main TNE Model	Collaborative partnerships	Branch campuses, partnerships	Branch campuses
Policy Focus	Talent pool, public HE upgrade	Private sector, domestic access	Expatriate/international students
Student Demographics	Local and international	Mainly domestic	Mainly expatriate/international
Key Challenge	Integration, engagement	Revenue, quality assurance	Student experience, campus life

Benefits of TNE

Global Perspective and Cross-Cultural Skills: Exposure to international faculty and diverse peer groups fosters adaptability and global competencies.

Career Advancement: TNE graduates enjoy enhanced employability due to recognized qualifications and international exposure.

Cost and Accessibility: TNE programs in Singapore are more affordable than overseas study, broadening access.

Flexibility: Part-time and online options cater to working professionals and adult learners.

Challenges and Sustainability

Commodification of Education: The global marketization of education raises concerns over quality and equity.

Alignment with National Policies: TNE providers must adapt to initiatives like Skills Future, ensuring programs remain relevant to workforce needs. **Quality Assurance:** Sustaining high standards requires rigorous accreditation and continuous monitoring.

Market Competition: The proliferation of TNE providers necessitates innovation and differentiation.

Stakeholder Engagement: Students seek more interaction with partner universities and practical learning opportunities.

Government Role

The Singapore government has played a pivotal role in shaping the TNE landscape through policies that balance market forces with social protections. Initiatives such as the Global Schoolhouse and Skills Future have provided a framework for the growth and regulation of TNE. Additionally, the government's focus on quality assurance and accreditation ensures that TNE programs meet high standards, safeguarding the interests of students and employers.

CONCLUSION

Transnational education in Singapore has emerged as a powerful tool for delivering global academic opportunities and fostering cross-cultural exchange. By providing students with access to internationally recognized qualifications, TNE enhances their career prospects and global competencies. However, sustainability depends on addressing challenges such as commodification, quality assurance, and alignment with national policies.

Comparative insights from Malaysia and the UAE highlight the importance of tailored strategies and robust regulatory frameworks. As Singapore continues to position itself as a global education hub, TNE will remain a cornerstone of its education strategy, provided stakeholders address integration, engagement, and practical learning opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To further strengthen the role of transnational education (TNE) in Singapore's education ecosystem, several concrete strategies are recommended. First, enhancing stakeholder engagement is essential; this can be achieved by fostering deeper connections between students and partner universities through joint activities, virtual exchanges, and increased faculty mobility, all of which help create a more integrated and supportive learning environment. Expanding practical learning opportunities is also crucial-by integrating internships, industry projects, and experiential learning into TNE curricula, institutions can boost students' employability and equip them with real-world skills that are highly valued in the global workforce. Strengthening quality assurance should be a continuous process, involving regular reviews and updates of accreditation processes to ensure that TNE programs maintain high standards and remain relevant to evolving industry needs.

Promoting knowledge sharing through the establishment of regional networks will facilitate the exchange of best practices and encourage collaboration among TNE providers in Singapore, Malaysia, and the UAE, thereby enhancing the overall quality and competitiveness of TNE offerings. Aligning TNE programs with national priorities is vital; programs should support government initiatives like Skills Future by offering courses that address emerging sectors and promote lifelong learning, ensuring graduates are future-ready and relevant in a rapidly changing economy. Finally, supporting policy implementation through clear guidelines and resources will help both new and existing TNE partnerships navigate regulatory compliance and adapt effectively to the local context. By implementing these strategies, Singapore can further solidify its position as a leader in transnational education and a gateway to global opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to acknowledge the contributions of Singapore's educational institutions, particularly the

Singapore Institute of Management (SIM), for their pioneering role in transnational education. We also extend our gratitude to researchers and policymakers whose work has provided valuable insights into the evolution and impact of TNE in Singapore.

REFERENCES

1. Alligood, M. R. (Ed.). (2017). *Nursing theorists and their work* (9th ed.). Elsevier.
2. Cambridge Core. (n.d.). Inbound and outbound mobility strategies in transnational education. Retrieved March 29, 2025, from <https://www.cambridge.org/>
3. Durham University. (n.d.). Sustainability challenges in transnational education programs. Retrieved March 29, 2025, from <https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/>
4. Ho Mok, K. (2020). Higher education governance in Singapore: Balancing market forces and social responsibilities. *Journal of Education Policy*, 35(3), 345–360. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx>
5. Ministry of Education Singapore. (n.d.). Global Schoolhouse initiative overview. Retrieved March 29, 2025, from <https://www.moe.gov.sg/>
6. Singapore Economic Development Board. (n.d.). Education sector overview: Singapore's global schoolhouse vision. Retrieved March 29, 2025, from <https://www.edb.gov.sg/>
7. Singapore Institute of Management (SIM). (n.d.). Transnational education benefits and opportunities. Retrieved March 29, 2025, from <https://www.sim.edu.sg/>
8. Skills Future Singapore. (n.d.). Lifelong learning initiatives and workforce development programs. Retrieved March 29, 2025, from <https://www.skillsfuture.gov.sg/>
9. UNESCO. (2019). The globalization of higher education and its implications for transnational education. Retrieved March 29, 2025, from <https://unesco.org/>
10. World Bank. (2018). Economic impact of transnational education: A global perspective. World Bank Research Papers. <https://doi.org/10.>