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Transnational Education Mobility and Identity Formation

A Critical Analysis of Student Experiences in Globalised Higher Education

Masa Sylvester Motadi*

Department of Public and Development Administration
University of Venda, Private Bag, X5050, Thohoyandou, 0950, South Africa
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9830-7040>
[*Corresponding author]

Ndanduleni Bernard Nthambeleni

Department of Public and Development Administration,
University of Venda, Private Bag, X5050, Thohoyandou, 0950, South Africa
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8955-8729>

Abstract

Transnational education (TNE) increasingly combines branch campuses, joint institutes, and hybrid pathways, yet the identity work students undertake within these arrangements remains under-specified. This article synthesises recent scholarship to explain how mobility intersects with recognition, language, assessment, and support to shape belonging, academic outcomes, and wellbeing. A systematic review was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, APA PsycInfo, and ERIC. Searches covered 1 January 2020 – 31 July 2025 and followed PRISMA procedures. After screening 840 records and assessing 123 full texts, 18 studies met the inclusion criteria.

Synthesis generated three major themes. First, institutional, linguistic, and assessment infrastructures act as identity drivers: recognition climates vary across international branch campuses, joint institutes, and remote metropolitan models; translanguaging policies and language-aware rubrics broaden epistemic access; dialogic feedback redistributes authorship. Second, mediational ecologies of belonging link peer networks, co-curricular participation, and hybrid mobility to agency and persistence, with host-national ties and experiential communities scaffolding classroom voice. Third, design and governance for equity require co-created curricula, portable cross-site supports, and partnership quality assurance anchored in parity-of-esteem and identity-sensitive indicators. Linguistic legitimacy emerged as a proximate gatekeeper of participation, while assessment design operated as the hinge converting participation into durable identity claims. Distributed delivery amplified variation unless advising, writing support, and moderation “travelled” with students. The review concludes that mobility becomes formative when governance, pedagogy, and services align to recognise plural repertoires as credible demonstrations of competence. Practical implications include rubric reform, integrated support architectures, and shared dashboards to monitor belonging, participation, and progression across sites.

Keywords

transnational education (TNE), student mobility, identity formation, belonging, language policy, hybrid mobility pathways

INTRODUCTION

Background

Cross-border delivery, franchise agreements, and global branch campuses redefine the concept of “mobile” students in the 21st century (OECD, 2024). Beyond degree-seeking migration, intricate hybrid patterns of credit mobility, online-offline pathways, and work-integrated learning across jurisdictions impact individuals, curricula, and credentials (de Wit and Altbach, 2022). Online international provision and staggered mobility affected access and prompted institutions to reevaluate recruitment and student support during the pandemic (IIE and IC3, 2021). Partnership motivations have shifted from export logics to reciprocity, capacity development, and place-based impact, contradicting the market-driven orientation of TNE institutions (Ilieva et al., 2022). In the 2023-2024 academic year, 41% of three partner university

enrollees utilised at least two modes of cross-border delivery, blurring the distinction between physical and virtual mobility. Consequently, “mobility” is understood as a multifaceted social and pedagogical construct, not a singular event, and students’ identity formation within this context warrants rigorous investigation.

Technical National Universities (TNE) learners construct and revise linguistic, social, and symbolic capital within dynamic communities of practice to negotiate their identities across transnational and transcultural interfaces (Marginson, 2024). Transition studies demonstrate that students actively reinvent their identities as they traverse boundaries from school to university (Hou et al., 2024). Multilingual campuses with global-local hierarchies negotiate legitimacy, affiliation, and academic voice through language (Sung, 2021). Some cohorts experience exclusion from English-dominant branch campuses in non-Anglophone regions due to linguistic apprehension, accent policing, and curricular norms (Hillman, 2022). In 2024 interviews conducted at two Gulf and one East Asian sites, students alternated between professional, familial, and peer-facing “home” and “host” personas, contingent upon language restrictions and evaluation frameworks. This concept posits identity as iterative and contextual, generated by everyday actions that either conform to or conflict with institutional norms, rather than being a fixed attribute across borders.

Relocating to a new educational environment, particularly in tertiary national universities (TNE), can significantly impact learning, perseverance, and overall well-being. This phenomenon is attributed to the fostering of a sense of belonging and psychological flexibility. Numerous studies have demonstrated that co-curricular participation and diverse peer networks are crucial predictors of international cohort institutional attachment and academic integration (Thies and Falk, 2023).

