



## INTER-INDEPENDENCE COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE INFO-GLOBALIZATION AGE – A NEW SCIENCE OF E-LEARNING IS IN THE MAKING

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### Abstract

Due to the accelerating developments of globalization, digital information and communication technologies... the nature, mission, and academic identity of higher education have been changed. As a result, a new form of higher education has emerged. That is "transnational higher education (TNHE). However, in addition to the direct influence of info - global advances on TNHE, additional internal factors such as economic and academic concerns are interfering the scene, governing consequently with other factors, the goals, processes, resources, and directions which TNHE is apt to pursue. Moreover, TNHE is facing as any forming science, several challenges related to: incongruent missions and / or priorities, problem of accreditation, insufficient resources, inappropriate methods of teaching and learning, mismanagement, lenient governance and regulations, and biased attitudes. To counteract above shortcomings and contributing to the advancement of TNHE, this article is introducing two working principles: inter-independence and collaboration. And then produced two operational mechanisms: the first, a strategic inter-independence collaborative model by which each TNHE partner could achieve its academic and professional needs, and the second, a quality audit / evaluation framework that could help each TNHE institution focusing on achieving its priority goals.

**Keywords:** Transnational Higher Education, Inter-independence, Collaboration, Inter-independence Collaboration, Inter-independence Collaborative Strategies, Inter-independence Collaboration Model, Information Age, Globalization.

### INTRODUCTION

Man, who had limited his schooling from the era of Plato to needs within confined borders on earth, had entered by the mid-nineties of the twentieth century the cyberspace age. As a result, the psycho-social, economic, physical and educational means and priorities for a productive schooling seem to have changed. The reason beyond this shift in schooling priorities stems from the fact that the cognitive as well as the behavioral fields in which man operates have extended to infinity (Hamdan1987).

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are altering who we are, how we think, what we believe, and how we behave. The human race is in essence developing a new humanity. By digital ICT means, it becomes possible to communicate, interact, and learn- receive information instantly (Hamdan2007; Papp and Alberts1997; Kupfer1997; Stewart1997). ICTs are enabling humans and institutions to go cyber, thus changing profoundly many facets of doing things, including the ways of Transnational Higher Education TNHE (International Research Center 2006; Kok 2006; O'Donoghue and Others 2000).

Globalizing ICTs, have caused a massive flow of information and innovation throughout the globe. They, the two together are seen by this Writer, to represent a decisive operational factor of current TNHE. In fact, the streaming of human resources, programs, skills, expertise, academic and professional exchange across the world, indicate the decisive role of Globalizing ICTs for the advancement of TNHE (Answers Corporation1997; Burbules and Torres 2000; Cogburn 2012; UNESCO2007).

It follows therefore, that continuing schooling within restricted classroom walls or specific school or local borders means simply gearing priorities of educational system backward to outdated conventional knowledge, preparing generations at best to live the persisting past, since isolated educational institutions can't empower



learners to develop themselves for living the open Space Age as much as to be attached to memories, folklores and obsolete epistemology (Hamdan1992).

Further, While institutions could keep their individual identities, academic integrity and the independence of in-house decision making, they could at the same time initiate new interactive relationships that are professional, equitable, productive, and responsive to institutional needs. These intents and processes resemble what this writer calls here inter-independence collaboration.

### ***Transnational Higher Education Based Inter-independence Collaboration- A New science of eLearning is in the making***

Transnational (cross-border)Higher Education "TNHE" is generally practiced in three forms: student/academic mobility, program mobility, and institution mobility (Naidoo 2006 in Yi Cao2011).

TNHE came strongly to the fore of educational scene twenty years ago due to the pressures of globalization and constant demands of info technologies and knowledge economy that urged international States to launch a series of educational plans since the mid-1990s, to:

- create new valuable markets by expanding education into new geographies.–promote reform and quality of TNHE,
- boost Global academic rankings,
- get economic revenue by globalizing the business of higher education,
- be recognized as exporters of higher education research and services (KPMG International Cooperative2012; Mok,2009):.

