

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.

2,000

Peak of Mexican students in the UK in a single year (2016)

27%

Students funded by Mexico's CONAHCyT went to the UK (2014-17)

1B. International research collaborations

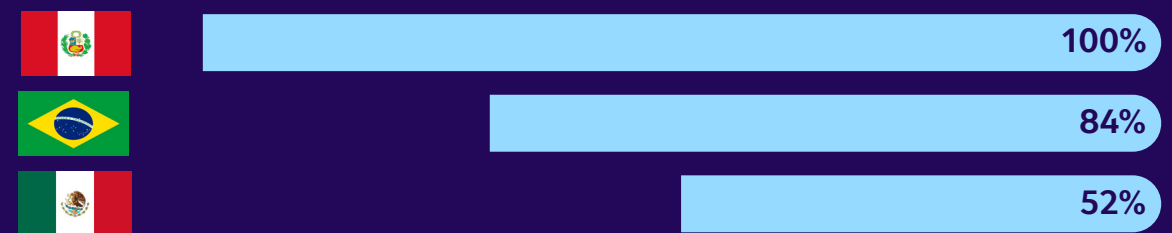
There is an active research collaboration between the UK and Brazil, Mexico and Peru. Bibliometric analysis shows that the UK is among the top research partners for the three countries and accounts for between 4 and 6 per cent of their collaborative research output.



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

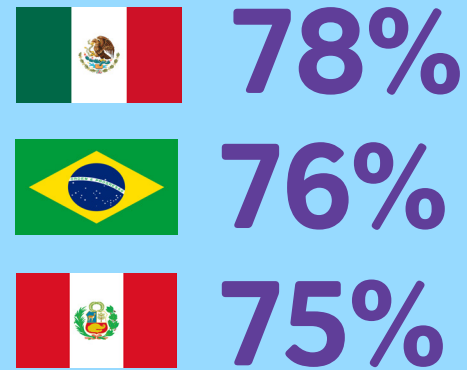


• UK Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA's) Aggregate Offshore Record about distance learning and online education
 • Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships with the UK in 2021-22

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. Mutual recognition of qualifications

The survey points to the ambitions of higher education institutions in all three countries to grow their Transnational Education (TNE) engagement. Streamlined recognition of foreign degrees and qualifications is one of a number of challenges for TNE engagement. Also making the regulatory framework for TNE more friendly was seen as an important step in encouraging its growth.

In Mexico and Peru, bilateral mutual recognition of qualifications agreements are one important tool for doing this – although none of the interviewees in the two countries was familiar with the qualification recognitions signed with the UK.

Brazil and the UK signed a memorandum of understanding to enhance international cooperation in education in 2016 (largely related to the Science without Borders programme), but there is no bilateral mutual recognition of qualifications agreement.

7. Recommendations

7A. 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 national guidelines to help support universities wanting to engage in TNE.



7B. 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.

7C. 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 | Mexico and UK universities

Although Mexico does not have central data on the number of students studying in international collaboration programs, and most foreign universities do not collect data on Transnational Education (TNE) programs, the UK and Australia show a detailed account of students studying with international links.

Based on UK TNE data provided by HESA, Mexico had a total of 840 students in TNE programs involving UK higher education institutions. While this represents a 25% increase from 2018-19, the number of students in TNE remains below 1,000 over the last decade.

UK TNE provision in Mexico (Figure 1) is divided equally between distance, flexible and distributed learning and validation programs. About 56% of UK TNE students in Mexico are at the undergraduate level, while 37% (Figure 2) are at the postgraduate level. This is consistent with the overall picture of UK TNE activity worldwide, where the majority (~61%) is at the undergraduate level.



