Transnational Education – The Students Coming Onshore: A Case Study

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Abstract

Since 2001 Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) has taught the first two tears of the Bachelor of Information and Communication Technologies (BICT) degree at four vocational colleges in Beijing, China. The students study for three years as the computing content is combined with a year of English language study. After passing the three years study in Beijing the students graduate with a Diploma of Computing (Level 6) and they are eligible to complete the final year of the BICT at CPIT.

Students' who articulate to the BICT often require extra English tuition, find our educational model foreign and they often feel pressured by the expectations of their family in China.

CPIT academic staff, who teach on the third year of the degree, have noticed a change in class dynamics as these 'new to CPIT' students require additional support in many cases. The students have little independent learning skills and require nurturing initially to get them comfortable with the CPIT way of life.

In spite of the problems faced by the students and staff the success rate of these students is reasonably close to the success rate of other students in the final year of the BICT degree.

Keywords: Transnational Education, Off Shore Delivery, China, Education, CPIT.

1 Introduction

In late 2001 Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT) commenced a relationship with the Beijing Information Technology College in Beijing, China, and over the years since, similar relationships have been developed with three other vocational colleges in Beijing. The nature of these relationships is that students at the vocational colleges complete the first two years of the Bachelor of Information and Communication Technologies (BICT) degree over a

three-year period along with the equivalent of one year's study of English language.

At the end of the three years the students are able to graduate with a Diploma of Computing (Level 6) or complete the final year of the BICT at CPIT, with most of the students being required to complete further English study to bring themselves up to a level to give them a reasonable chance of success in the final year of the degree. The essence of how the programme would work was described in Nesbit and Weir (2002), with their conclusion being that the overall success of the programme would not be able to be determined until the first students arrived at CPIT and commenced study towards the final year of the degree.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the success rate of the first groups of students who came to CPIT to complete the final year of BICT, and compare the success rates with other students in the same courses, and to discuss some of the issues faced by the students (that were observed by the lecturing staff) and issues faced by the lecturing staff with these students completing the final year of the degree at CPIT.

The conclusion of the paper points to the success rate of these students being reasonably close to the success rate of other students in the final year of the degree and identifies some of the significant issues faced by both the staff and students involved. This paper will be of interest to other New Zealand tertiary education institutions considering similar relationships off shore.

2 Literature Review

Madugula (2005) described the growing trend for organisations in the higher education sector to build relationships internationally as being the internationalisation of education or the emergence of transnational education. Madugula goes on to quote the definition of transnational education from UNESCO-CEPES and the Council of Europe:

> *"All forms of Higher Education, or sets of studies or educational services, including distance education in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. They may belong to the state in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national system"*

Knight (2003) as cited in Madugula (2005) describes how transnational education involves cross-border mobility and as such it can take three forms:

- A person can go abroad for educational purposes (people mobility)

- An educational programme can go abroad (programme mobility)

- An institution or provider can go or invest abroad for educational purposes (institution mobility)

Larsen, Momii and Vincent-Lancrin (2004) analyse trends in different forms of cross-border higher education and focus on three forms that are consistent with the forms identified by Knight (2003) and Madugula (2005): student (people) mobility, programme mobility and institution mobility. Larsen et al (2004) goes on to describe how student mobility is by far the dominant form, with programme mobility being the second most common form of cross-border higher education, with institution mobility being less common, but still growing.

Larsen et al (2004) describe how Australia and New Zealand are the only countries who are collecting data on international students enrolled in their institutions operating abroad, with enrolments in off shore programmes having risen significantly over the previous few years.

When looking at the model adopted by CPIT for this programme, and relating it to the work of Madugula (2005), Knight (2003) and Larsen et al (2004) it is apparent that the transnational education was taking the form of programme mobility while the students were studying in Beijing, but then took the form of people (or student) mobility when the students moved to CPIT to complete the final year of the degree.

While the aspect of the overall programme that is under review in this paper is the aspect that relates to people mobility, it may be that there are issues from the part of the programme that relates to programme mobility that result in issues being created for both the staff and students at CPIT when the students undertake the final year of the degree.

From the work of Larsen et al (2004), it is clear that CPIT is one of a number of institutions that are adopting similar models, and that much could be learned from sharing the experiences of both staff and students.

3   DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAMME

The School of Computing (SOC) at CPIT support the teaching of 21 courses (240 credits) that are taught, in English, by Chinese teachers at the four vocational colleges in Beijing. Each CPIT course coordinator supplies, and keeps updated, course material and assessments for these courses. Moderated exams and marking guides are supplied twice a year, and a selection of the marked scripts is post-assessment moderated as part of the quality assurance process.

Training is provided for the teachers in two ways. Some teachers come to CPIT for 1-2 months and take English classes and sit in on computing classes they are likely to be involved in teaching. Also twice a year a team of CPIT lecturers go to Beijing to run a five day training session. This has resulted in these staff having an increased awareness of Chinese culture, and in particular the issues faced by other Chinese students studying at CPIT. The Chinese teachers can communicate directly with the course coordinators when necessary.

