

Globalising Education in an Unequal World

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Abstract: *As human population swells and resources shrink, efforts towards optimizing resources for equitable distribution grow. This phenomenon of sharing education on a global basis is already widely practiced in many parts of the world and is being examined by the rich and the poor institutions alike. Developments in information and communication technologies (ICT or telematics) have opened new opportunities for all types of learners irrespective of age, sex, class and so on to receive education from various institutions situated far off. Traditional institutions no longer remain the sole agencies of academic transaction. Telematics has liberated the teachers and the learners alike. We already have providers and recipients of education from far off places dissolving territorial boundaries.*

Providing education internationally requires serious efforts and addressing some genuine concerns. Highly populated countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh are likely targets of most of such international collaborations because the number of students seeking educational opportunities is usually quite high, so financial returns are also high. Education in collaborative mode is primarily suited to the distance mode perhaps because within an already available structure or edifice, direct human interaction is minimal here. This paper is an attempt to explore the variety of areas and methods that can be made use of for a variety of goals to collaborate for input, processes and output. These, however, need to be visualised against the limitations or shortcomings that are likely to emanate from the practice of such collaborations. The paper tries to articulate some of these as well.

Introduction

Globalising education means making courses available beyond defined territorial boundaries of the institution. Two other terms, 'collaboration' and 'internationalisation' are used interchangeably to mean the same. Sometimes 'networking' is also used for the same phenomenon. Globalisation in education functions on the ethics of 'sharing'. So what are the educational resources that can be shared? In the educational context some of the resources which can be shared are:

- Faculty and their skills (teaching and training know-how)
- Fellow learners' expertise (i.e. peer interaction)
- Learning resources like laboratory, electronic networks and libraries, and
- Non-teaching expertise (in management and evaluation).

These resources can be shared either by physically transferring the experts or physical resources to the learner's location or transferring the learners to the providing institution's site. However telematics has provided opportunities for sharing these in a virtual environment. Human expertise can and is being shared through audio, video and teleconferencing technologies and physical resources like books through remote electronic

access by transferring them into electronic form. Sharing the above mentioned resources can be for the following purposes:

- sharing for something equal in return,
- sharing for mutual benefit/development,
- sharing as charity, and
- sharing for profit.

Recent resurgence of globalization has its etymology in the European Union (EU) where doors of nations have been opened to member states. Even though the languages of member nations are different, their cultures are by and large the same. Emboldened by a situation like this, collaborative curriculum development seems a possibility. In Europe, a course on "What is Europe" was developed through collaborative efforts made by members from five different countries but offered in their native or one of the translated languages (Peters et al: 1995). Academic Programmes have been shared between institutions in India also. Even though the shared material has been developed invariably by IGNOU, other state level institutions have been using the material in either the original form or have translated the material into the local/regional language, which is also one of the national languages.

Educational globalisation is a post-virtual phenomenon. Whether the societies of the West are practicing it or not, they are technologically equipped to turn to virtual mode any time. The members of the EU are technologically very advanced and almost all of them are at the same stage of technological development, availability and use. As against this, the developing societies are technologically quite backward. Not only the availability of technology, but also literacy and use of the technologies is low. Sharing becomes difficult when partners are at variant levels of technological development.

Globalising Courses

The most popular mode of collaboration is in the form of lending developed course material to another institution to offer it independently. This practice has been followed since correspondence courses were first offered in the early 1960s. It is noteworthy that correspondence courses were developed with individual learners in mind but programmes in ODL are developed keeping larger society, and now increasingly, telematics availability to its potential members into consideration. Programmes in ODL depend on telematics and if a society does not have access to telematics, collaboration is likely to fail. As pointed out earlier, this was not true with courses offered through correspondence because social or institutional support was required in a very limited way and the printed study material was the mainstay.