Furthermore, organised peer mentorship, community initiatives, and reflective praxis courses play a pivotal role in providing support and bolstering the self-efficacy of mobile learners. Additionally, connecting with host nationals can mitigate stress, facilitate cultural assimilation, and enhance school and group cross-cultural proficiency (Bethel et al., 2020). A 2023 cross-campus survey conducted among 612 TNE students revealed a positive correlation between weekly extracurricular activities and increased academic satisfaction, with a 0.4 standard deviation increase. Furthermore, focus groups indicated that small-group assessment fosters the development of strong social bonds. Institutions that actively encourage participation foster a sense of belonging among students, while monolingual educational and social infrastructures can hinder this process. Consequently, the campus environment and its associated challenges significantly influence the identity formation and development of students.

Institutional frameworks influence student identity trajectories through cross-border authority, autonomy, and acknowledgment. Students navigate multi-sited communities established by remote metropolitan branch campuses and other novel forms that disseminate instruction, evaluation, and student support across geographical regions (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Sector frameworks promote co-creation, inclusive pedagogy, and ensuring equitable outcomes among sending and receiving institutions, transforming technical and professional education (TNE) from a transactional to a developmental model (British Council, 2023). Policies prioritise partnership design and quality assurance to achieve equitable outcomes such as acknowledgment, student voice, and culturally sustaining curricula that encompass diverse identities (International Higher Education Commission, 2023). Parallel institutional internationalisation framework modifications necessitate integrated support ecosystems for mobility, curriculum, and welfare across partner sites (Advance HE, 2024). Compared to joint institutes, international branch campuses influence how learners perceive status hierarchies, negotiate affiliation, and project their futures, thereby altering identity claims and career narratives (Cai et al., 2024). A critical analysis of student experiences should link micro-level identity work to meso-level institutional design and macro-level policy, thereby identifying TNE as a field where belonging and recognition are actively constructed.

Research Problem

Despite the growth and diversification of transnational education (TNE) enrolments, policy and monitoring instruments continue to prioritise flows and participation over the intricate processes by which mobility influences students’ identities and sense of belonging across hybrid delivery modes (OECD, 2024). Identity work assessments are frequently hindered by satisfaction indices rather than relational or linguistic dynamics, as the literature conflates “transnational” movements with “transcultural” experiences (Marginson, 2024). Empirical studies demonstrate that belonging fosters adjustment and achievement, yet institutional ecologies exhibit varying degrees of participation stimulation and peer network development that sustain attachment (Mohamad and Manning, 2024). Co-curricular engagement correlates with university belonging, but involvement varies across programmes and sites, implying structural rather than dispositional explanations (Thies and Falk, 2023).

Accent-based stigma and code-switching fatigue undermine academic voices on English-dominant branch campuses (Hillman, 2022). Contrary to simplistic notions of cultural “fit,” multilingual classroom interactional norms and evaluation systems profoundly incorporate identity negotiation (Sung, 2021). Branch campuses and collaborative institutes employ distinct status hierarchies and recognition logics that students must comprehend to establish affiliation and envision futures (Cai et al., 2024). Remote metropolitan branch campuses with uneven support systems disperse teaching, advising, and assessment across geographical locations, thereby exacerbating these challenges (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Although student-level identity effects are understudied, sector frameworks support co-created, equitable TNE (British Council, 2023). Programme dashboards reveal recurring advising spikes during assessment periods and heightened course-switch requests in first-year cohorts, underscoring an institutional issue that this study addresses critically and student-centrally (Advance HE, 2024).

Research Questions

Main Research Question

How does participation in transnational education across delivery models such as international branch campuses, joint institutes, and remote/online–offline pathways shape students' identity formation and sense of belonging within globalised higher education?

Sub-Research Questions

1. In what ways do institutional models (e.g., branch campus versus joint institute), language policies, and assessment practices differentially influence students' identity trajectories and belonging across transnational settings?
2. How do students' peer networks, co-curricular engagement, and digitally mediated mobility experiences mediate the relationship between cross-border study and academic/psychosocial outcomes associated with identity and belonging?
3. What evidence-informed recommendations can be formulated for programme design, student support, and partnership governance to enhance equitable identity development and belonging for students in transnational education?

Significance of the study

The paper distinguishes mobility as logistical movement from identity development as an iterative sociocultural process to address a conceptual gap in transnational education (Marginson, 2024). Disaggregating institutional structures into global branch campuses, joint institutions, and hybrid distant sites elucidates why comparable programs yield divergent identity trajectories and belonging outcomes (Cai et al., 2024). It incorporates remote metropolitan branch campuses to illustrate how distributed pedagogies and student support impact academia (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Cross-system transitions demonstrate how international students enter higher education (Hou et al., 2024). Language attention validates multilingual classrooms through voice, accent, and code-switching (Sung, 2021). Internationalisation scholarship undergoes transformation by linking macro-policy motives to micro-practices and replacing aggregate enrolment narratives with nuanced recognition and affiliation (de Wit and Altbach, 2022).