In fact, expanding direct governmental backing and financial support to foreign higher education institutions in forms of tax deduction benefits, educational grants and land concessions, are expected to reinforce more collaborative transnational initiatives and as well encouraging civic society gurus to empower universities to address sustainable development challenges of the twenty-first century (Khan2011; Koehn 2012).

To achieve optimized consequences of these info-global factors and to neutralize their possible negative side effects, TNHE institutions need to adopt two operational principles: the first is inter-independence which enables them individually and as joint venture groups to interact with a sense of responsibility toward one another, and the second is collaboration which allows each partner to maintain equitable agreed upon needs.

For TNHE as recognized a new schooling trend has transformed the concept and practice of local isolated higher education institutions to global collaborating learning- teaching networks in which "*learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based*" (Vignoli 2004).

Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, Australia, and UAE, among others, are notable cases in which the states have explicitly declared intentions to make their territories regional hubs of such new type of education. Thus leading to dramatic developments of today's TNHE as part of the states' coping strategies (Mok 2009). In fact, "One in five TNHE branch campuses in the world is hosted by the UAE"(Choudaha 2012), and China doubled student enrollment from five million post-secondary students in mid-1990s to more than 34 million in 2010(Koehn 2012).

Consequently, TNHE institutions are established with no apparent limitations; special governance laws are introduced; distinctive methods of learning, instruction, assessment, human and professional communication techniques are formed and practiced; TNHE graduate study programs are offered; new terms such as: transnational education, "glocals", eStudent, education mobility, and internationalization were coined; specific types of literature and research have emerged; and specialized forums and conferences are convened (Choudaha2012;Connelly and Others 2010; Coverdale-Jones 2012;Drew and Others 2008; Huang 2006; Jokivirta 2006; Kazuhiro 2006; Koehn 2012; Naidoo2009;Mok 2009; Ong and Chan 2012; The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education 2013; The University of Nottingham 2013; Wilkins and Balakrishnan 2013;Yonezawa2009; Yoshino 2004)..hence, a new educational science: *Transnational Education, is borne*.

However, TNHE as any newly forming science, and in lieu of its highly compelling pace of developments, is facing several technical and practical problems; and understanding of its real status on the ground is still



incomprehensible due to lacking of systematic study statistics (Naidoo 2009). New and more detailed governance and regulatory regimes for steering the growing number of TNE providers and programs are still urgently needed.

For example, the Sino-UK TNE partnership was initiated without specific organizing formula but personal connections. Thus, a need was observed to work out a precise form of partnership and its associated financial implications for both parties and regulatory frameworks...while cultural diversities and differences in educational tradition, curriculum challenges, communication style and organizational practices are among factors affecting the operation of a TNE partnership over time. Changes in macro-economic factors such as exchange rate can also lead to termination of a TNE project (Altbach 2010; Van Damme 2001; Wenying and Boncella 2007; Zhuang 2009; Wenying 2007)

Quality Assurance issues to regulate effectively TNHE, to ensure its quality, to promote mutual recognition of academic / professional degrees or qualifications, have all become the concern of governments and international organizations. More work is evidently needed to improve current external quality assurance systems in regard of quality audit, professional accreditation and mutual recognition of academic and professional attributes (Social Science Paper 2012). The last part of this paper is dealing with current issue.

Moreover, economic preference in terms of generating revenue over other human and academic merits that determine the cause of collaborating TNHE institutions, has added immensely to its persisting problems. Hence, it is essentially expected from TNHE providers to adopt strategies which ultimately differ from the business model to reflect the intrinsic value of higher education whose main goal is to serve the human cause (Altbach 2010).

#### ***The Concepts and Roles of inter-independence and collaboration in TNHE***

To negate above shortcomings or at least to ease their negative effects on TNHE institutions, two philosophical organizational principles are proposed for partnership: inter-independence and collaboration.

The concept of inter-independence was firstly coined by this Writer in a work published in Arabic at 1987 and then in English at 1992. With inter-independence, the organization may appear more aware of its strengths, limits and needs and those of others. It is expected while maintaining a highly integrative own profile and mutually exclusive identity, tends without apparent reservations to share own qualities and shortcomings for the sake of achieving better independence which is free of dismay, threat, or uncertainty.