Seen thus, globalising correspondence courses is easier because the total content can be transacted through the printed text and therefore the imparting institution and the home institution can make necessary adaptations including translation or adding supplementary material to make the remotely developed curriculum relevant to the culturally distant learners. Explaining correspondence courses, Perry (1976) says that they are:

Specially written correspondence text was sent to the student through the post and these were to be integrated with television and radio broadcasts transmitted on open

circuits ... student would be required to undertake written assignments which would be marked by a 'correspondence tutor' and this activity was seen as a method of teaching as much as a method of assessment of performance. In addition students would be required to attend short residential summer schools and would be offered, optionally, the opportunity of meeting a counsellor (and later a tutor) and other students at one of a network of local study Centres. Each course would end with a final examination to be held in a local examination centre (p. 76).

In Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system Programmes, a lot of emphasis is on 'interactivity' provided through men, media and machines. Besides, the student-tutor and peer interaction is desired and promoted. ODL programmes make use of, or at least aspire to, use communication technologies extensively and if the borrowing institution and its client do not have access to these, curriculum transactions will not be satisfactory. Availability and application of such technologies in different situations mismatch more often than not. Reporting on the technological development in Africa, Hugh Africa (2000) says "these developments have to date been unevenly distributed across the continents..." (p.6). In the absence of a reliable, swift and developed telematic network in the developing world, courses developed in foreign lands particularly, developed countries may not be transferred nor transacted meaningfully. Similarly, Rathore (1997) through his comparative study on the quality of feedback through electronic media of IGNOU (India) and Fern Universitat (Germany) students says "The use of communication technologies for providing feedback to students in FeU and IGNOU is so different that a comparison between them is not possible. For example, teleconferencing is used in IGNOU and not used in FeU. In FeU one finds the use of internet facility to communicate with students through computer, whereas it is not available to students at IGNOU" (p.83). However, Rathore also reports that half the active students use telephone to contact the counsellors in both the universities. It could be concluded that telephone technology in both countries has come of age and telephone-dependent courses developed in any country can be simultaneously applied in both countries. But Rathore himself reporting on IGNOU teleconferencing observes, "The difficulties of getting a telephone line and high costs of telecommunication were also generally reported by the participants" (p.88). Also, the time gap between the lending and the borrowing countries makes real-time interaction between teacher-taught and peer a bit difficult. Similarly, in courses provided through collaborative arrangement, there is a likelihood of most services planned and offered to direct clientele by institutions not being on the same scale when offered to students of borrowing institution. Even when courses are offered by the agencies of the provider institution, different personal services are curtailed. The Management Programme of the British Universities offered through the British Council offices in India are not able to provide identical services to students in India. Fee charged in India is much higher than what is charged of British students in Britain. Even though the students opting for such courses are aware that these courses may not be as relevant as Indian courses because they are not developed with local expertise and case studies, yet they are considered more prestigious because they bear the name of reputed foreign institutions.

In some places, universities and institutions of higher learning have not developed academic programmes in certain areas of studies. Students wishing to take such courses have to travel abroad, often after quitting jobs. Such ventures cost high in terms of 'opportunity cost' and family dislocations. Making such courses available through collaborative efforts has been found to bring satisfactory results (Ng and Leung 1998). One of the most important factor in collaboration is that efforts made in any part of the world

can be made use of. We know that the Consortium for the Professional Development of Practitioners of Distance Education (in Africa) has recently developed, and the Sri Lanka Open University is in the process of developing a Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education (PGDDE) (Africa, 2000), a programme that has been on offer by IGNOU for more than one and half decade now. A wide range of courses can be made available without establishing extensive infrastructure and also making maximum use of the existing support system. Collaborating partners may be more than two and each should volunteer to undertake the responsibility which it can perform best. A checklist of the activities and responsibilities of the type given below can be developed and agreed upon before getting into affecting collaboration in practice. In a well planned collaboration, some of the areas which will need specification can be of the following type:

Activity	Stakeholder 1	Stakeholder 2	Stakeholder 3	Stakeholder n
Curriculum design				
Curriculum development				
Advertising				
Admission/Selection				
Administration				
Network support				
Library support				
Academic counselling				
Mid-term Evaluation				
End-term Evaluation				
Certification				

Globalisation of expertise is another important area. If experts from different fields can cooperate to develop study material, collaborate in joint research or examine research results.