Figure 1: Number of UK TNE students in Mexico

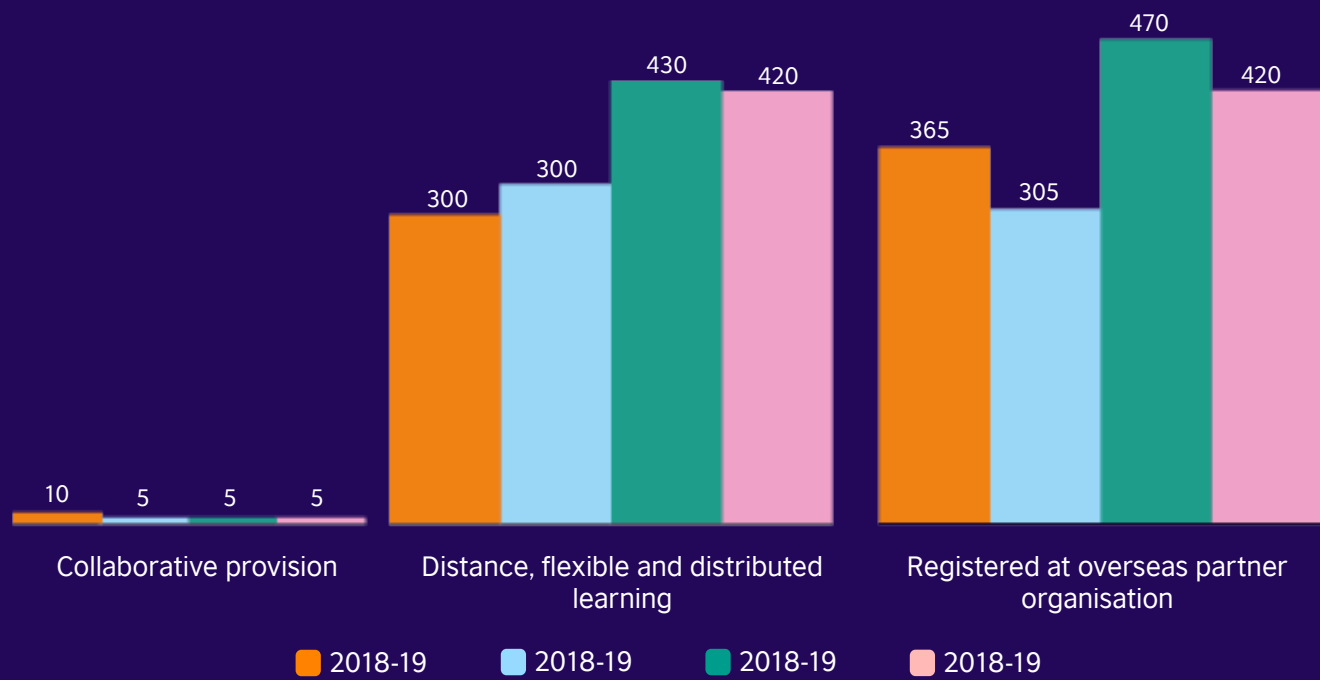
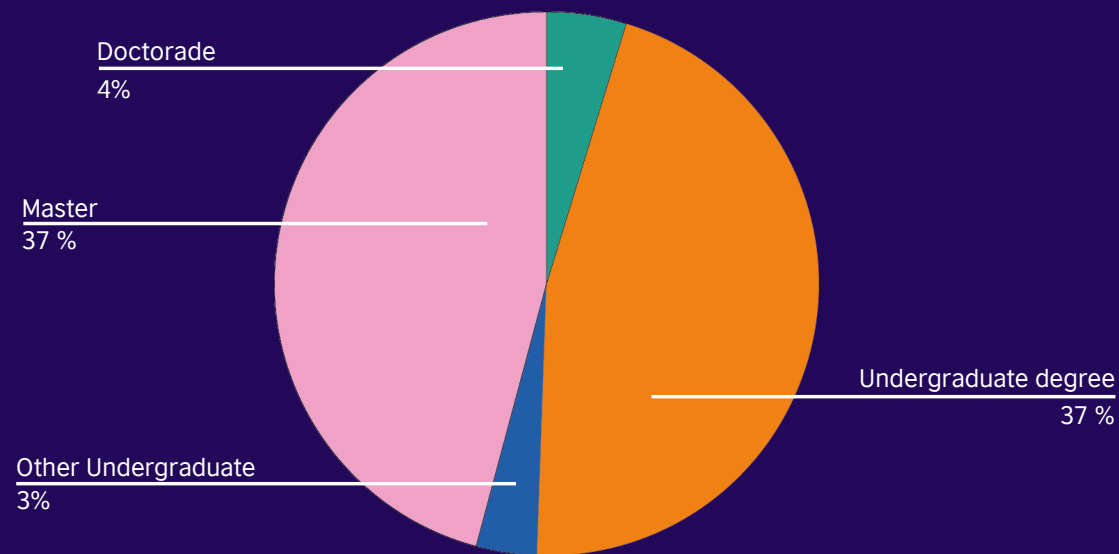


