Overview

- five approaches to international distance education
- examples, advantages and disadvantages of each approach
- economic, cultural and social issues
- recommendations and conclusions

Different approaches to international distance education

- an international university: e.g. UWI
- direct marketing: e.g. UK Open University
- franchise: e.g. Australian universities in Asia
- partnership: e.g. University of British Columbia, Canada/Tec de Monterrey, Mexico
- consortia: e.g. Virtual Network of Small States of the Commonwealth

A single international university

Example: University of West Indies: 15 countries, one institution (also USP, Antilles et de la Guyane, Aegean)

Advantages:
- economies of scale
- high regional status
- unified administration/single language
- specialist DE centre
- shared history
A single international university (cont.)

Disadvantages:
- only Commonwealth countries
- limited number of DE programs
- not fully online (blended model)
- high communications costs
Possibility of partnership with other Caribbean institutions

Direct marketing: advantages

Example: UKOU, UNED, USA
1. easy to do, if courses already exist
2. economies of scale/extra revenue for institution
3. international accreditation for students
4. quality degree? - depends
5. no cost to government

Direct marketing: disadvantages

1. No cultural adaptation
2. Expensive for students
3. Revenue drain
4. Local institutions don’t develop DE skills/experience
5. Learner support?
6. Quality? Money first?
7. No local accreditation

Franchise

Example: Australian universities in Asia; variations:
a. local institution offers courses from another institution and awards own degree
b. local institution recruits students for another institution
c. local institution accredited to offer degree of another institution
Franchise (cont.)

Key: nature of student support: who supplies tutors/examines students
Often private local university + public international university
Basically a business deal
Quality (especially local support) often an issue

Partnership

• Masters in Educational Technology (for teachers)
• UBC/Tec de Monterrey: joint degree + T de M degree
• fully online: English and Spanish
• certificates + master

Partnership

- partnership since 1996: masters opened 2002
- joint degree: 80 students a year
- Tec de M degree: 200 + per year
- fee: US$9,000, paid per course
full cost recovery inc. overheads and risk = new research faculty
**Partnership**

Students choose known brands:
e.g. MET joint degree (English)
UBC on-campus students: 20%
rest of province: 24%
rest of Canada 23%
international (31 countries) 33%

**Partnership**

MET program: a niche market:
• strong local and international markets (global demand)
• target group with access to Internet and computers
• willing and able to pay (e.g. Tec de Monterrey scholarships)
• lack of quality competitors

**Partnership**

1. not easy but manageable
2. cultural/language adaptation
3. partners must be of equal status (power/accreditation)
4. needs leadership/support
5. clear agreement on responsibilities/conflict resolution/costs and revenues

**Consortia**

Example: Virtual University of Small States of Commonwealth (also SREB Electronic Campus, WGU, NTU, BC Campus)
Advantages:
• institutions retain autonomy
• more choice for students
• economies of scale
• blended learning (campus +)
Consortia (cont.)

Disadvantages:
• very difficult to maintain
• often no credit transfer, hence no fully distance degree
• where consortium degree, lower status than institutional degree
• lack of coherent programs

Different approaches to international distance education

International institution: restricted to limited number of countries
Direct marketing: no cultural adaptation
Franchise: local students prefer international accreditation
Partnership: manageable and culturally adaptable
Consortia: complex/difficult to sustain

Economic issues in international programs

• what to charge students (subsidize, break-even or profit)?
• government regulations/subsidies for foreign students?
• how to handle different fees in different countries
• do you know what the costs are?

Cultural and social issues

The digital divide
Home ownership
• 60%-70%+ in USA, Canada, Scandinavia, UK, Portugal, Australia, Hong Kong, S.Korea, Singapore
• 50%-60% in Germany, France, Italy
• 33% in Mexico, Chile, S. Africa
• 15% (6 million) in Caribbean: 60% Barbados and spreading rapidly
Cultural and social issues

The digital divide
However, no access for the poor
Alternative access:
• campuses/libraries/learning centres
• employers
• Internet cafes
Doing nothing widens gap

Language issues

Dominance of language (especially English)
• cultural context (idioms, examples, cases)
• standard of written English varies
• asynchronous discussion forums require high level of English
• oral vs written cultures (but high bandwidth helps)

Pedagogical issues

• objectivism vs constructivism
• information transmission vs critical thinking, problem solving
• authority of the teacher
• collaborative learning
• participation in online discussion forums

Pedagogic issues

Styles of teaching related to economy and jobs
• industrial society: authoritarian, following orders, information transmission
• knowledge-based society: entrepreneurial, personal responsibility, creative thinking
one reason for foreign courses
Quality control

• same admission requirements (especially English)?
• entrance vs exit standards?
• access to same facilities (e.g. libraries)
• same instructor: student ratios?
• who gives degree?
• same or different fees?

Conditions for success

Different stakeholders:
• students
• teachers
• institutions
• funding agencies (govt., etc.)
All must see the benefits

Conditions for success: students

1. More choice for students (courses, programs, delivery method)
3. Coherent programs
3. Credit transfer between institutions
4. One-stop shopping (portal)
5. Quality qualifications

Conditions for success: teachers

1. no on-going extra work
2. involvement in course design and decision-making
3. must accept/respect teachers from partner organizations
4. willing to work in a team
Conditions for success: institutional
1. no loss of students
2. equality between institutions
3. common shared technology infrastructure
4. no extra (unfunded) costs
6. must add value to institution
5. structure/mechanism for shared decision-making
7. small neutral facilitating organization

Conditions for success: funders
1. avoids duplication
2. builds on existing institutions/infrastructure
3. avoids creating a new institution with high overheads
4. endorsement rather than creation
5. sells as innovative, hi-tec, relevant

Recommendations
• be clear on reasons for participation in collaborative program
• develop clear business plan
• clear joint contracts/agreements
• joint, powerful steering committee
• content with international focus
• inter-cultural training for staff
• involve administration from start

Recommendations
• choose partners strategically; long-term relationship
• identify unique contributions of each partner (strengths/weaknesses)
• reward professors/avoid increased workload
• dependency and power always an issue
Conclusions

Collaborative DE programs:
• are difficult to do successfully
• require strong vision, leadership, and support from academics
• need a strong business plan
• are very satisfying, both for students and instructors

Further information


Bates, A.W. and Escamilla de los Santos, J. (1997) 'Crossing Boundaries: Making Global Distance Education a Reality' Journal of Distance Education Vol. 12, No. 1/2
Distance Education (2001) Vol. 22, No. 1

Further information (cont.)


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