

Brief Report

Globalising Higher Education: TNE Models and Regulatory Insights in Latin America



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Overview

This is a brief summary of the research “The landscape of Transnational Education and mutual recognition of qualifications in Latin America, with special emphasis on Brazil, Mexico and Peru”. Developed by the British Council, this report examines the opportunities and challenges for Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships and the role of mutual recognition of qualifications in facilitating these.

To establish the benefits of internationalisation of higher education, the research studied:

- 1 International engagement in higher education between the UK and Latin America
- 2 The international higher education landscape in the studied countries – Brazil, Mexico and Peru
- 3 The regulatory policies for Transnational Education in Brazil, Mexico and Peru
- 4 The benefits and challenges for Transnational Education partnerships as perceived by higher education and government stakeholders in those countries
- 5 The perceived importance of mutual recognition of qualifications agreements for internationalisation of higher education cooperation and, in particular, Transnational Education growth.



Main research findings

An analysis was undertaken of current quantitative data on collaboration between the UK and the wider Latin America region. This focused on the three main components of internationalisation of higher education: international student mobility, research collaborations and Transnational Education partnerships. This helps to understand the context in which internationalisation of higher education and Transnational Education (TNE) in the three countries operate. It also provides some comparisons with other world regions in terms of the development and landscape of internationalisation of higher education.

1. The state of internationalisation of higher education engagement between the UK and Brazil, Mexico and Peru

A prominent feature of internationalisation of higher education engagement with the studied countries is the critical role of government funding and support. This research found that higher education (HE) relations between the UK and the studied countries blossomed when they were supported by government-backed initiatives.

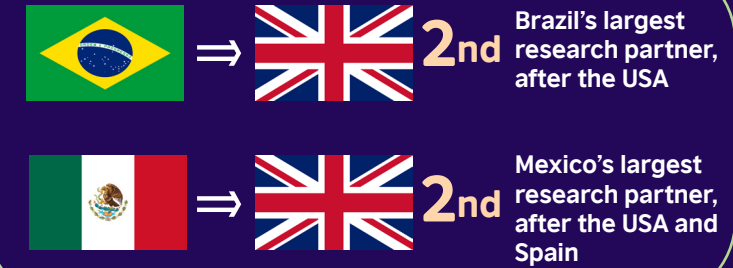
1A. International student mobility

There has been little mobility between Latin America and the UK over the past two decades. Latin America accounted for approximately 1 per cent of the internationally mobile students in the UK. The peak in mobility from Brazil in 2015 was driven by the country's Science without Borders programme. The number of Mexican students peaked in the following year, when they reached an all-time high of almost 2,000 students.

745 UK Transnational Education students hosted by Brazil in 2021-22

1B. International research collaborations

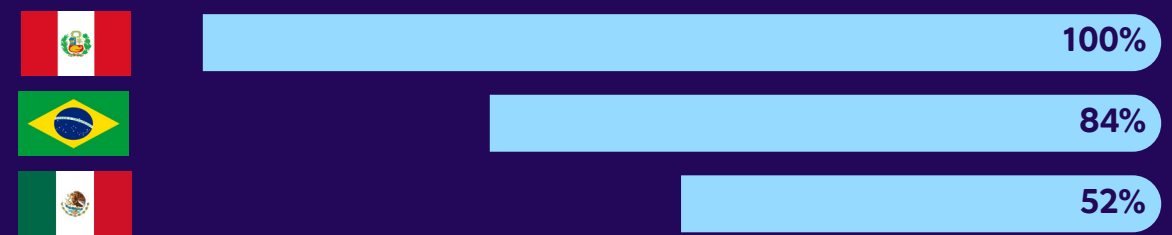
There is an active research collaboration between the UK and Brazil, Mexico and Peru. Bibliometric analysis shows that the UK is among the top research partners for the three countries and accounts for between 4 and 6 per cent of their collaborative research output.



1C. Transnational Education

Compared with the rest of the world, Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships between the UK and Latin America remain limited. Across the region, Mexico is the most active country for TNE, with almost 900 TNE students going to the UK in 2021-22. Brazil was home to 745 TNE students, and Peru had 405 in the same period. According to the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA's) Aggregate Offshore Record, TNE partnerships are limited outside the provision of distance learning and online education.