Figure 2: UK TNE Mexico by level of study (2021-2022)



840

Mexican students in Transnational Education programs involving UK institutions (2021-2022)

56%

UK Transnational Education students in Mexico at the undergraduate level (2021-2022)

Regarding the analysis of internationally co-authored research, the analysis of 25 years (1996-2021), summarised in Figure 3, shows that Mexican universities have increased the development of this type of research from 5,000 in 1996 to 34,000 by 2021 (Figure 5).

As shown in Figure 4, in 2021, 41% of research publications in Mexico were developed in international co-authorship.

Mexico owns the second highest number of international co-authored publications in a ranking that also includes Brazil, Argentina and Peru

Figure 3: Scholarly output (all types)

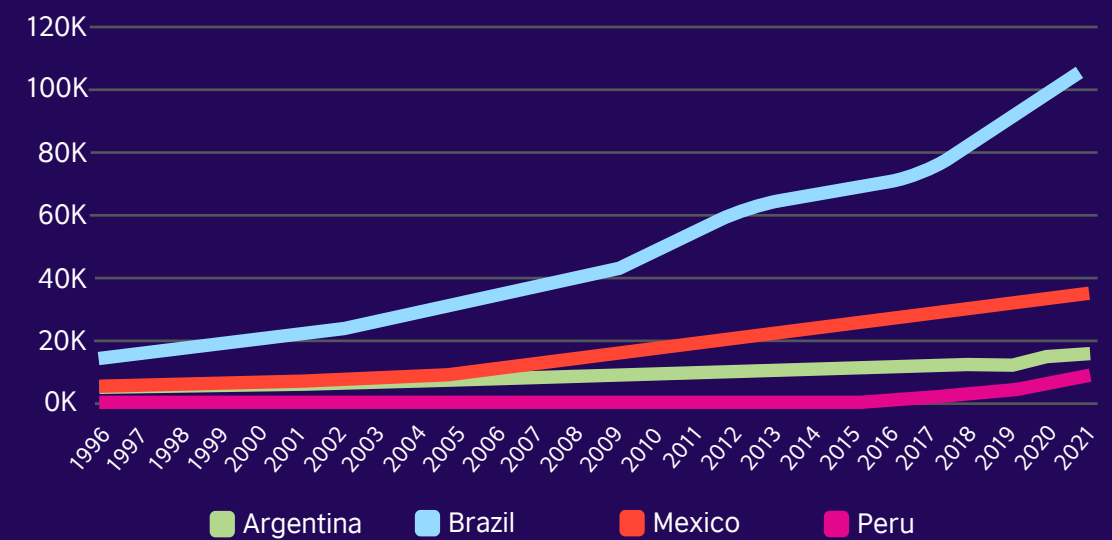


Figure 4. International collaboration (% of total publications)