Working with the concept of inter-independence is expected to maintain an educational process by which every organization can maintain equitable relations with others, and explore its uniqueness then share it develop it and without a sense of being hopeless or the risk of being overtaken, subdued, or offended by others.

*Collaboration on another hand is a behavioral paradigm, and a well-defined relationship performed by two or more higher education institutions (or individuals) to achieve mutual strategic goals (ETC- Education Transition Choices 1997).*

For *collaboration* to succeed however, it calls for a relationship built upon commitments to: the concept of mutual relationships and goals, *a sense of shared ownership*, jointly developed tasks and joint responsibilities, mutual authority and accountability for success, and sharing of resources and rewards (Bishop 1993).

Further, a real feeling of mutual trust among partners of TNHE should be available to motivate working together without too many risks. THE collaborating institutions by utilizing the *philosophy, working principles and techniques of inter-independence*, will help them in neutralizing emerging risks and balancing them against academic and professional vulnerabilities (Ruohomaa and Kutvonen 2008).

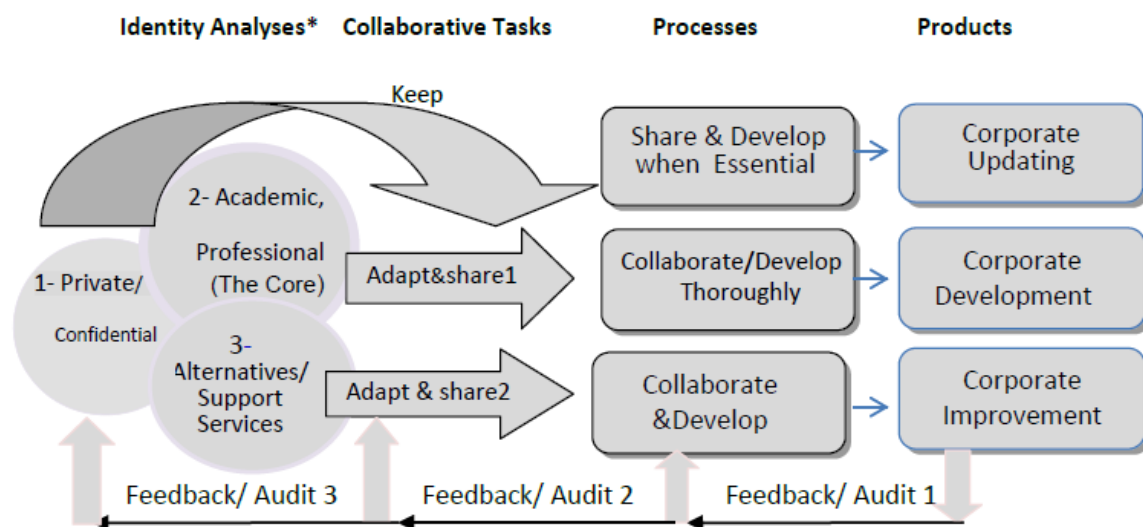
#### ***Proposed strategic Systemic Model for Inter-independence Collaboration of TNHE***

TNHE has conventionally handled issues of students' learning and academic programs. It is strongly advocated by this Writer however, that the mission of inter-independence collaboration of TNHE institutions should be

extended to all other factors and processes, since educational institutions are in reality Gestalt operating systems built upon "inputs- processes- outputs". Hence, sub-systems like students' learning and academic programs are not operating in isolation of other components of the TNHE system. Rather, they are affecting and being affected by all other factors within the grand system.

Thus, TNHE institutions, in order to be effectively responsive in their inter-dependence collaboration strategies and succeeding consequently in their learning - teaching missions, are required to customize, transform, or develop their human, academic, professional, educational, psychological, physical, regulatory laws, and other support services, whenever deciding to initiate the transnational collaborated efforts. Needless to indicate that without this Gestalt systemic operational approach, TNHE may turn into a "trial- error" risky business, failing students as well institutions whenever any shortcoming may emerge.

The strategic Systemic Model of Inter-independence Collaboration is depicted in the following diagram.