Distance learning and online education are the dominant TNE delivery mechanisms

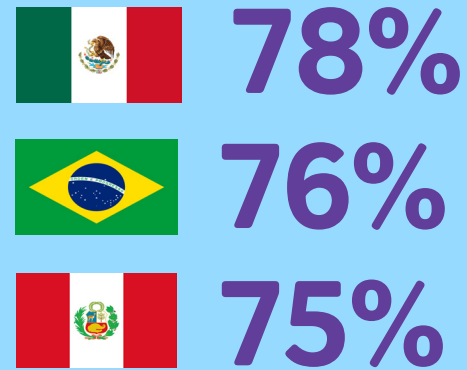


• UK Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA's) Aggregate Offshore Record about distance learning and online education
 • Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships with the UK in 2021-22

2. Internationalisation of higher education priorities in the studied countries

Studying abroad and student exchange are top internationalisation of higher education priorities in Brazil (for 76% of the surveyed higher education institutions), Mexico (78%) and Peru (75%). The following most important areas are international research collaboration (65% of the surveyed higher education institutions in the three countries) and international partnerships (64%).

Study abroad and student exchange are top priority for internationalisation of higher education as follows:



International research collaborations are a priority for:



International research collaborations are a priority for:



3. Regulatory Frameworks for Transnational Education (TNE)



Brazil: While the internationalisation of higher education is an emerging priority for many higher education institutions in Brazil, there is no regulatory framework to facilitate international partnerships, with little activity in terms of international mobility of academic programmes and institutions. Institutions in France and Germany were pointed by the surveyed higher education institutions as their main Transnational Education (TNE) partners.



Mexico: The regulatory environment in Mexico is supportive of TNE, primarily in the areas of dual degrees. Several agreements exist to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications. At the national level, there is a streamlined policy and process for the recognition of foreign qualifications. The Mexican Ministry of Education leads on recognition of HE degrees.



Peru: While there is no specific regulation for TNE in Peru, there is provision for the operation of foreign universities in the country. These universities require licensing even if they involve a partnership with a Peruvian university. The local government's regulatory reforms from 2014 placed internationalisation as a key area for improving the competitive position of universities.

4. The value of Transnational Education (TNE)

Dual degrees are the most common type of activity that Latin American institutions were involved in. Half of the surveyed higher education institutions were engaged in dual degrees and 38 per cent were involved in the online delivery of courses from foreign universities.

In Brazil, Mexico and Peru, universities perceive TNE partnerships as an important way to internationalise higher education and increase its quality. There are, however, challenges at the institutional and government levels, which hinder their efforts.

Brazilian stakeholders perceived TNE as a vehicle to achieve greater internationalisation of higher education. Additional benefits included the socioeconomic development of regions and local communities. TNE made a valuable contribution to the provision of courses that did not exist in particular regions, strengthened links and capacity building for the local market, and helped retain talent and prevent brain drain.

Almost all institutions that responded to the survey in Mexico agreed that joint and dual provision increased knowledge transfer. Joint degrees were perceived to contribute to improved internationalisation of education and institutional competitiveness.

Peru's higher education system is less internationally oriented than those of Brazil and Mexico, and there was much more emphasis by stakeholders on potential benefits at national level.

50%

Higher education institutions engaged in dual degrees

40%

Country's dual degrees at undergraduate level

38%

Higher education institutions involved in the online delivery of courses from foreign universities

43%

Brazilian higher education institutions engaged in cotutelle PhD degrees



5. Transnational Education (TNE) challenges

Similar top challenges were identified among stakeholders from the three countries, with a large degree of congruence:

5A. Regulatory: No higher education legislative or regulatory framework in any of the countries were written to include TNE – which means that TNE was neither a political priority nor on government agendas. TNE engagement is developing faster than the countries' ability to develop appropriate regulations.

5B. Cost of TNE: Costs involved in partnerships with UK higher education institutions were particularly challenging. Tuition fees were higher than in most other countries, and these were rarely reduced or waived. Higher education institutions in Brazil, Mexico and Peru could negotiate reciprocal agreements so that tuition fees were not charged by either institution, but that was not usually possible with UK.

5C. English language proficiency: English language proficiency was a challenge across the three countries, where it's seen as directly related to the wealth of families. There was a perception that TNE (usually conducted in English) disadvantages students from deprived backgrounds.