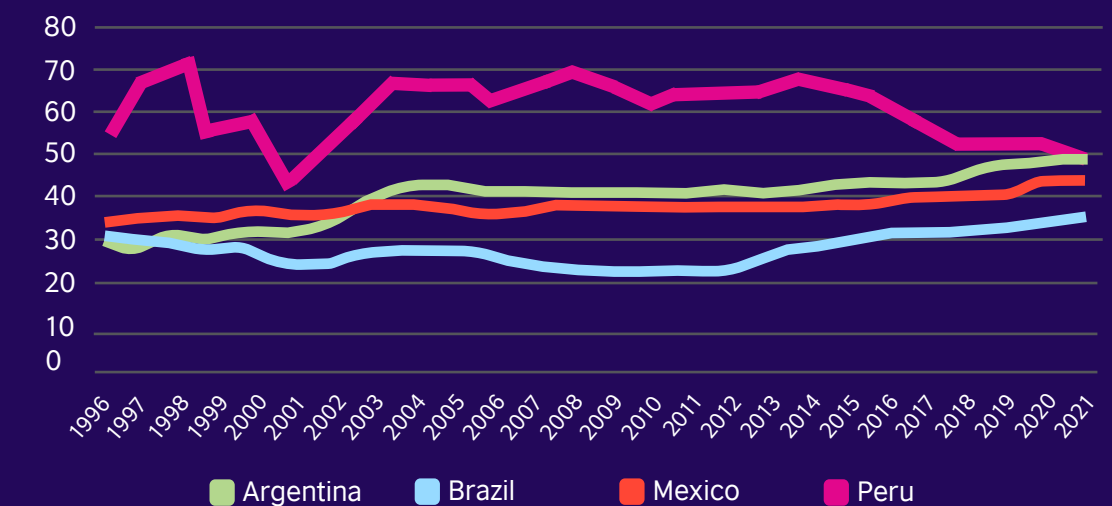
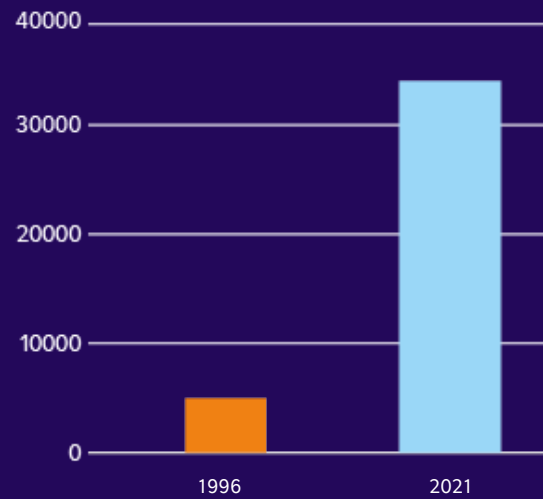


Figure 5. Mexico - Growth in international coauthored research



583%

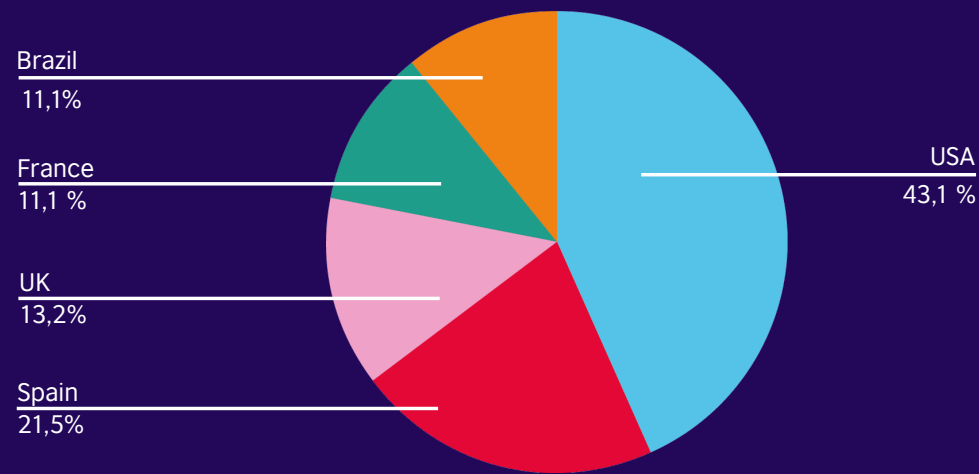
Increase in internationally co-authored research in Mexican universities (Period: 1996-2021)