Collaboration for credibility

Universities around the globe can be categorized into different types on the basis of their academic and research standing. Some universities like the Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Sorbonne, Heidelberg and others have attained a level often named 'world class'. Students and teachers from all parts of the world aspire to enter these universities. Similar tags of 'quality' have been attached on local level institutions. Institutions low on the 'opinion list' of masses tend to gain credibility in the marketplace by collaborating with institutions high on the 'opinion list'. One of the motivations for popular institutions to collaborate is to earn revenue by attracting local institutions for advertising, administration and management. The managing institutions seem to rise in the opinion of the clients. This unequal partnership tends to work because both tend to gain in their own ways. World Bank report (2000) has marked this trend and says "The globalization of higher education can have damaging as well as beneficial consequences ... Franchisee universities have also been problematic, where the parent university meets quality standards in the home country but offers a substandard education through its franchised programmes in other countries." (p. 43).

Collaboration is a follow up of successful negotiation. Negotiation can end either in collaboration or challenge. Successful negotiation results in precise demarcation of roles,

responsibilities, short and long term planning, trust building between key negotiators and finally in establishing a joint venture partnership. Challenge means invitation to survive through competition. The crucial question in globalisation is the relevance vs. reverence of the courses and imparting institutions to the 'recipients'. Countless institutions from the developed world are offering courses in the developing countries. The mad rush for 'foreign degrees' make them hot cake, but their relevance is not examined. It is no condition for competition. Hong Kong has perhaps found a pragmatic solution to this problem through its 'Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance' (1997). This ordinance makes it mandatory for foreign agencies to get their curriculum passed by the local accrediting authority.

Extensively available foreign courses are exorbitantly expensive and so available only to the privileged few. It seems neither charity nor mutual growth is the objective of globalised courses at present. Education, particularly in the ODL system, is fast becoming 'student centred' and in the corporate terminology 'consumer driven'. This change besides having positive effects has a major drawback of relying on marketing and publicity strategies. Rich collaborators would easily be able to capture the market through packaging and advertising instead of course content which can set in the dangerous trend of form taking precedence over content.

Collaborating Locally and Globally

It may seem that collaborating locally has greater chances of success. As a case one may mention South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) as a collaborative forum for South Asia where possibilities for cooperation abound. Cultures, technological development, geographical conditions are not very different in this region and joint efforts in curriculum design can bring favourable results. Such area specific collaboration in Asian or African region may also succeed in finding large learner segments.

Sharing Financial Resources

Collaboration is found to bring benefits to both or all partners but it has to be realised that collaboration without equitable share in profits is most likely to fail. There must be a funding policy and also sharing of profits policy right at the beginning of any collaborative arrangement. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) established through joint efforts and funding of Commonwealth countries is an example of such successful collaborative arrangement promoting research, training and development of DE in Commonwealth countries.

Proposed areas of Collaboration

There are certain areas in which international collaboration between the developed and developing world is desperately required. Some of these areas are collaborative research projects, human resource development, training in critical areas, systems development and technical capacity building for independent ventures. The Open University of the UK (UKOU) has played a key role in training and development of staff in the open universities of Netherlands, Portugal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, etc. It is apparent that the above mentioned areas are capital intensive. The expertise and the resources have one way transfer and are likely to come for a high cost or charity only.

Collaborative Research

Research is the most quality intensive of the activities that academic communities would over perform in the universities. Besides being capital intensive, research is also quality and intellect intensive. Expanding application of ICT has already drastically affected most areas of academic institution, particularly research. Research activities have already seen great transformation. Increased access to telematic resources has opened a plethora of questions of academic processes and norms for fresh inquiry. In the area of research particularly, the basic tenets themselves are under scrutiny. 'Research' by itself signifies the highest level of quality but disparities in academic inputs and processes us accept varying degrees of research outputs in different parts of the globe in the past. With the extensive real-time access and scrutiny of academic processes and resources and findings, 'quality' has become a key issue. It becomes imperative that we not only open our processes and output for global examination but also collaborate globally for capacity-building and process development of research. Traditional research activities like literature review, quantitative analysis etc. which can be accomplished within no time with the help of computers has become easier. Personal intellect and analytical capability perhaps attracts more attention.