- Identity Analyses of Higher Education Institution

Figure 1: A Proposed Strategic Systemic Model for Inter-independence Collaboration in Transnational Higher Education (developed by the Author)

#### **Structure of the Systemic Model**

The model in figure1 is composed of three major elements-inputs, processes and outputs, which are briefly illustrated as follows:

**Inputs of the Systemic Model** which form the academic and professional identity of higher education institution (HEI). These are sorted in three categories, briefed as follows (inputs are based on a comprehensive review of several university sites):

1-Private / confidential elements which the HEI keeps as a special concern that are rarely shared with outsiders, except in extremely emergent cases. Examples of these elements are the following:

- Faculty and Staff Personal Information-Students' personal and academic records
- Human resources records
- University Financial Records
- Organizational security practices and controls, and
- classified information.

2- Academic/Professional elements which represent the core of Institutional every day Inter-independence collaboration. A sample of these:

- Instructors - academic and professional qualifications



- Study plans and programs
- Curricula and academic content
- Instruction and methods
- Learning techniques and alternatives
- Assessment and evaluation
- Degrees and accreditation

3-Alternative / Support Services. These represent all the factors and activities which help in transforming above academic/professional elements from paper or online documents into real actions with more concrete effective results. Collaborating institutions share and improve these elements when educational and management contexts and operations call for more development and better outcomes. A sample of alternative/support services is in the following:

- Faculty & Staff services, e.g. Alumni Association, Office of Development, and Office of faculty affairs.
- Physical support services. e.g. University enterprises, Facilities, University affairs office, mental health advisory services, The counseling services, and Student health services.
- Academic support services. e.g. Library services, Undergraduate study support technology services,
- Technical support and services
- Education support services. e.g. Campus programs, Outreach programs, Parents role related services.

#### Processes of the Systemic Model

Inter-independence Collaboration institutions inquire their own needs, searching for more effective achievements, locating willing parties, designing joint plans and efforts to achieve priorities, initiating mutual exchange of experiences and knowledge, and accomplishing collaborative missions as stated. They adopt here three tasks:

- 1- Keep confidentially their private identity elements, or sharing them and developing when deem essential.
- 2- Adapt & share academic and professional elements, collaborate with other fellow institutions and develop thoroughly as much as possible.
- 3- Adapt & share support services elements, collaborate with other fellow institutions to develop for more improvements.

#### Outputs of the Systemic Model

Inter-independence collaboration empowers TNHE institutions to develop their academic as well professional knowledge and operations services, and to achieve effectiveness in their delegated responsibilities by:

- Exploring, testing, and refining own purposes, strategies, and actions in light of priority outcomes.
- Seek ultimate corporate updating of private identity elements whenever needed, confirm thorough development of academic and professional elements, and maintain corporate improvement of support services for better productivity.
- Revising Inter-independence collaboration plans and processes according to observed quality of results, by means of auditing and assessment feedback.

#### Implementation Stages of Inter-independence Collaboration within the Systemic Model

Three consecutive Stages (Torbert & Others 2010) are involved in the Systemic Model (figure 1):

**Stage 1: Individual Institution Perspective**— analysis of status, priorities and needs, by means of:

- Observing ongoing actions and the effects, strengths and weaknesses in inputs, processes and outcomes, academic and professional satisfactions / dissatisfactions, and needs still to be realized.
- Proposing protective alternatives against becoming subsumed by 'collaborative institutional group', their norms or own personal 'official stories'.

**Stage 2: Collaborating Transnational Institutions Perspective** - analysis of status, priorities and needs of collaborating institutions as individual units, inter-groups, and as a gestalt collaborating partnership, by means of:

- o Initiating collaborative tasks as generated in Stage 1 which are (figure 1):



- keep private elements, or share and develop as essential;
- share academic and professional elements, collaborate and develop **thoroughly for more progress**;
- share, collaborate, and develop selectively support services for institutional improvement.
- Encouraging mutual auditing of attributions and assessments in real practices, and generating mutual critical and constructive implications for collaboration and change.
- Proposing mutual protective alternatives against becoming limited by own institutional perspective, or become overwhelmed in unproven assumptions and norms.