5D. Institutional capacity: A lack of institutional capacity was noted in the survey, as TNE required higher education institutions to allocate additional staff and financial resources, although budgets were already under pressure. The survey identified professional training of staff to engage in TNE partnership as a development priority for institutions.

5E. Lack of knowledge about TNE: Limited awareness about the benefits of TNE to students, institutions, businesses and national agendas. Many of the interviewed stakeholders conflated TNE with study abroad. At the national level, there were few universities with TNE programmes.

6. Recommendations

6A. Policymakers: Greater government-to-government cooperation is needed between the UK, Brazil, Mexico and Peru.

- To develop a shared understanding of what Transnational Education (TNE) comprises and also its potential to deliver to the socioeconomic agendas of Brazil, Mexico and Peru.
- To create bilateral (or multilateral) incentives, particularly financial, to prioritise and support those TNE partnerships that will contribute value to agreed agendas that meet the needs of countries. The research shows that successful TNE programmes are those backed by government-funded programmes.
- To review how existing research networks can be capitalised on to build priority TNE partnerships, and how national funding agencies can work collaboratively to achieve this.
- Where mutual recognition of qualifications arrangements exist (Mexico, Peru), to facilitate their operation by identifying and addressing barriers (including regulatory and cultural) that serve to limit their practical effectiveness. Where mutual recognition of qualifications does not exist (Brazil), to identify other routes to achieving mutual recognition of degrees.
- For agencies and higher education institutions to collaborate on developing





6B. Higher education institutions: Huge interest among higher education institutions in deepening international collaborations, despite the little knowledge about Transnational Education (TNE). It leads to an opportunity to develop an understanding of what TNE provision is and also how it can benefit higher education institutions and students.

- A greater awareness across the institutions about TNE and its potential value.
- Institutional internationalisation strategies that include TNE as a component alongside research collaborations and student and staff mobility.
- Building institution-wide support for TNE engagement to ensure that it can be appropriately staffed and resourced as part of institutions' core resource allocation.
- Developing and sharing knowhow between institutions, including examples of successful models and operational practice.

6C. UK stakeholders: There is an opportunity for the UK higher education sector to strengthen its engagement with some of the world's largest HE systems.

- UK government support will be critical if Transnational Education (TNE) engagement between the UK and Latin America is to succeed. Support should include collaboration with the governments of the three countries to provide jointly funded incentives.
- UK higher education institutions should consider the feasibility of delivering TNE in the local language. TNE can make a huge contribution to the local area when it is adjusted to meet local skills and demand. Given the limited English language proficiency across Latin America, TNE in the local language would significantly widen access to international degrees and qualifications.
- UK higher education institutions should consider developing platforms for virtual collaborative online international learning (COIL) projects with Latin America. These could bring together institutions and their students and facilitate the virtual mobility between institutions.

Improving international collaboration | Brazil and UK universities

A study published in 2018 by the International Journal of Education Management identifies three key elements for the development of sustainable international partnerships:

1 the existence of an enabling policy framework

2 clear and appropriate international strategy at university level

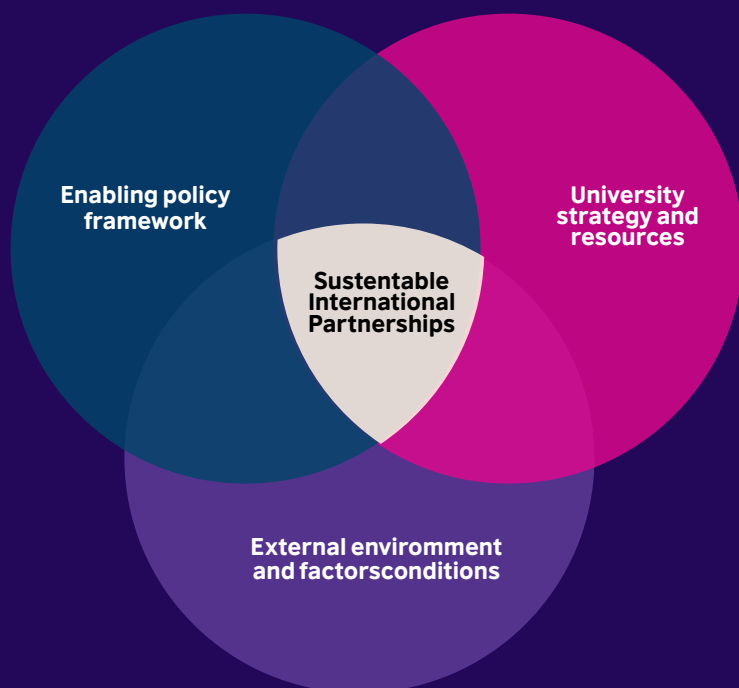
3 broader factor conditions and external environment in other countries

An enabling policy framework is one that includes clearly defined and easily accessible requirements for each of the different types of international partnerships and provision for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

At university level, a key prerequisite is the existence of an international strategy with measurable objectives and dedicated resources for its successful implementation.

