



Entrepreneurship Education in the Transnational Vocational Education Context

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship education is often perceived from the local context, due to the lack of international exposure of the local stakeholders in this area. Learning and teaching entrepreneurship education as part of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in the transnational context, therefore, is relatively new. In fact, it remains unclear on what kind of learning is appropriate for the future entrepreneurs who need to work in the global business context. In this paper, we explore learning experiences of undergraduate students in the transnational entrepreneurship education program, focusing on vocational and career training, co-offered by two partners from Australia and Singapore. We focus on what Singaporean students identified as challenges in learning in the transnational entrepreneurship education program in the Australian context from the Singaporean view. This study unfolds the complexity of the management of transnational entrepreneurship education, engagements among students from different locations, and cross-cultural bias in the management of program, people, and learning. It is suggested that addressing these challenges require managers of transnational entrepreneurship education programs to consider issues of power and inequality inherent in teaching partnerships, industry engagement, and the mindset change needed to develop global perspectives.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, transnational education, TVET, learning and teaching

1. Introduction

Technical and vocational education (TVET) in the transnational context is still in its infancy, compared to higher education or language training. The nature of TVET has shifted drastically from traditional approaches to context-related world-of-work competences (ADB, 2008). This can be translated as a change to broaden the notion of local vocationalisation by including some international aspects into current TVET worldwide.

TVET is to be successful it needs to respond to the need to transition students from school to training, from school to the workplace, from training to the workplace, from the local to the international. We start to witness various internationalisation activities among TVET institutions worldwide. In fact, the growth of transnational education (TNE) in TVET and higher education is evident in the past decades (Ziguras, 2008), due to popularity of its standard, prestige, ease of access, and relevance to work at home countries. Research studies in this area agree that it is not uncommon for international students, that traditionally would have travelled overseas to study for an international qualification, to earn foreign degrees in their home, or neighbouring, countries. Transnational education has been accelerating by various factors such as the new policies in international services, information communication technology, and better income dispersion in most developing countries (Pimpa, 2009; Knight, 2015). In fact, a framework by UNESCO on strategy for global TVET education in 2016-2021 clearly identifies three priorities:

Fostering youth employment and entrepreneurship, promoting equity and gender equality, and facilitating transition to green economies and sustainable societies worldwide. Similar to other forms of trade in education, TVET education also suffers from 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 transnational TVET education could constitute a way for countries, such as Asia, where it is implemented to retain their students and to become themselves destinations for students from abroad (Levatino, 2016).

Modes of delivery for TNE can be diverse, due to technological advancement and nature of students. Some examples include branch campus, franchising, joint degree, articulation, distance delivery, and credit transfer between the host and home institutions. With the rapid change in the e-learning system and reduction of cost of electronic system, TNE can be offered worldwide in various formats and for different groups of learners.

When it comes to entrepreneurship education in the TNE context, there is no clear evidence to support how to manage the program effectively. Due to common challenges in the transnational context such as rules and regulations, learning culture, relationship in the virtual learning environment, the management of transnational entrepreneurship education requires special attention.

This point can be confirmed by Debowski (2005), Dunn and Wallace (2006), and Lamers and Admiraal (2018) who suggest that there is relatively little research into pedagogy of transnational programmes, and the little that exists tends to focus exclusively on the voices of lecturers from the host countries. Consequently, there is a pressing need to undertake a holistic examination of the distinctive nature of transnational pedagogies (Dunn & Wallace, 2006).

In this paper, we will focus on the *transnational entrepreneurship education* landscape, which include vocational education and training. It is complex because of its involvement with multiple stakeholders, each having different perceptions, expectations and motivations. Differing starting points and expectations have spawned a vibrant and diverse range of engagement models. Some have been more successful than others, but all have contributed to the rich fabric of international higher education and in most cases benefited their stakeholders either directly or indirectly (Dunn & Wallace, 2006).

Another potential challenge teaching staff may experience in the TNE environment is the provision of curriculum (Dobos, 2011), 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 outlook and practices (Dunn & Wallace, 2006), expecting difference in what and how they are taught (Egege & Kutieleh, 2008). Yet, this approach is criticised to take form of a “cultural colonialism” that transfers Western 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 socio-cultural dimensions that reflect the complexity of real-life interactions and relationships.

