

Comparability and Equivalence

The principle promoted to Australian universities to ensure quality and sustainability in the economically and educationally significant TNE market is one of “comparability” or “equivalence” between what happens in Australian-based programs and their TNE delivery. Our research indicates that Australian and TNE partner academic staff highly value academic standards and big picture outcomes at the program level. However there is a range of interpretations of “comparability” and “equivalence” in the high stakes area of student assessment and on how these should be achieved.

Issues

- Lack of shared understandings
- Range of interpretations of comparability and equivalence
- Use of related terms such as consistency, equity, equality, identicalness, mirroring, sameness and similarity
- Comparability generally used to signify similarity whereas equivalence was used to indicate equality or sameness
- Language related issues, with TNE students having lower proficiency in English
- Complexity around level of contextualisation

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“The main problems are language, not the conceptual understanding. There seems to be an over emphasis on language in the marking but meaning should be more important than expression. If Australian students were learning programs in (another language), how would you judge their work? Maybe there is a different standard needed for (TNE) students studying this Australian degree.”

Transnational partner academic

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Suggestions for improvement

- Big picture outcomes at the degree level can (and in many cases should) be achieved in ways other than having identical assessment
- Focus on achieving the same learning outcomes
- Foster trusting relationships and dialogic interaction between the Australian and TNE partner staff in regard to assessment and, more broadly, academic standards
- Address the issue of “locus of control” about who makes decisions on the detail associated with curriculum development and assessment
- Have local content in TNE programs and embed it in assessment
- Adapt curriculum, assessment and marking criteria to the TNE context

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“Comparability - not 100% similar assignments done here and there (in Australia), but comparable in the sense that same lecture notes, the same guidelines, same text books, content more or less similar and consistent.”

Transnational partner academic

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