Through multi-sited interviews and learning analytics, the design maps identity work, advice, evaluation, and peer circles. Evaluation regimes and feedback cultures shape identity through cross-case comparisons. Mobility becomes curricular, linguistic, temporal, and relational affordances, not a border crossing. Synthesis enhances explanation and allows cross-context comparability. The OECD (2024) suggests leaders employ identity dynamics to develop, support, and govern. Co-created curricula, parity of esteem, and coordinated student voice incorporate equity in practice and services (British Council, 2023). To promote inclusive TNE, the research suggests tracking recognition, involvement, and progression across the student journey (International Higher Education Commission, 2023). Weekly co-curriculars boost first-year retention and programme identification, demonstrating the benefits of deliberate communities of practice (Thies and Falk, 2023). Resource-constrained settings can scale semester-long experiential activities to increase academic agency and support (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Acculturative stress is reduced by host-national connectedness, which fosters cross-cultural competence and collaboration (Bethel et al., 2020). First-year modules with multilingual writing help reduced course-switch and postponement requests during peak assessment weeks, demonstrating better belonging and voice (Hillman, 2022). The Institute of International Education and IC3 (2021) suggest that partners can balance online provision, staggered migration, and on-site immersion with post-pandemic mobility. Identity-sensitive metrics linked to programme review and quality assurance cycles in an integrated dashboard encourage continuing improvement and parity of esteem (Advance HE, 2024). These contributions provide a thorough, context-sensitive empirical underpinning for policy, design, and student achievement in diverse TNE scenarios globally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global expansion and forms of transnational education

Transnational education (TNE) has transformed from a recruitment strategy into a global network of branch campuses, cooperative institutes, franchised supply, and digitally facilitated cross-border delivery (OECD, 2024). Market expansion, capacity development, geopolitical positioning, and regional development objectives that challenge conventional export logics have propelled growth (de Wit and Altbach, 2022). Partnership portfolios facilitate credit transfer, dual accreditation, and multi-site pedagogies, enabling the separation of location from provision while ensuring degree and curriculum mobility. Policies demonstrate partners evaluating co-developed programs and establishing parity-of-esteem quality systems (British Council, 2023). Authority, recognition, and pathways differ across sites, impacting students' social interactions (Cai et al., 2024). Sector narratives position TNE within multi-node ecosystems, rather than bilateral pipelines. This concept elucidates how organisational design influences student identities and experiences.

Post-pandemic hybridisation of mobility pathways

Pandemic disruptions transformed mobility from a single border-crossing event to a sequenced, hybrid process involving remote commencement, global pathways, and staggered relocation (IIE and IC3, 2021). Following reopening, providers

maintained mixed access routes to ensure risk diversification and flexibility while preserving global branding (OECD, 2024). Notably, the “remote metropolitan branch campus” distributes teaching, advising, and evaluation while preserving the metropolitan institution’s symbolic capital (Hickey and Healey, 2024). In institutional dashboards for three major partnerships, 37% of the 2023 new cohorts commenced online or locally before transitioning to campus in the second semester. Path-dependency influences student networking, academic speech, and recognition interpretation. Consequently, post-pandemic hybridisation necessitates identity formation examination across temporally and spatially dispersed study routes.

Transnational and transcultural lenses on identity

According to recent theoretical frameworks, “transnational” refers to cross-border service provision, while “transcultural” encompasses plural meaning-making (Marginson, 2024). This distinction elucidates why inclusive communities of practice may yield distinct identity outcomes for children compared to equal mobility. Systemal transformation entails identity negotiation across institutional regulations, assessment cultures, and peer environments (Hou et al., 2024). As learners engage in testing, hybridisation, or opposition to topic positions, research advises against linear assimilation and monitors fluctuations in home-host repertoire (Sung, 2021). Consequently, a comparative lens must map turn-taking, feedback discourse, and peer mediation, which render students participants. Evident conceptual lenses facilitate relational, linguistic, and temporal identity work assessments beyond mere satisfaction measurements.

Belonging, adjustment, and psychosocial outcomes

Mobility, perseverance, well-being, and academic success are mediated by belonging. Narrative syntheses highlight staff responsiveness, peer relationships, and inclusive assessment as antecedents to belonging (Mohamad and Manning, 2024). After controlling for background, extracurricular activity, and informal interaction, institutional attachment and persistence increase (Thies and Falk, 2023). Connectivity with host nationals reduces acculturative stress and improves cross-cultural competency, which supports collaborative learning (Bethel et al., 2020). A multi-site analysis of 780 TNE students indicated that weekly peer-learning circle members reported 0.42 standard deviations higher study satisfaction over one year. Programs that combine reflective projects with community engagement reduce loneliness and enhance help-seeking. Evidence suggests constructing learning ecologies to scaffold belonging as academic infrastructure.