1.1 Entrepreneurship Education in the TNE Context

The idea behind entrepreneurship education is based on the assumption that the education and training of individuals who are likely to become independent entrepreneurs or employees in small enterprises should be considerably different from the education of those individuals who will find employment in large enterprises (Bird, 1988). This type of education should take into account at least three elements that distinguish small enterprises from large ones: de-specialisation of tasks, scarcity of resources, and self-employment. The growth of international entrepreneurs’ and ‘Born Global Start-Up’ accelerates the need for entrepreneurs who can manage their business and resources across countries. The question that remains unclear for us is how to teach and learn entrepreneurship education and skills in the cross-national and cross-cultural contexts (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001). Ismail et al. (2019) reported that key entrepreneurship skills among obtained students in the formal entrepreneurship education programs include communication, information technology, thinking, and time management skills. Interestingly, international or cross-cultural management skills are not included in the list.

Similar to all another management and business transnational education programs, local and foreign providers of entrepreneurship education question how to provide global entrepreneurship education that fits in the local business and social context. A number of studies in this area (Knight, 2015; Wilkins & Jusola, 2018) reveal different pedagogical approaches and practices between countries that may hinder effective management and practice of transnational education. According to the wide definition of entrepreneurship education, it is about personal development, creativity, self-reliance, initiative taking, action orientation, i.e. becoming entrepreneurial. What definition and approach is used profoundly affects educational objectives, target audiences, course content design, teaching methods and student assessment procedures, leading to a wide diversity of approaches (Mwasalwiba, 2010).

Due to its vocation-oriented in nature, it is always the case that students who are interested in entrepreneurial careers have to develop a number of work skills in order to manage and control their organisations or business (e.g., strategic and operational planning, risk management, market analysis, problem solving, and creativity). A successful start-up demands the mastery and integration of skills that differ from the skills needed to run an existing business (Bae, 2014). When compared to TVET, entrepreneurship education in the higher education programmes suffer from certain limitations (Kuzin, 2018) Having established that, the integration of TVET and higher education in the entrepreneurship education can reduce challenges of mismanagement in entrepreneurial activities, as well as in developing skills and self-esteem for students (Kuzin, 2018; Oviawe et al., 2017).

When we examined literature focusing on the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship competencies (i.e. McMullan & long (1987), McMullan et al. (2002)), most of them report that effective entrepreneurship education should include courses that promote skill-building, leadership programs, new product development, creative thinking, and technology innovation. Bae (2014) concluded that a relationship between entrepreneurship education and learning outcomes (i.e. entrepreneurial skills) in the local and international context remains unclear and needs more research. A study on innovation and entrepreneurship education by Modenov et al. (2018) also added that the new set of entrepreneur competencies, that should be taught internationally, include the use of digital technologies for achieving effective solutions in the shortest possible time, understanding on e-learning for instruction and collaboration, and human resources issues.

It is also suggested that, when designed properly, transnational management education program, including entrepreneurship education, can develop cross-cultural capabilities and global competencies among students (Kuzin, 2018). Activities such as study abroad, visiting academic staff from the partnered institutions, or exchange programs can help students to understand and build their cross-cultural competencies for entrepreneurs (Bovill et al., 2015; Joy and Poonamallee, 2013).

1.2 Research Questions

The management of entrepreneurship education in the transnational education context is complex. It requires educators and program managers who can integrate the local and international theoretical and practical contexts that influence the students' attitude towards entrepreneurial activity. It also involves the interactions of various stakeholders at different levels. In order to understand challenges in the delivery of entrepreneurship education in the transnational education context, we set the following questions as key research questions.

- 1) What are the challenges for students in the transnational entrepreneurship education programs?
- 2) What promote effective learning and teaching in the transnational entrepreneurship education programs?

2. Methods

The researcher aims to explore the experiences of undergraduate students who are in their final year in a Bachelor of Business (entrepreneurship) program. They are currently enrolling in an Australian-Singapore transnational undergraduate program. The researcher contacted program directors in both countries (Australia and Singapore) and requested students in the program to volunteer to participate in this study.

Questions for the interviews were developed from the literature in this area (Almahry, 2018; Henry et al., 2005; Maritz et al., 2015). We also invited three academics and two students from the Australian entrepreneurship education program to provide feedback on its clarity and contents.

The participants of this study are 21 Singaporean students in the transnational entrepreneurship education program. The program is truly vocational oriented. All of them are accustomed to international education (16 of them studied in the international education program since secondary school). A third of them are from a strong family-business orientation. All of them agreed that they are passionate about being 'leader' in international entrepreneurship. To protect the anonymity of participants in the qualitative interviews, pseudonyms were employed. Interviews with all participants were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

When it comes to the analysis of the data, the researcher aimed to portray "what it is like" to be engaged with a transnational entrepreneurship education program 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, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 254).

The explanatory themes identified in the data and also present in the literature were perceptions of the transnational entrepreneurship education program; challenges experienced in learning; and the learning and teaching culture. Hence, conversations around students' 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).