**Stage 3: Collaborative Data Perspective**—Steering the future of institutional Inter-independence collaboration, by means of:

- Using collaborative generated data to establish ‘objective’ perspectives that are highly strategic, rational and more productive for all partners.
- Protecting collaborative partners, individually and as a group against becoming overly subjected by their own proclaimed prejudices.

### Observed Barriers to Effective Systemic Inter-independence Collaboration

Torbert and Others (2010) stated in this regard seven barriers, appear as follows:

- 1-** Chauvinism: some higher education institutions are observed in need to be seen as source of knowledge and competence; ignoring consequently the academic as well professional priorities and conditions of other member institutions, and the educational values imbedded in the concept of inter-independence collaboration.
- 2-** Close-mindedness: when having fixated mind.. Being locked onto a particular issue, perspective, methodology, a specific time schedule or a way of collaboration.
- 3-** Academic nagging: appears in showing-off a personal or academic view, persisting subjectively on talking or asking for specific idea or demand, debating a point endlessly, and seeming unsatisfied regardless of authentic facts or the logic involved in the situation.

### An authentic example of above three barriers

*The Author of this article had experienced the above three barriers during the academic year 2005-2006 as professor and head of the psychology and education department (PED) at a private university in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).*

*Briefly, the real story happened as follows: the University Administration asked the Head of (PED) to develop a master's degree program in educational administration and supervision (EAS) directed to serve teachers, supervisors, and principals of the (UAE) Ministry of Education schools who are eligible to study the EAS graduate program..*

*The accreditation system adopted by the (UAE) Ministry of Higher Education requires referring the new programs to a critical review by an academic committee of two “experts” from a western country such as USA. So, two academicians (man and a woman) were invited from two American universities on the expense of the University who owned the graduate program.*

*The two external examiners and this Writer as the designer of the program and head of the (PED) had long sessions discussing along two days every detail of the program. Then the committee met separately with faculty members of the program. At the end of the appraisal week, the reviewers suddenly pressed for the issue of English language as a first medium of instruction of the (EAS) program. Needless to point out that reversing the role of English as a second language to the first one for a graduate program dedicated to Arab trainees with Arabic cultural and educational backgrounds; belonging to Arab schools, students, local environments, values, traditions, and history; teaching and supervising Arab pupils, curricula and activities in Arabic; fostering strategic goals to better future for Arab generations.. Seemed extremely abnormal, chauvinistic, close-minded, and academic nagging!*

*It was felt at the time that those academicians appeared overwhelmed by a sense of military psychology assuming they are invading an underdeveloped, helpless, low-quality higher education institution (which is in*



reality not the case). Their proposal was resisted by this Writer since Arabic was seen a sovereign identity issue. And at last, the program was failed! as an example of inter-independent collaboration.

- Self-depreciation: some collaborating parties seem lacking professional confidence, feeling somewhat inferior or incapable of contributing anything of value. Hence resist revealing their own vulnerability, insecure academic status, or receiving judgments.
- Behavior- rushing as institutional collaboration is resulted from short-sighted work plans, speedy decisions, and careless performance.
- Day- dreaming: collaborating member institutions appear here absent- minded, task- disoriented, inattentive, uninterested, occupied by other things than collaboration, or listening without hearing. Hence the mission of inter-independent collaboration could not be realized.
- Withdrawal opposition by means of ignoring collaboration without vocalizing, negligent performance, procrastination of assignments or tasks.

#### **Proposed Brief Meta Audit and Evaluation Frameworks for Quality Assurance of TNHE**

Three meta audit and evaluation frameworks are offered, they are briefly as follows:

##### **Inter-institutional Meta Audit and Evaluation Framework**

TNE collaborating institutions that form in reality a regional or international league, could set up an internal quality assurance agency, a tribunal, or a steering committee, to:

- handle auditing and quality issues related to processes and outcomes of inter-independent collaboration partnerships,
- handle auditing and quality issues of inter-institutional and regional accreditation, academic and professional qualifications of graduates.
- help in setting up quality standards, practices and inter-relations needed by individual members to improve their "TNE" missions.
- serve as a liaison body who helps in settling disagreements that could emerge between collaborating institutions. However, this agency is expected further to fulfill the following specific tasks (Bennett and Others 2004):
  - o "Monitoring the activities of imported transnational education providers;
  - o Liaising with providers (and countries of origin) when problems arise;
  - o Reporting bogus institutions to appropriate national and international authorities;
  - o Seeking bilateral solutions to TNE problems;
  - o Providing advice and information to the public associated with imported TNE".