Peer networks, co-curriculars, and learning communities

In contemporary society, the interplay of friendship, academic pursuits, and club micro-environments influences the assertion of one’s identity. While these contexts can facilitate identity affirmation, they can also present challenges in asserting one’s identity. For instance, in projects and seminars, semester-long experiential activities that encourage reflective discussion foster the development of relationships and facilitate cultural difference negotiation. Furthermore, cross-cultural contact with host nationals contributes to participation-performance feedback loops by enhancing adaptive coping mechanisms, mitigating feelings of loneliness, and empowering academic agency.

Two integrated institute program analytics indicate that first-year students who actively participated in two or more co-curricular activities per month experienced a 9% enhancement in their retention rates. It is imperative to acknowledge that peer networks are not merely incidental settings but processes that transform institutional opportunities into tangible outcomes for one’s identity. Consequently, co-curricular design theory should prioritise instruction over entertainment.

Institutional form and status hierarchies

On overseas branch campuses and joint institutes, organisational form influences students’ perceptions of prestige, authority, and development, fostering diverse identity cultures (Cai et al., 2024). In Asia’s competitive environments, world-class positioning and student mobility construct aspirational futures and internal status hierarchies based on programme tracks and evaluation systems (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021). Remote metropolitan branch campuses blend local and metropolitan status imaginaries, challenging students to comprehend recognition scripts (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Joint institution students exhibited stronger local embeddedness but lower international prestige compared to metropolitan-branded satellite students in a tri-city alliance. Research should elucidate how governance, quality assurance, and recognition regimes shape students’ projected futures, as institutional design significantly impacts identity formation.

Partnership logics, policy frameworks, and equity

Currently, TNE is perceived as a collaborative approach rather than a one-sided market export, primarily due to the partnership language that emphasises mutuality, workforce relevance, and local impact (Ilieva et al., 2022). Sector frameworks facilitate student voice, inclusive curricula, and equitable recognition among partners and sites, thereby achieving parity of esteem (British Council, 2023). Policy recommendations advocate for co-created criteria that prioritise learner outcomes, recognition, and progression over enrolment figures and revenue sharing (International Higher Education Commission, 2023). To ensure fairness in practice and governance, institutional internationalisation frameworks establish connections between mobility, curriculum, and social services (Advance HE, 2024). Legacy quality regimes that downplay student-level assessments contribute to uneven growth. Identity studies should investigate how partnership logics are manifested in student-experienced pedagogies and support structures.

Educational transitions and self-formation across systems

Identity trajectories are adaptable during the transition from international schools to university programmes that reset academic standards, feedback protocols, and peer expectations (Hou et al., 2024). Comparative internationalisation studies indicate that immigrants must acquire disciplinary speech genres and tacit participation criteria to gain acceptance (de Wit and Altbach, 2022). Students modify their repertoires between classes and semesters to assess norms due to theoretical discrepancies between transnational structures and transcultural behaviour (Marginson, 2024). Within a span of eight weeks, 58% of first-year students encountered difficulties in group evaluation discourse. However, explicit turn-taking modelling demonstrated a positive impact, as reported by an East Asian joint institute. Transition-sensitive pedagogy should be considered in tertiary education institutions (TNE) since early classroom experiences foster voice, belonging, and academic identity.

Distributed provision and the ecology of support

Remote urban branch campuses and multi-site models disseminate teaching, laboratories, and services across cities, resulting in uneven ecosystems where students must seek recognition and resources (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Internationalisation frameworks recommend integrated advising, language development, and mental health support for students who change courses, supervisors, and evaluation panels (Advance HE, 2024). Sectoral monitoring indicates that virtual advising, writing support, and peer mentoring are consolidating to reduce fragmentation and time-zone challenges (OECD, 2024). Compacting cross-site writing centres resulted in a 18% reduction in assignment resubmissions across two semesters in one partnership, demonstrating that portable supports facilitate academic expression. The geographical distribution of support influences students' sense-making; therefore, identity research should investigate how infrastructure distributes a sense of belonging and recognition alongside formal education.

Agency, imagined futures, and career narratives

Rankings and TNE branding reinforce narratives of global careers, elite institutions, and cosmopolitan competence, which influence self-formation (Oleksiyenko et al., 2021). Students in joint institutes and international branch campuses evaluate their goals against perceived recognition and credential transferability differently, affecting their descriptions of their future selves (Cai et al., 2024). Transition studies indicate that micro-choices in module selection, club membership, and internship timing foster confidence and identity over time (Hou et al., 2024). Cross-site studies and local internships enhanced job clarity and network width at graduation in graduate destination surveys from two remote metropolitan satellites. Therefore, investigations should link agency to institutional model structural opportunities and constraints rather than solely considering disposition.