3. Results

Theme 1: Pedagogical in the Transnational Context

The issue of intercultural learning, communication and interaction was explored and the extent to which students in the program communicated with each other. Students are required to work in a number of projects with their peers from Australia. The virtual learning and activities are well-supported by teachers from both locations. When we discussed their learning experiences, most students agreed that communication with their peers from another country, or with those who spoke an alternate primary language, was a key challenge. This challenge, however, 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 vs. team communication. All participants agreed that opportunities to work with students in the same program but living in different corners of the world help them to understand the concept of idea generation and opportunities in the entrepreneurship education.

"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." (Male student, Singaporean)

"I learned the concept of business model and the development of business canvass while working with my friends from Australia." (Female student, Singapore)

A number of students also referred to the importance of their ability to manage learning 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. Although modern communication technology was adopted at the early stage, students in the TNE program still struggle with managing the learning activities with their peers.

"Within our transnational group, we attempted to set guideline dates and times for individual task completion, around the deadline provided for our assessment tasks." (Female student, Australian)

Learning the concept of innovation in SMEs with students from different countries and cultural backgrounds was found to promote students' cross-cultural experiences and deep understanding. Most students suggest that getting views from teachers from both countries promote various skills for young entrepreneurs.

A number of students in the program suggested that local tutors should be able to help them with training on 'strategies to work' in the international entrepreneurship and innovation. Since most 'learning with the team' 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.

"It will be helpful if we could attend cultural training and some programs such as how to prepare memo, e-meeting protocol before we work with [the] Singaporean team." (Male student, Australian)

Various teaching techniques have been adopted to teach in this vocational-oriented entrepreneurship program. They include study visit, speakers, case study, problem-based learning, and business plan development for entrepreneurs. Most student in the study agree that the international aspects of skills and business planning can be learnt more effectively in this environment.

The only main issue that emerged among students in this study is the application of Australian entrepreneurial context to their home countries. Most students suggested that the balance of local and international contexts must be implemented to the program, if they need to nurture potential young entrepreneurs.

Theme 2: Roles of Host-Home Institutions

The second theme that emerged from the staff is the management roles of host and home institutions. This issue is not new since the ownership of the program is unorthodox from the traditional entrepreneurship education program. Power

and its relationship with the management of transnational entrepreneurship education program is clearly evident in this study. Similar to other empirical studies (Barnett, 2000; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Debowski, 2008; Bengtsen, 2018), the key issue is balance of power from the host country and the management of teaching in the host country. The structure of the program is designed by an Australian institute. However, the delivery of the program, including engagement with the local industries, is the responsibility of the Singaporean partner. This is ambiguous for those who manage this program in both locations.

Transferring to a new international (or foreign) academic and learning environment is challenging for all students in this study, due to the different learning and teaching culture of the host and home countries. Most students referred to lack of understanding (and preparation) about the new education culture and expectation from the Australian teachers. Teaching on this transnational program occurred in intensive bursts over the weekends or an intensive 4-day mode, 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. Obviously, pedagogical problems can be expected.

Learning and 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 was the design and transference of an unmediated Australian curriculum and values to the transnational setting. As one participant 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." (Male tutor, Singaporean)

Some students addressed that they overwhelmingly perceived themselves as subordinate, as the 'follower' in the program managed by the Australian teachers, and some local Singaporean tutors. Hence, they reflected that they lacked authority or autonomy to adapt the curriculum, materials, and contents to promote their understanding of global entrepreneurship is lacking. Their perceived lack of power by the local staff presents a potential long-term problem for the sustainability of the program.

"I am just a student so don't have a lot to do at the program design phase. In fact, I know everything is from Australia. Am I ok with this? Not sure." (Female Student, Singapore)

"We need to follow rubric from Australia when we developed our business plan and business canvas. I disagree with this but I had no choice." (Male Student, Singapore)

Another aspect that arose from the qualitative interviews was the relationship between power and the transfer of Australian assessment, teaching, and activities to the Singaporean management learning context. Being controlled by the overseas partners is difficult for teachers in the local program to adjust the subject to fit in the local context. The transfer of assessment criteria and marking appeared to pose further pedagogical and administrative problems.

"We usually start each semester with a few classes conducted by our Australian counterparts. They expect us to be ready for their learning activities and assignments. It is difficult because we always have a big lecture of over 150 students. How can we adopt their approach?" (Female Student, Singapore)

Some students addressed that local Singaporean tutors were reluctant to apply the assessment criteria set by the Australian course coordinator when allocating grades. 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 students and tutors 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 global entrepreneurial skills 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.