Marks are recorded in the CPIT Student Management System for each course and the required diplomas for graduation ceremony, held twice a year in Beijing, are produced.

It is estimated this programme mobility model requires half an academic position and half an administration position to manage.

With the courses that the students complete as part of their courses in Beijing, they arrive at CPIT needing to complete the courses shown in Table 1 to complete the programming specialisation of the BICT degree.

Table 1: Courses Required By Students from Beijing to Complete BICT

BCIS301	Management of ICT	15 credits
BCPR301	Advanced Programming	15 credits
BCCE301	Cooperative Education Project	45 credits
BCEB300	eBusiness Strategies	15 credits
	Other Business Courses	15 credits
	Other Elective	15 credits

Where the students have been required to study further English on arrival at CPIT they have been enrolled in a foundation programme made up of 30 credits of the courses shown, along with a 30 credit level 5 English course which ultimately counts as the 15 credit Other Elective.

4   ISSUES FOR STUDENTS

The lecturing staffs that were involved with the students when they came to CPIT observed the students facing a number of issues. A brief discussion of these issues follows:

The main issue for students is that they have only studied in China where culturally the education system is very different. In general, teachers should not be questioned, rote learning is encouraged, all learning is done in class, and group or project work is minimal. They are used to being told the answer and learning it. The third year papers in BICT, particularly the project, require independent learning and thought, which is a steep learning curve in half a year.

Meeting English requirements is a challenge for some students. Although the classes in China are taught in

English, Chinese translations are readily available, if not given first. CPIT require an IELTS level of 6.0 across the board to enter the degree in the first year. This is also the requirement for the third year so these students English ability is less than their classroom colleagues.

Reality is often very different from the students' expectations as they generally expect the transition to be easier than it is. The need for extra English and / or the fact they haven't passed all their papers in Beijing can extend their stay from 1 to 1.5 or 2 years. Also because of the CPIT timetable it is easier to articulate into the first semester than the second semester.

Money is a problem for many students as the vocational colleges that relationships have been entered in to with are not from a wealthy catchment of Beijing. The students are often spending their parents life savings to come to CPIT for one year, which can make them, feel very pressured.

5 ISSUES FOR STAFF

There have been a number of issues for the academic staff at CPIT that relate to the students coming to complete year 3 of BICT. These include:

- That the pastoral support within the group is strong and that as a result issues don't necessarily reach CPIT lecturer. Fortunately the students who appeared to take on a leadership role were able to communicate issues of concern to various academic staff. As time goes on, the earlier students to arrive are able to pass on their experiences, and in particular that it is OK to ask questions, to the students arriving later.
- Some frustration with the lack of independent learning strategies. This is of particular concern with the year 3 cooperative education project, where the greatest degree of success was in general with students who were managed more tightly that is normally done.
- Some issues with timetabling when English courses clash with important BICT courses. This resulted in some of the students not completing courses in the best possible order for some of the students, with this having now been resolved.
- That some of the students, while having completed a number of programming courses as part of their studies in Beijing, did not really want to specialise in programming. With there being no choice of courses for the students in Beijing, they arrive at CPIT, with the only possible specialisation to complete being the programming one. This is further accentuated by parents of some students choosing the programme for the students, meaning that some of the students have little interest in computing generally.
- The need to provide additional support in some courses where the content in prerequisites may not have been covered in exactly the same way as it normally is at CPIT. This has created higher workloads for some staff, and had the potential to

create a "them and us" situation for the students who had completed the first two years of the degree at CPIT. Fortunately this did not happen to any significant level.

6 STUDENT RESULTS

Up until the end of the 2005/2006 summer school, 14 students from the first group of students in Beijing had arrived at CPIT and had completed at least one semester's worth of study, with five (5) of these students having completed all of the academic requirements for the degree. Of these 14 students, 12 were required to complete the 30 credit level 5 English course, all of whom passed the course.

Table 2 shows the BICT courses that have been completed by the students, along with the numbers passing and failing each course, and the pass rate for the group of students in each course. Of note is the overall pass rate for this group of students being 83.1% as compared with the overall success rate for all students in the degree in 2005 of 78.5% (CPIT, 2006).

Table 2 shows the pass rates in comparison with all students by course and course cluster. The business courses are all clustered together (with the exception of NZDB141, Marketing Principles as the vast majority of students doing that course are not BICT degree students) with BCCE301 (Cooperative Education Project), BCIS301 (Management of ICT) and BCPR301 (Advanced Programming) being shown separately.

Closer examination of this data shows that the pass rates for the business courses are higher on average than for the entire BICT student body, with the pass rates for BCCE301, BCIS301 and BCPR301 being lower on average for the entire BICT student body.