The factor conditions and external environment that support the development and sustainability of international partnerships include the proficiency in foreign languages, the quality of secondary education, the quality of human capital, the IT infrastructure, and the country's capacity for research and innovation.

Framework for the development of sustainable international partnerships



Given this context, it's important to consider practical advice and policy recommendations on how to improve the international links between Brazilian and UK universities – based on a wide array of evidence collected from the study in Latin America conducted by the British Council in 2022/23 and secondary data from published reports and academic research.

Practical advice for Brazilian higher education institutions

Due to the complex regulatory and policy framework in Brazil, Brazilian higher education institutions experience a high administrative burden in establishing and managing international partnerships. This acts as a key obstacle to the engagement with the UK, and other foreign higher education institutions, and it is not something that can be tackled by Brazilian universities alone.

Existing collaboration landscape and barriers to international partnerships

Despite the large number of universities in the country, currently there is very limited teaching and programme delivery international collaboration activity with the UK, but also more broadly with other countries.

The low internationalisation of Brazilian universities can limit their global recognition, restricting research collaborations and cultural exchange opportunities. This lack of international exposure may hinder students' preparedness for the global market and the universities' ability to attract international funding.

Ultimately, this could impact the universities' diversity, the quality of their research,

Most common institutional-level causes of the reduced international collaboration activity in Brazilian universities

- Lack of a focused and well-defined university internationalisation strategy
- Limited allocation of resources for pursuing, nurturing, and maintaining international activities
- Alleviating impact of “North-to-South” type of internationalisation activities, opposing to developing partnerships in the local context
- Lack of motivation by faculty to pursue and support international activities
- Academic staff and student language barriers
- Regulatory burden for independent Transnational Education (TNE) projects; absence of a specific and well-defined TNE regulatory framework

The proficiency in English has been identified as a key barrier for the internationalisation of Brazilian universities

Recommendations for Brazilian higher education institutions

Faculty and student buy-in

To achieve appropriate faculty and student engagement with international collaboration projects, it is important to justify their value to the student experience, quality of teaching and research outputs, and the global visibility and reputation of universities.

To achieve this, Brazilian universities could consider international collaboration as endogenous to local provision and as an inseparable element of their teaching model.

Key points to communicate these benefits to key internal stakeholders:

- International projects lead to innovation in teaching and enhancement of the curriculum
- International partnerships improve the employability prospects of graduates
- International collaborations allow to expose students to different learning environments, assessment designs, and experiential learning opportunities.
- Such projects generate valuable research collaborations that evidently produce publications of higher quality/impact.



Higher education students tend to rate international learning experience as of high value to their learning

University internationalisation strategy

A well-defined university internationalisation strategy is vital for communicating to internal and external stakeholders the university objectives and priorities for international collaboration.

The Brazilian universities should seek to develop this strategy with:

- Measurable objectives about:
 - 1) mobility of students and faculty, and 2) collaboration on academic programmes
- Specific targets to measure the achievement of the strategy objectives
- Faculty incentives linked to targets in the academic and administrative staff's annual appraisal schemes
- Appropriate resources allocated to each of the strategic objectives, as developing and managing international collaboration requires substantial resources
- Provide financial support, staff allocation, infrastructure development, or partnership funding as part of these appropriate resources

Implement and cascade the strategy by example

Implementing an internationalisation strategy is a challenging task and this is where most universities encounter challenges. Local stakeholders are not always clear as to how these could be aligned with the core activities of teaching and research.

One practical solution to this problem is to start by focusing on establishing one exemplar collaboration that can be used as the blueprint across the organisation

It allows the university to set and maintain certain standards about the type of activities that may emerge from the internationalisation strategy. Additionally, for its successful implementation, it is important for Brazilian universities to cascade the information at each department.