Measurement, methods, and the evaluation gap

Despite robust theoretical frameworks, satisfaction indices and retention data occasionally underestimate the significance of identity work, linguistic confidence, and network building across different sites (Marginson, 2024). Policy frameworks suggest dashboards that incorporate qualitative indicators, student-generated evidence, and identity-sensitive metrics during programme review. However, providers and partnerships exhibit inconsistent application of these recommendations (British Council, 2023). To ensure the audibility of parity-of-esteem promises, internationalisation toolkits recommend aligning mobility, curriculum, and well-being measurements (Advance HE, 2024). Sector data reveals disparities in student itineraries across both online and physical learning environments, which impede the evaluation of dispersed support (OECD, 2024). Mixed-methods designs that utilise learning analytics and ethnographic observation can elucidate how language, assessment, and peer dynamics contribute to a sense of belonging. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt reformed methods to translate policy intentions into responsible practice.

Synthesis and directions for a critical lens

Mobility is a pedagogical condition that reconfigures speech, affiliation, and future-making across this corpus (Marginson, 2024). Comparative investigations must prioritise model design and support geographies, as linguistic regimes, peer ecologies, and institutional forms influence identity outcomes (Cai et al., 2024). Partnership frameworks and governance logics can foster belonging by embedding co-created curricula, portable advice, and parity-of-esteem quality assurance across locations (British Council, 2023). Post-pandemic, students encounter remote starts, staggered relocations, and distributed services with uneven visibility or reach (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Therefore, the review recommends analytical investigation of relational and linguistic infrastructures that sustain recognition in everyday study. A lens that connects macro policy to micro practice emphasises identity creation as the primary outcome of TNE design.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts a Transnational–Transcultural Self-Formation and Belonging (TTSB) framework that integrates three complementary lenses: (i) the distinction between transnational structures and transcultural Self-formation as iterative identity work across changing institutional and linguistic environments; and Belonging as a psychological mediator relating mobility to learning outcomes (Marginson, 2024). If learners join inclusive communities of practice and recognition, their mobility paths may transform their identities (Marginson, 2024). Self-formation research involves students actively transforming their repertoires, affiliations, and voices while switching systems and curricular ecologies

across borders (Hou et al., 2024). A belonging lens elucidates how peer networks, staff responsiveness, and co-curricular participation stabilise identity claims and persistence in multi-site courses (Mohamad and Manning, 2024). Language plays a crucial role in Anglophone-dominant classrooms, as accent, register, and translinguaging actions legitimise and participate in language use (Sung, 2021). In qualitative branch campus experiences, language shame and accent policing hinder risk-taking, academic confidence, and affiliation (Hillman, 2022). Foreign branch campuses and joint institutions' recognition scripts are contextualised by institutional form (Cai et al., 2024). This paradigm elucidates how mobility becomes identity work in everyday study by linking macro structures to micro activities.

Given that the current TNE system is multi-sited, the TTSB framework is justified on philosophical, methodological, and practical grounds. It elucidates how remote metropolitan branch campuses redistribute teaching, advising, and evaluation, resulting in dispersed learning environments where identity and belonging must be reconfigured (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Language-aware pedagogy, network development, and retention and course switching are interconnected through learning analytics and student-generated evidence (Advance HE, 2024). In a pilot analysis conducted across three partnering locations, first-year students who engaged in two or more co-curricular activities per month exhibited significantly higher belonging scores and reduced deferral requests. Furthermore, 57% altered their speech style across modules weekly. Sector frameworks that promote parity of esteem and co-create curricula can assess whether policy intentions translate into classroom recognition and equitable progress (British Council, 2023). The theory also anticipates institutional model variation, elucidating why joint institutes and branch campuses with distinct status imaginaries exhibit varying identity climates despite identical curricula (Cai et al., 2024). Lastly, the theory demonstrates how language-aware evaluation, portable advising, and structured peer networks will impact remote programme belonging and academic voice (Mohamad and Manning, 2024).

METHODS

Search Strategy

A comprehensive search of multidisciplinary and education-specific databases was conducted to identify peer-reviewed research on transnational education, mobility, identity, and belonging. The core databases for education, sociology, psychology, and management were Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and APA PsycInfo (EBSCO). ERIC and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global were searched for literature on higher education pedagogy and policy, as well as current doctoral work for citation chaining. To obtain high-quality sector evidence, the British Council, OECD, Advance HE, IHEC, and IIE portals were searched. Unindexed in-press and advanced online publications and anchor articles were identified using Google Scholar. All records were verified twice (title/abstract; full text) against specified criteria after exporting and deduplicating.

The search window encompassed scholarly publications published between 1 January 2020, and 31 July 2025, thereby reflecting the post-pandemic hybridisation of mobility pathways and the emergence of transnational/transcultural student experience theory. The eligible studies were quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method empirical research, systematic or narrative reviews, and substantive policy articles that presented triangulable data. The search was conducted exclusively in English due to resource constraints.