In research, 'expert' holds the key. Expertise for developing research competence in employed personnel/research supervisors or supervising/guiding students for degree-based research can be two potential areas. In all probability the degree-based research can be comfortably handled by supervisors distantly placed through the use of e-mail and other on-time or real-time means of communication. At present, supervisors mostly provide brief face-to-face or written comments on the drafts of the chapters submitted to them or attempt to develop critical approach through discussion. One crucial help can come from supervisors in the form of references/resources likely to be useful to the researcher. This can be made available once again through electronic communication.

Staff Development and Capacity-Building

Capacity-building of experts is a crucial area and quite different to the supervision provided to student-researchers. Skills related to professional development have to be more through forms of interaction, group work, collaborative projects, etc. For these telematics will perhaps have only a minor role. Technologies like live chat, teleconferencing etc. will also have limited roles. Extended contacts will perhaps ignite creativity. It is time we create a central body of the type of ICDL (UKOU) or DEC (IGNOU) which can document and disseminate information world-wide. One of the important areas should be developing database of experts for capacity building, national use and training.

Research Scholarships

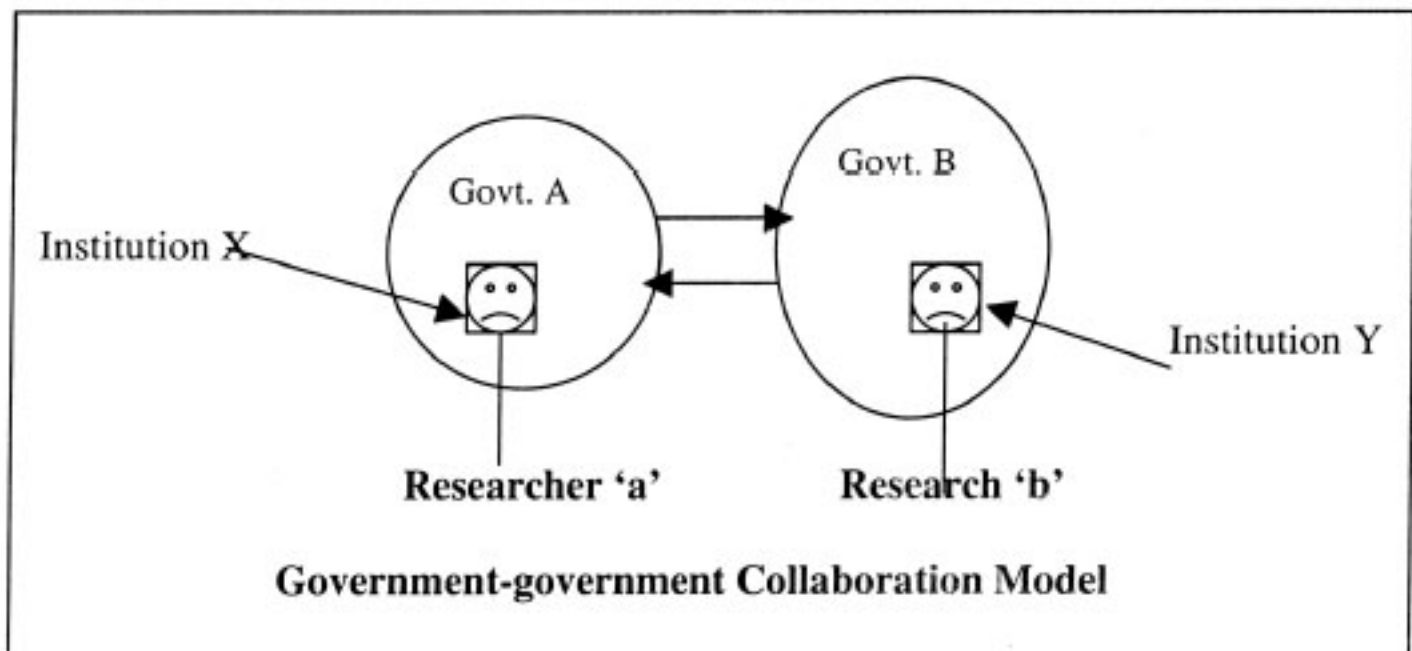
Scholarships granted for studies abroad are also a form of global collaboration. Such schemes have been criticized for perpetuating neo-colonialism through the selected academic-elites. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) 'Sandrich-Model' fellowship scheme is a departure from this model. In the 'Sandrich-Model' fellowship a scholar registered in Indian universities "can carry out his research alternatively in India and in the Federal Republic of Germany under the supervision of an Indian as well as German guide". The Indian supervisor could visit the researcher during his stay in Germany and the German supervisor could visit India if required. It can be seen that a community of