41%

research publications in Mexico developed in international co-authorship (2021)

There is a history of active research collaboration between the UK and Mexico. More specifically, as shown in the graph below, Scival's bibliographic data analyses show that the United Kingdom is among the top four research contributing countries, with a share between 4 percent and 6 percent of all production of international research collaboration in Brazil, Mexico and Peru (Scival, 2023).

International research collaborations in Mexico



Mexico's top 5 collaborating countries



Transnational Education (TNE) regulatory framework | Mexico

In terms of the regulatory framework, Mexico offers opportunities for international academic collaboration, mainly in the form of:

- Double degrees.
- Agreements for the mutual recognition of qualifications.
- Agile and efficient policies and processes for the recognition of studies abroad.
- A recognition process that is carried out without the need to submit professional qualifications to specialized schools.

Models and regulation of Transnational Education in Mexico

Model of Transnational Education		Regulatory aspects from a Mexican and foreign university perspective
Autonomus	Branch Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Mexican university can create a branch campus abroad. This will be subject to the regulations of the host country. • A foreign university is allowed to create a campus in Mexico subject to compliance with the investment laws and authorisation by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP).
	Distance Learning and Online Provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Mexican university can provide its programmes fully online. A foreign university can provide fully online (no local support) programmes in Mexico without the need for licensing.
Locally supported	Franchise/ Validation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For a franchise, blended learning, or validation collaboration with a foreign university, it needs to be authorised by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP).
	Blended learning	
Collaborative	Joint Degree Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Mexican and a foreign university are allowed to establish a joint degree however this should be licensed by the Ministry of Public Education (SEP).
	Dual Degree Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Mexican university is allowed to establish a dual degree with a foreign university.

Regarding these three models, among institutions in Mexico, as shown in Figure 6:

20 out of 36

agreed that streamlined recognition of foreign degrees would incentivise more graduates with degrees from abroad to return to the country.

11

agreed that the labour markets were unable to absorb returning graduates anyway.

11

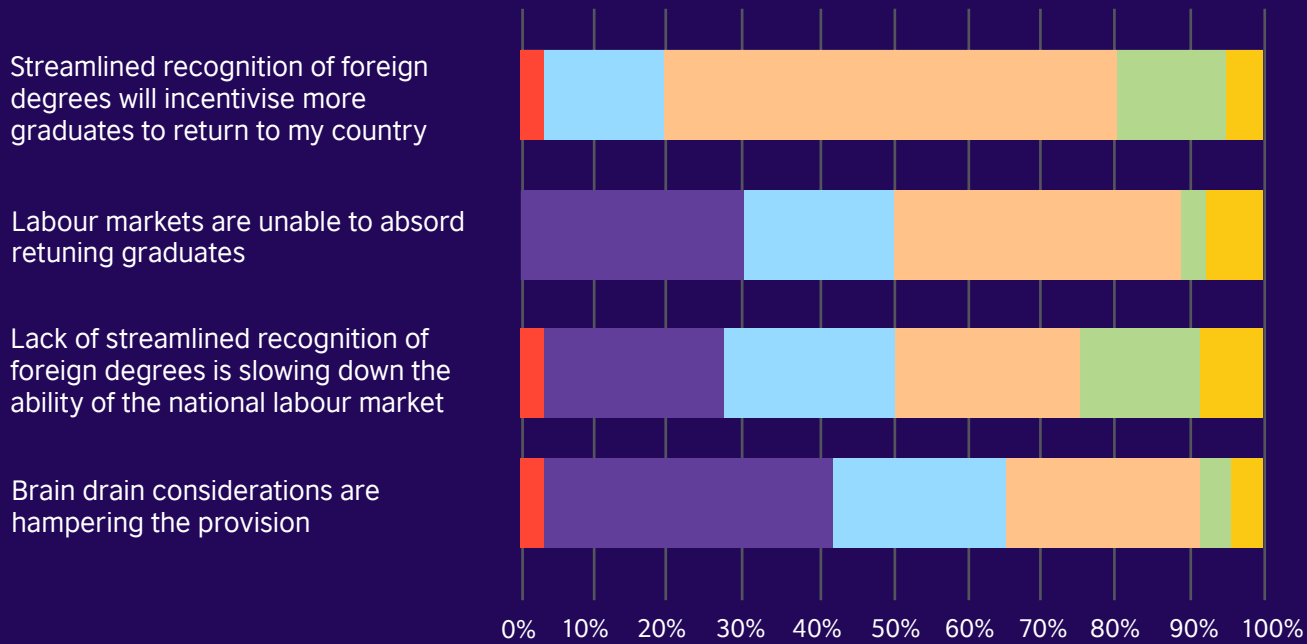
agreed that the lack of streamlined recognition of foreign degrees was slowing down the ability of the national labour market to absorb returning graduates from abroad.