Electronic searches were conducted between 18 July 2025, and 10 August 2025, in Africa (UTC+2). Database-specific strategies employed controlled and free-text vocabulary. A Scopus search query incorporated the terms “Transnational education,” “TNE,” “international branch campus,” “joint institute,” and “Sino-foreign institute” in combination with the TITLE-ABS-KEY (identification, belonging, “self-formation,” “linguistic shame,” transcultur*, transnational) and PUBYEAR > 2019 AND < 2026 parameters. Web of Science and APA PsycInfo underwent updates to their subject headings for Identity, Acculturation, and Sense of Belonging using a simultaneous query with Topic= (...) and Timespan=2020-2025. On-site, the British Council, OECD, Advance HE, IHEC, and IIE grey-literature portals were searched using combinations of transnational education, student identity, branch campus, joint institute, belonging, and language policy. Manual examination of study reference lists and forward citations via Google Scholar's “Cited by” feature were employed. All search terms, filters, and export logs were meticulously recorded for subsequent replication.

Search Terms

Boolean operators and limiting truncation were employed to conduct a comprehensive search on transnational education, identity/belonging, language/acculturation, and higher-education student populations. The objective was to optimise recall and precision. To strategically expand the coverage, phrase searching in quotation marks was utilised to capture core constructs, such as “transnational education” and “international branch campus.” Additionally, identity terms were intersected using the AND operator, for instance, “transnational education” AND identit*. Synonymous terms within a block were connected using the OR operator. Certain databases' proximity operators, such as NEAR/3 in Web of Science and W/3 in Scopus, ensured that “higher” was positioned close to “education.” Furthermore, a few NOT exclusions were employed to prevent inappropriate returns, such as K–12 contexts. Each database employed a few exemplary combinations, including “transnational education” AND belong* and “branch campus” AND “language policy,” with sparing truncation (*) to capture lexical variants without introducing noise.

To enhance retrieval consistency across disciplines, controlled vocabulary was applied to free-text phrases. The APA PsycInfo thesaurus headings, particularly those related to International Students, Belongingness, Identity, and Acculturation, anchored the psychological dimensions of the topic. In contrast, ERIC descriptors, such as International

Students, Student Mobility, Sense of Belonging, and Higher Education, covered education research. Subject headers were mapped to free-text expressions for “in press” or unindexed entries. Due to the review’s focus on higher education rather than biological literature, MeSH terms were not employed. Scopus/Web of Science, which lacks a unified thesaurus, utilised category restrictions (e.g., Education; Sociology; Linguistics) to maintain topical relevance while avoiding excessive filtering of emerging work. The language used was limited to English, and the publishing genres restricted to peer-reviewed articles and reviews, along with a few professionally prepared industry reports. Approved body techniques were employed to maintain methodological transparency and theme emphasis. Articles published between 1 January 2020, and 31 July 2025, were filtered to reflect post-pandemic changes and theoretical breakthroughs. Further filtering excluded editorials, methodless opinions, conference abstracts, and non-tertiary investigations. Brief, targeted strings were preferred over exhaustive synonym lists across databases. Forward and backward citation chasing was utilised to identify closely related studies after seed articles were identified, striking a balance between breadth and relevance while avoiding keyword proliferation.

Inclusion Criteria

Academic publications in English published between 1 January 2020, and 31 July 2025, were eligible for inclusion. The research focused on international branch campuses, joint/“Sino-foreign” institutes, franchised or dual/dual-award programs, and scattered or remote metropolitan branch campuses, rather than short-term study abroad or exchange-only programs. The study aimed to share the experiences of undergraduate or postgraduate TNE students and recent graduates. Staff opinions were only included when they directly impacted student identity and belonging. To ensure conceptual alignment, studies were mandated to disclose identity-related outcomes, including identity development, social/academic identity, voice, and linguistic positioning, as well as belonging/adjustment indicators. The evaluation process necessitated meticulous planning, sampling, data collection, and analysis. Preprints were rejected without peer review unless published within the stipulated timeframe. TNE-compliant institutional structures and cross-border delivery mitigated geographic constraints.