1

Brazilian Universities can start from a faculty/school that is best positioned to establish an international partnership with UK universities

2

Identify faculty members with expertise and interest in international collaboration who will act as “internationalisation champions”

Language capacity

Most of international collaboration projects require a good level of proficiency in English by all key internal stakeholders (e.g., academics, students, administrators). This can be considered a challenge in Brazil, where the English language element of international collaboration is often seen as a source of inequality and alienation.

On the other hand, Brazilian universities have a strong international engagement with non-English speaking countries. This can provide unique opportunities for multi-country collaboration projects.

To develop their language readiness and capacity, Brazilian universities could:

1

Create foreign language support for students and staff. This could extend beyond English to include other foreign languages that can boost international collaboration with a broader range of other countries

2

Provide portuguese language support for foreign students and staff, leading to an improved overall experience of foreign students and staff. Also, this can promote the development of more equitable forms of collaboration



Policy-level recommendations

It is true that Brazil has an active HE internationalisation policy framework – but it is limited by substantial gaps, especially in Transnational Education (TNE). A robust and clear regulatory and broader policy framework is a prerequisite for the country to evolve in any TNE activity.

The existing policy framework for international collaboration in Brazil is lacking clarity and detail. There are no specific requirements, guidelines and prerequisites for establishing Transnational Education projects



Also, the lack of a well-articulated and easily accessible framework does not help foreign universities interested in pursuing collaborative projects in Brazil. This causes the regulatory and operational risks to increase and prevents other countries' HE institutions from closing collaborative partnerships with their Brazilian peers.

The lack of a clear framework for the recognition of foreign academic qualifications, and particularly the absence of an operational mutual recognition of qualifications between the UK and Brazil, also hinders the development of Transnational Education (TNE) projects. Such agreements can help alleviate these issues, ensuring qualifications are recognised across borders to facilitate greater international collaboration.



An enabling policy framework for international collaboration in higher education

The existence of a clear and well communicated regulatory framework provides clarity to local and foreign universities about the requirements of the international partnerships. This is important in reducing the operational and regulatory risk for foreign universities who are looking for detailed and clear regulatory criteria when embarking on an international partnership.

Brazilian authorities and policymakers should aim to shape an enabling policy framework with the following characteristics:

1 Clear and concise policy in defining the approval requirements for each of the key types of international mobility and collaboration in HE.

In this context, Brazilian policymakers need to consider developing a policy framework about key types of Transnational Education:

- 1.1 Collaborative provision (e.g., validation, franchising, double/dual/joint degrees)
- 1.2 Campuses of foreign universities
- 1.3 Online/distance learning provision

2 Easily accessible framework through a dedicated online portal to Brazilian and foreign universities and other external stakeholders.

Brazilian universities need to have a clear and concise overview of the regulatory context of international collaboration. For example, there is the need to outline:

- 2.1 What is allowed
- 2.2 What are the requirements
- 2.3 What is the process and timeline for gaining regulatory approval

To enable the access of foreign stakeholders, the policy framework needs to be available in English and other languages that represent the majority of the languages spoken by the partners of the Brazilian HE sector.

Also the development of the policy framework should be informed by the Brazilian government's strategic priorities about the internationalisation of the HE sector – for example, it should be reflective of the targets for inbound and outbound mobility of students and academic staff, and the priority areas for skills, innovation and research.

Finally, the policy framework needs to be developed in consultation with Brazilian higher education institutions stakeholders to reflect their strategic and operational considerations.

Recognition of foreign and Transnational Education (TNE) qualifications

Brazilian policymakers should focus on shaping an enabling framework for the recognition of foreign qualifications with a clear provision for Transnational Education (TNE) qualifications.

The existing recognition system is based on the autonomy of Brazilian universities, and this should be respected and maintained. However, there needs to be a provision for an automatic recognition process of academic credits for foreign qualifications for certain countries that fulfil certain criteria set by the Brazilian HE sector.

This reality needs to be reflected on this new UNESCO's report:



Scan the QR Code for accessing UNESCO's Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (NCRALC)



Also, the structure and quality standing of higher education qualifications from the countries that belong to the European Higher Education Area possess similar characteristics that cater for a standardised recognition approach. This will strengthen the readiness of the Brazilian HE sector to establish collaborative projects with universities from the EMEA, including the UK.

In this scenario, the automatic recognition of academic credits, benchmarked against the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), can facilitate the development of double degrees and exchange of students.

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