Theme 3: Learning and Teaching Expectations

This theme was constructed from students' experiences and expectation in learning and teaching. Students in this study tended to focus on learning activities and learning outcomes from the activities designed by the teaching team. They 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. The 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 (i.e. immersion in intercultural interactions; two-way dialogue; personal transformation).

“When we work with other students, we developed a greater understanding of the ways in which others interpret situations and how cultural differences can have an impact on entrepreneurs.” (Male student, Singapore)

We also learnt from the tutors 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, business games and activities that replicate cross-cultural scenarios can support students when adapting 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.

“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.” (Female student, Australian)

Students reflected upon the open nature of TNHE where they were required to interact with students from culturally and contextually different countries whilst simultaneously working on the same ideas and task. Their ability to provide feedback to their international counterparts, as previously reported, promoted their understanding on 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 other countries and campus, most students in the program agree that because of the support given by their tutors, and assessment requirements they were progressively feeling more at ease in culturally diverse environments.

“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.” (Male student, Singapore)

Various forms of feedback (i.e. verbal, written, face-to-face) were discussed among teachers in the programs from both locations. They all agree that feedback is crucial for self-development among students in the entrepreneurship and innovation program. The expectations on direct feedback among students from the home institutions can influence how instructors from the host institutions will need to adapt their feedback system to fit in the learning culture and system of the home country.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study addresses challenging issues in learning and teaching of transnational entrepreneurship education in the TVET context. In order for effective engagement among host and home institutions, it requires creative innovation to the challenges inherent in an era of super-complexity. This also implies a level of behavioural adaptation through cultural consciousness and competence, which can be taught, and to deliberately foster engagement between local, international, and offshore students (Treleaven et al., 2001; Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006; Summers & Volet, 2008).

Approaches in learning and teaching in the international vocational-oriented entrepreneurship program is pivotal for the success of transnational entrepreneurship education programs (Henry and Lewis, 2018). 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, or favouring a ‘reproductive or surface approach to learning’ rather than a deep learning approach which is necessary for academic success.

A study by the National Agency Education for Europe at the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (2017) identifies that transnational vocational education system can improve language competencies, skills, and understanding the host country’s factors. Obviously, the enhancement of language and culture in the TVET environment can promote global skills and mindset among students in the program. As the case for this study is Singapore, it shows that Singaporean students in the transnational entrepreneurship education programs are shown to culturally adapt to Western education approaches and are academically engaged debunking the stereotypes about their monocultural learning style. Despite evidence for monoculture 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 learning environment which may be ineffective in contrasting culture-based educational experiences (De Vita, 2001) as well as the key technical competencies for the current global climate (Ismail and Hassan, 2019).

In the future, we should explore various and broad issues in the international entrepreneurship, as Crook et al (2010) also suggested that entrepreneurship research needs additional longitudinal studies as well as more multi-country, multi-source data sets. The nature of TVET is different from higher education in many ways. The integration of TVET

orientation in the higher education's entrepreneurship education program is relevant to modern global and local skills (Chamadia and Shahid, 2018).

This study confirms that contextualising the local and international context is crucial in the management of transnational entrepreneurship business education program, if students are to develop various entrepreneurial competencies. The data suggests 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 vocational outcomes for students in the transnational entrepreneurial education program.

From the TVET's perspective, this study resulted in transportable, transferable and culturally relevant curriculum; improved student engagement through application of educational technologies; validation of cultural diversity in organisational practice; and curriculum expansion that applied diverse skills and examples across contexts. As internationalisation and TVET education 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. The management of transnational entrepreneurial education in the TVET context must be aware of this important issue.

It will be important to incorporate and enhance the discussion on pedagogy as part of a broader discussion concerning ideologies of internationalisation and diversity of entrepreneurship education in the vocational-oriented system (Eisenberg et al, 2013), as participants in the program are fully aware of the importance of the local context. For, if transnational entrepreneurship education occurs in isolation, the danger is that staff and students will find themselves in the midst of a debate centred on higher education as a tool of neo-colonialism, in which case they may refuse to participate on ideological grounds, or feel compromised and confused.

Finally, it is important to include students from both host and home countries in the process of curriculum and learning design. We need to understand from students' perspectives in terms of what is or is not important for them to learn in order to develop the global entrepreneurial competencies. Without students' voices in this process, the design is unquestionably incomplete.

We argue that the development of global competencies among students in the TVET programs is pivotal. Global competencies and mindset will create graduates who are capable of working in the complex global industry, and be ready to face the challenges of the unpredictable global business environment.

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