researcher and research environment would emerge of such efforts. Such fellowships should be promoted for better international understanding and collaboration

Sharing Funds for Research

If we look at the funding pattern of different nations for research we find large variations. Funding for research and development varies from near fifty percent to one to two percent. The reasons may be genuine or frivolous. However what we find is that there is a large overlapping or repetition in research leading to wastage of resources. From systemic research to course development, the same sort of research activities are duplicated.

Funding global collaborative projects becomes a bit of a complex issue. Governments normally do not fund research projects from other countries. Government to government project may not attract all individuals and also may not be useful at a micro level. Governments/institutions should promise to fund the partner from their country or institution with a matching grant if collaborating partner from abroad succeeds in getting a grant in his/her own country. It is apparent that if two individual partners make efforts and decide to work on a joint project of mutual interest, it will be useful to both institutions/nations. Such an arrangement will reduce the costs to half for both nations, while each will derive full benefits from the research.



It is most likely that a govt.-to-govt. collaboration may not be implemented in the best possible manner because the model followed is top-down. The actual implementers may not agree with each other or understand the project. If the originator of a project is at the individual researcher level then both collaborators would be able to contribute the best of their institutions and governments. In fact, it will be a good idea to reserve funds for projects which have international partners and agencies. In the first instance funding agencies should only vet the projects for 'likely to get grant' if a similar agency from abroad considers it fit for funding.

Recommendations

- It is time we have a DE Commission. To maintain quality DE in India, IGNOU the national Open University, should acquire the role of a quality assurance and quality augmenting agency.
- The above discussion throws enough light on both the possibilities and perils of collaboration. The road to collaboration is a tough one fraught with problems at multi-levels. In this situation, let us see how we can move ahead, especially in a country like India.
- Courses offered by foreign universities should fulfill quality and local requirements of the country where they are being offered and must also accompany all facilities offered to home students.
- Collaborating institutions should have joint committees for curriculum transactions.
- National quality maintenance agencies like the Distance Education Council (DEC) in India should first examine the curriculum and then grant permission to impart the courses on the lines approved.

Conclusion

Collaborations without a proper perspective can mean different things to different people for example, for the resource poor and the lesser-known or less established, globalisation is borrowing the name and for the well known and the established it is encashing on the reputation. In educational contexts however, the focus has to be on the students. We need to examine partnerships from their perspective. What will the learners gain? In Friere's terms we need to make distance education 'liberating' not 'dominating' (p.252). Let us be aware that globalisation and collaboration should not become another tool of neo-colonialism. Let us aspire to mutually grow through collaborative efforts. The present scene is well summarized by Prasad (1997) who says "partnership arrangements in an unfair competitive situation may not bring any substantial benefits to learners in developing countries" (p.3). Providing education through ODL requires an understanding of the target groups, their level and learning habits, training of staff in preparing Self Instructional Materials (SIM), media literacy of the learners, etc. Any course developed for one particular group normally cannot be offered to another group with the same expectations of attainments. The course material and method of administering should normally require modifications. Methods and areas of collaboration will have to be identified beforehand so a lot of ground work will have to be done before collaborative ventures can actually take off.

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