6

agreed that brain drain considerations were hampering the provision of joint and double degrees.

Figure 6. Transnational Education and Mutual Recognition of Qualifications in Mexico

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Strong disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly Agree Not Applicable

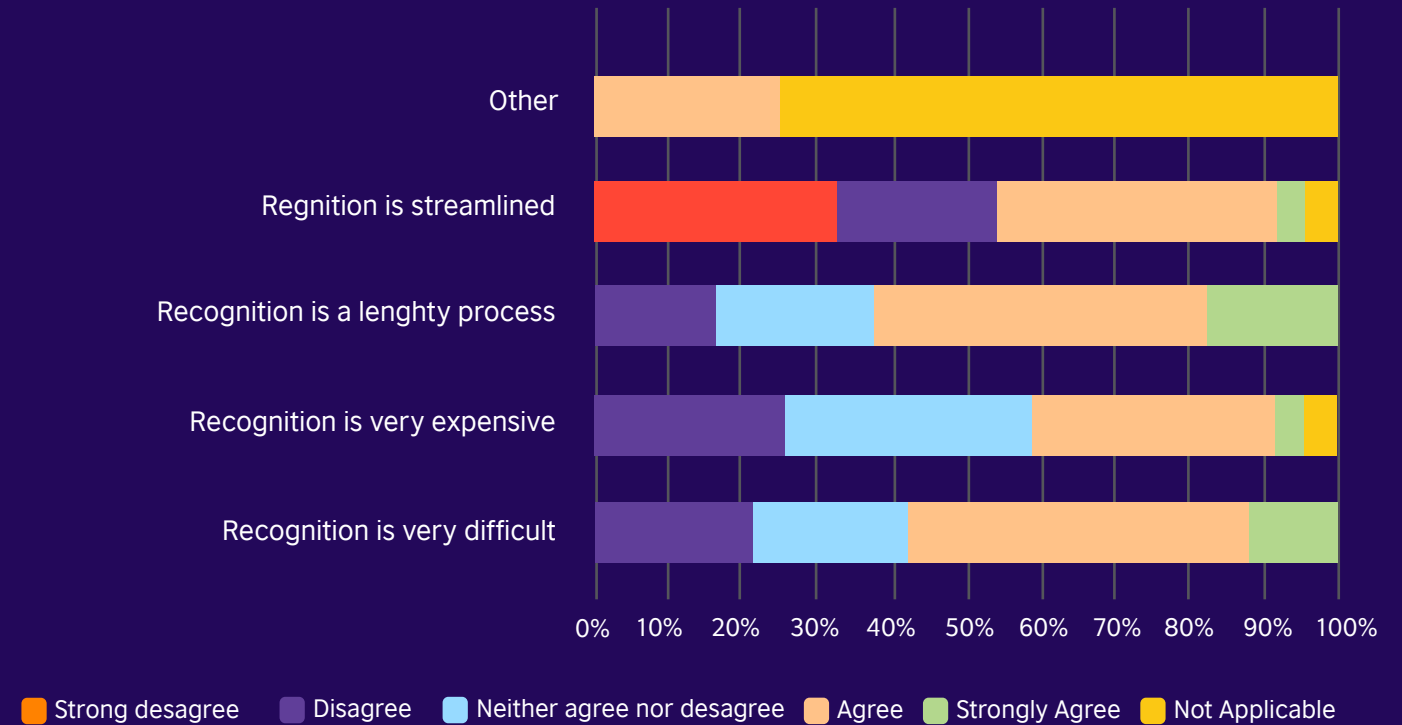
Source: Online survey question 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements?' N = 36.