This difference is likely to be related to BCIS301 and BCPR301 having specific prerequisites that this group of students had completed in Beijing, where as the business courses completed, while at 3rd year level, are courses that have typically been studied by students completing the Graduate Diploma in eCommerce, and as such do not have specific prerequisites.

7 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Many of the issues that have been raised are related to cultural differences and the difference in the education systems between the two countries. While these differences are not likely to disappear, there are some steps, based on the experiences to date that could reduce their impact.

A number of the issues would have less impact if the students came to CPIT for both year 2 and 3 of the degree, as opposed to just year 3. The issues that would have less impact are:

- The students would have 3 semesters of study to adjust to the independent learning required for the cooperative education project compared the with 1 semester that these students currently have

- While students arriving at CPIT would still have a minimum of IELTS 6.0, they would be entering year 2 instead of year 3, and by the time they start year 3, their prowess with academic English would have improved making them more able to cope with the year 3 papers
- By spending more time at CPIT the students would be able to develop better relationships with the academic staff, thus enhancing the pastoral case that they receive
- As the students would arrive for year 2, and therefore have more choice over the courses that they enrol in, there are less likely to be problems with timetabling for students who are required to study further English. This would also enable students to complete one of the other specialisations in BICT (Multimedia, eCommerce or Data Communications and Networking)
- The additional support that the students require would take place during their second year courses, and thus the extra staff workload would be spread across a wider group of academic staff.
- The immediate prerequisites of courses such as BCPR301 (Advanced Programming) and BCIS301 (Management of ICT) would be completed at CPIT, with this being likely to increase the success rates of students in these courses, and at the same time reduce the extra staff workload associated with providing these students with additional support.

There would however, be some other issues that would be accentuated or created by such change to the programme, with these including:

- That the students would potentially arrive at CPIT with a lower IELTS level than they currently do due to having spent less time studying in English in Beijing
- The extra year of study in CPIT would be seen as being very expensive, especially with the expense of the current programme being one of the reasons why a number of students have not come to CPIT to complete the degree. This expense has also been exasperated by the steady rise in the New Zealand dollar relative to the Chinese currency.
- Students would not be able to be awarded the Diploma in Computing (Level 6) based on what they have studied in Beijing.

Another option to address the concern over English levels is to increase the IELTS requirement for students entering year 3 to the equivalent of IELTS 6.5 or 7.0. This option is seen as one way of reducing the additional support that the students need, and of increasing their success rates, but would come at an additional cost for the students.

A significant spin-off for the CPIT staff who have travelled to Beijing for the training courses has been the increased awareness of cultural differences, and in particular the issues facing Chinese students when they come to New Zealand to further their studies.

8   CONCLUSION

The Beijing students' pass rate was higher with the business courses when they arrive for their final year of study at CPIT compared to the computing courses, with this in part being due to not having completed the specific prerequisites at CPIT, with this having a flow on affect into the 45 credit cooperative education project.

It would be more achievable for these students' learning to have them at CPIT for 2 years so they had a longer time to adapt culturally before they did the third year computing papers. Completing year 2 papers at CPIT would mean the year 3 papers were less of a challenge as their English levels would have improved and they would have had time to adapt to the New Zealand learning environment.

This option would appear to be more expensive for the Beijing students, 2 years study abroad compared to 1 however realistically it is more achievable for the students to reach a 100% pass rate using this model. With the students coming for 1 year their time often has been extended to 1.5 or 2 years with extra English to start with and course failures which means another semester and course fees to repeat the course. Another option is to increase the English requirements of students who are enter straight into Stage 3 courses. Requiring a higher IELTS level may improve their chances of passing the courses on their first attempt.

While there have been a number of issues identified in running this hybrid programme and student mobility transnational programme, the overall success rates of the students have been reasonably high, with other beneficial spin-offs including the valuable experiences of some academic staff visiting Beijing on a number of occasions.

9   References

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Table 2 – Pass Rates for BICT Courses Completed by BICT Students from Beijing and New Zealand

Course Code		Course Name	Beijing Students				All Students
			Pass	Fail	Total	Pass Rate	Pass Rate
BCCE301		Cooperative Education Project	5	2	7	71.4%	90.9%
BCEB300	Business Electives	eBusiness Strategies	14	-	14	100.0%	88.9%
BCEB310		eMarketing: Online Themes	4	-	4	100.0%	
BCEB340		Knowledge Management: Concepts and Practice	2	-	2	100.0%	
BCEB391		Current Issues in eCommerce	5	-	5	100.0%	
BCIS301		Management of ICT	10	4	14	71.4%	82.5%
BCIS391		Contemporary Issues in ICT	3	-	3	100.0%	
BCPR301		Advanced Programming	7	2	9	77.8%	91.3%
NZDB141		Marketing Principles	4	3	7	57.1%	
Total			**54**	**11**	**65**	**83.1%**	