##### **External Meta Audit and Evaluation Framework**

This framework focuses primarily on institutional quality accreditation, and usually is administered by professional governmental local agencies, and/or regional and international accreditation associations. These official affiliations provide TNE institutions with the following services (Bennett and Others 2004):

- o Establish, or encourage the establishment of a comprehensive, fair and transparent system of registration or licensing for cross-border higher education providers wishing to operate in their territory.
- o Establish, or encourage the establishment of a comprehensive capacity for reliable quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education provision which involve both sending and receiving countries.
- o Consult and coordinate amongst the various competent bodies for quality assurance and accreditation both nationally and internationally.

Moreover, Baird added for issues of recognition and accreditation of programs, degrees, and TNE institutions, the following tasks:

- o Provide accurate, reliable and easily accessible information in regard to criteria and standards for registration, licensure, quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education, their consequences on the funding of students, institutions or programs, and their voluntary or mandatory nature.
- o Contribute to efforts to improve the accessibility at the international level of up-to date, accurate and comprehensive information on recognized higher education institutions/providers.

- Consider becoming party to and contribute to the development and/or updating of the appropriate UNESCO regional conventions on recognition of qualifications and establish national information centers as stipulated by the conventions.
- develop or encourage bilateral or multilateral recognition agreements, facilitating the recognition or equivalence of each country's qualifications based on the procedures and criteria included in mutual agreements (Baird 2006).

**A Proposed Brief Meta Audit and Evaluation Framework**

In a competitive open market for higher education, coupled with the profound effects of globalization, communication and information technologies, source countries have an interest in ensuring that the standards of their transnational programs at least maintain those of programs offered at parallel professional facilities (Baird, 2006).

For HEI institutions, to insure tentatively a quality Inter-independence collaboration with fellow partners, they could build own mutual endeavors on two criteria: priority

*Table 1: A Quality Audit and Assurance searching Grid for improving Transnational Higher Education(\*S. S= support services)*

Tentative "TNHE" Topics	Specifics &Criteria of Program Owner	Specifics& Criteria of Program Collaborator	Observed Differences (+ / -)	Improvement decisions
Students				
Instructors				
Learning				
Teaching				
Programs				
Facilities				
Equipments				
Human S. S.*				
Educational S.S.				
Psycho S. S.				
Technical S. S.				
Managing S. S.				
Financial S.S.				
<i>Notes:</i>				

needs and mission standards. Each institution should know exactly what it needs the most (a sample is in above auditing form) , and the operational attributes and outcomes that should be observed at each formative stage of inter-independence collaboration, and then the mechanisms and steps by which each collaborating partner will be held accountable.

Comparing intended inputs and processes with observed outcomes, will simply reveal the minus and plus differences (as indicated in above form) which in turn will lead to required auditing and accountability sessions necessary for maintaining more quality inter-independence collaboration.

**Epilogue**

This paper explored Transnational Higher Education (TNHE) as an emerging educational science of eLearning based heavily on the developments and implications of contemporary globalization, digital information and communication technologies, and utilizing two operational principles: collaboration and inter-independence.





TNHE as a new science has its own terminology, academic and applied principles, eCurricula, methods, distinctive literature and research, regulatory frameworks, facilities, equipments, support services, and as well eStudents, instructors, theorists, thinkers, and practitioners.

To help in advancing TNHE as scientific productive framework for eLearning, the paper presented two organizing / operating tools: a Systemic strategic Model for Inter-independence Collaboration, and Meta Audit and Evaluation Frameworks for Quality Assurance of TNHE.

**WJEIS's Note:** This article was presented at 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on New Trends in Education and Their Implications - ICONTE, 25-27 April, 2013, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 3 Number 2 of WJEIS 2013 by WJEIS Scientific Committee

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