Among institutions from Mexico, 15 agreed that the recognition process was lengthy. Recognition was difficult for 14 institutions. Unlike Brazilian institutions, 10 agreed that recognition was streamlined but nine agreed it was expensive. Figure 7 shows this.

Figure 7: Recognition of foreign degrees in Mexico

Drawing on what you know about joint and double degrees, please rate the following statements about the recognition of foreign degrees in your country?

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Source: Online survey question 'Drawing on what you know about joint and double degrees, please rate the following statements about the recognition of foreign degrees in your country.' N=36



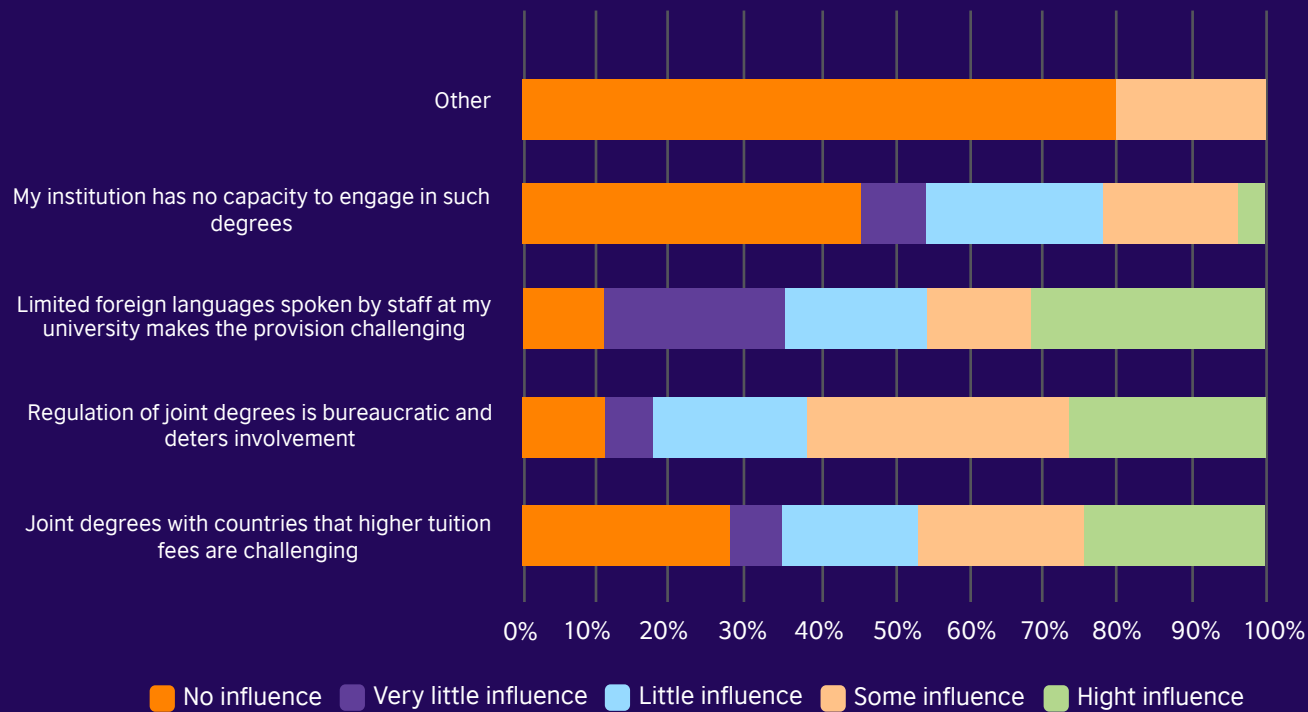
Challenges to Transnational Education (TNE) and its future growth

Here is a summary of the challenges faced by higher education institutions participating in ETN in Mexico

One Mexican institution thought it had no capacity to engage in such degrees. The limited foreign languages spoken by staff were of high influence for nine institutions, and the amount of bureaucratic regulation was of high influence for seven institutions. See Figure 8.

Figure 8: Transnational Education (TNE) challenges in Mexico

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about potential impact of joint and double degrees?



Source: Online survey question 'To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the potential impact of joint and double degrees?'. N = 36.



Four sections of Transnational Education (TNE) life cycle | Mexico

In order to achieve successful international partnerships for education in a country like Mexico, TNE practitioners have developed four sections that represent the TNE life cycle.

These phases represent the typical process that is applied in most international collaborative partnerships (e.g., dual/double & joint degrees, franchising/validation, articulation/progression). The checklist will be less applicable to independent types of TNE (distance/online delivery, branch campus):

- 1 Periodic Quality Assurance.** The objective of this phase is to introduce a series of checks and balances that act as an impartial process of evaluation and continuous improvement of the partnership.
- 2 Pre-establishment and agreement stage.** In this stage the priority is to achieve strategic alignment between the objectives of the Mexican university and those of the partner while minimizing all types of risks (operational, financial, academic).
- 3 Operation.** This phase refers to the design of the operational details. It should include all aspects of the project and operation.
- 4 Management.** This stage involves identifying the specific responsibilities of each collaborating party (university), as well as the specific individuals who would lead the management of the partnership. By deciding the governance structure and specifying responsibilities, the smooth functioning of the partnership is ensured.

Since 2018 University of Guadalajara and Boston College approved the master's in international Higher Education as a dual degree that seeks to expand access for Mexican and Latin American students to a high-quality education

Successful cases in Mexico

Following the TNE life cycle scheme composed by four sections (Periodic Quality Assurance, Pre-establishment and agreement stage, Operation, and Management), there are successful cases in Mexico such as the University of Guadalajara and Boston College.

Both institutions agreed on offering this Master program as it brings a positive impact to their communities. For Universidad de Guadalajara, the program is a mechanism to strengthen its institutional capacity in terms of internationalisation by being able to offer a postgraduate degree that enriches the profile of its administrative staff, it also increases the international visibility of the university in the region, particularly by attracting professionals from Latin American universities as its students.

For its part, for Boston College, the Master's in International Higher Education provides a diversity of voices and perspectives in the classroom. On a regular basis, in order to complete a master's program at BC, students are required to take 30 credits, while students are required to earn 75 credits to complete a master's program at UDG. In the case of the MESI, students obtain the double degree by completing 16 BC credits, as part of a degree of 88 credits at the UDG.

Professionals who graduated from this program are ready to meet the demands of the higher education sector in an international context, as well as to design and implement public policies and alternatives for improvement and solution to problems that contribute to increasing the quality and relevance of institutions and organizations dedicated to higher education in Mexico and Latin America.

Their field of action will be higher education institutions and research centres, as well as other governmental and non-governmental entities directly related to higher education in the international context.



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