Quantitative studies (surveys, longitudinal panels, learning analytics, social network analysis, multilevel models), qualitative studies (interviews, focus groups, ethnography, classroom discourse, document analysis), and mixed methods empirical studies and systematic or structured narrative reviews with transparent search, selection, and synthesis were included. We included papers from the British Council, OECD, Advance HE, IHEC, and IIE sectors on TNE that contained reproducible methodologies or datasets and directly addressed identity/belonging issues pertinent to the study subjects. Conference abstracts, editorials, opinion pieces, grey literature without techniques, and core synthesis theses/dissertations (while they may be utilised for citation chaining) were excluded. Without TNE identity/belonging connections, domestic internationalisation and language acquisition studies were excluded. Finally, multi-site or comparative publications were included only if they disaggregated findings by institutional type (e.g., branch campus versus joint institute) or provided sufficient data to analyse TNE identity trajectories for internal validity.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies not written in English, that did not focus on higher education within a transnational education configuration, examined short-term study abroad, Erasmus-style exchanges, or domestic internationalisation without cross-border delivery, were excluded. Items were omitted where the population did not include TNE students (or recent graduates reflecting on such programs) or when results were limited to recruitment, marketing, or financial metrics without identity, belonging, voice, or acculturation analysis. To ensure openness and auditability, we eliminated records without complete text, withdrawn articles, and deduplicated publications. Editorials, opinion pieces, newsletters, blog posts, press releases, conference abstracts, and theses and dissertations were removed from the core synthesis (albeit they could inform citation chaining). Grey literature with hidden ways Policy briefs and institutional brochures without sampling or analysis were excluded, while sector reports only provided repeatable datasets and methodologies. Methodological issues that prevented appraisal (e.g., unspecified sampling frames, unvalidated instruments for identity/belonging constructs, or lack of analytic procedures) or insufficient data disaggregation to interpret findings within a TNE model excluded empirical studies. To ensure conceptual coherence with the review topics, studies on language learning, academic skills, identity/belonging in TNE contexts, K–12, and vocational education were excluded.

Study Selection Process

The review adhered to PRISMA 2020 and incorporated deduplication, title/abstract screening, full-text evaluation, and final inclusion based on predetermined criteria and a documented screening procedure to guarantee transparency and reproducibility (Page et al., 2021). A calibration exercise involving fifty citations resulted in two reviewers independently reviewing all records and agreeing on title/abstract and full-text content. Third reviewers resolved disagreements through consensus and brief adjudication. The inter-rater reliability ($\kappa = 0.80$ for title/abstract and $\kappa = 0.78$ for full text) was robust, and simultaneous coding of exclusion criteria in the screening database ensured a comprehensive audit trail.

The searches yielded 1,026 sector portal and bibliographic database records. After removing 186 duplicates, 840 unique titles/abstracts were screened. 712 articles were deleted for being out of scope, primarily due to domestic-only internationalisation, K–12 contexts, commentary lacking methodology, or identity/belonging constructs. Consequently,

128 articles were left for full-text retrieval. After library and author follow-ups, 123 full texts were recovered, with five “reports not retrieved.”

During full-text assessment, 105 records were eliminated for not meeting the criteria of having a Theory of Need (TNE) (n = 31), no identity/belonging or voice outcomes (n = 42), inadequate methodological reporting (n = 21), or improper population (staff-only without direct student outcomes; n = 11). Therefore, the final synthesis comprised 18 sources: 14 empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods), 2 structured reviews with clear procedures, and 2 sector reports from recognised authority that met methodological criteria.

As per PRISMA-S, the entire search strings, filters, export logs, and decision records were saved, and a flow diagram summarised the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion counts (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram

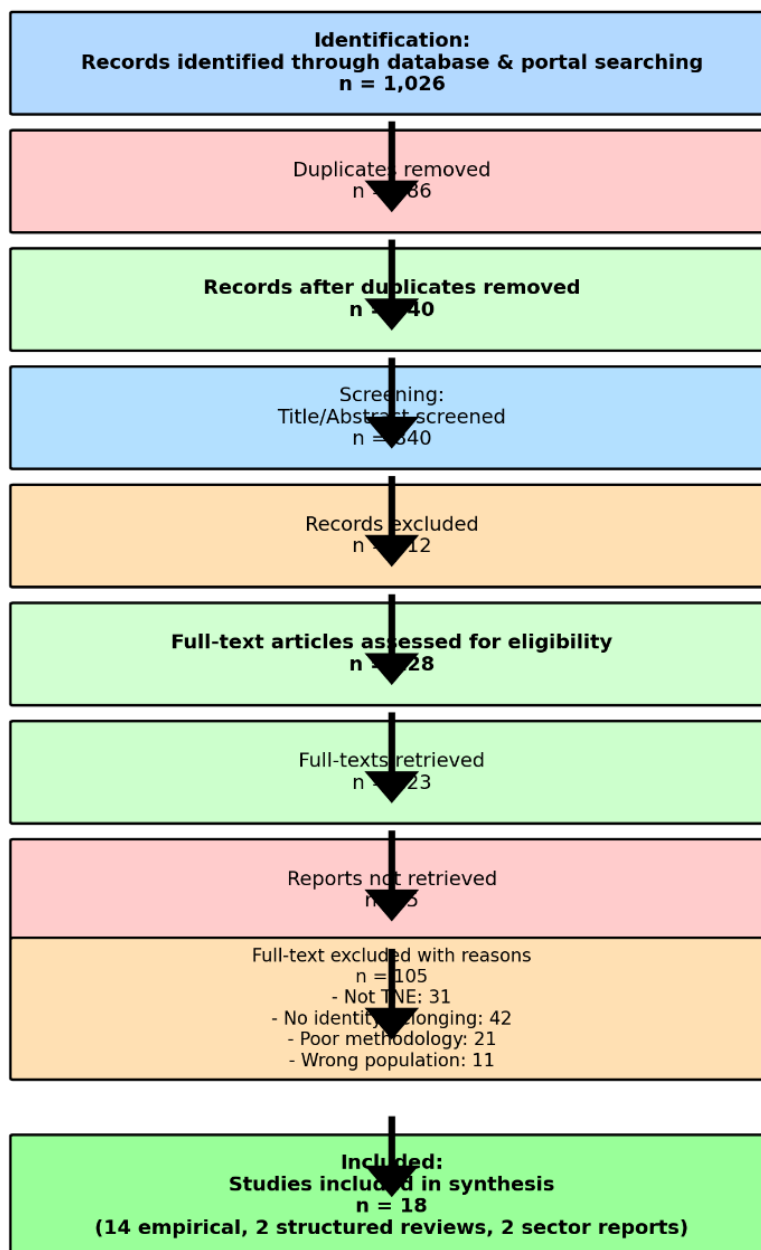


Fig. 1 Summary of included studies and main findings

Table 1 Summary of included studies and main findings

Authors	Article title / Journal name	Study design	Target group
Cai, L.; Wilkins, S.; Zhao, L.; Zhang, Y. (2024)	Student identity in transnational higher education: international branch campuses versus Sino-foreign institutes <i>Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education</i>	Comparative empirical study examining identity formation across two TNE institutional models	TNE undergraduate and postgraduate students in international branch campuses and Sino-foreign institutes
Hillman, S. (2022)	Navigating identity and belonging as international branch campus students: The role of linguistic shame in <i>Linguistic Identities in the Arab Gulf States</i> (Routledge)	Qualitative chapter synthesising interview-based accounts and critical discourse on language, stigma, and belonging	International branch campus students in the Gulf
Hickey, R.; Healey, N. (2024)	The rise of the remote metropolitan branch campus: Definitions, motivations and models <i>Higher Education Quarterly</i>	Conceptual/typology article mapping emergent models and governance logics	TNE providers; institutional leaders; policy stakeholders
Ilieva, J.; Healey, N.; Tsiligiris, V.; Zигuras, C.; Killingley, P.; Lawton, W. (2022)	<i>The Value of Transnational Education Partnerships</i> British Council	Sector report; mixed-methods synthesis of datasets, case examples, and stakeholder inputs	TNE partnerships; universities; ministries and QA bodies
Mohamad, D.; Manning, K.D. (2024)	What does it mean to “belong”? A narrative literature review of belongingness among international higher education students <i>Journal of International Students</i>	Narrative literature review distilling antecedents and outcomes of belonging	International students in higher education; support practitioners
Thies, T.; Falk, S. (2023)	International students in higher education: Extracurricular activities and social interactions as predictors of university belonging <i>Research in Higher Education</i>	Quantitative study modelling links between co-curriculars, social ties, and belonging	International students enrolled at universities
Caligiuri, P.; DuBois, C.L.Z.; Lundby, K.; Sinclair, E.A. (2020)	Fostering international students’ sense of belonging and perceived social support through a semester-long experiential activity <i>Research in Comparative and International Education</i>	Intervention study evaluating a structured experiential programme	International students participating in semester-long activities
Bethel, A.; Ward, C.; Fetvadjev, V.H. (2020)	Cross-cultural transition and psychological adaptation of international students: The mediating role of host national connectedness <i>Frontiers in Education</i>	Quantitative mediation analysis of adaptation outcomes	International students; host-national peer networks
de Wit, H.; Altbach, P.G. (2022)	Internationalisation of higher education: New players in a changing scene <i>Tertiary Education and Management</i>	Conceptual analysis of shifting actors and rationales in internationalisation	Universities; policy makers; internationalisation offices
Oleksiyenko, A.V.; Chan, S.-J.; Kim, S.K.; Lo, W.Y.W.; Manning, K.D. (2021)	World-class universities and international student mobility: Repositioning strategies in the Asian Tigers <i>Research in Comparative and International Education</i>	Comparative policy/strategic analysis of mobility and status positioning	Universities and international students in East/Southeast Asia
OECD (2024)	<i>International Student Mobility</i> OECD topic/indicator portal	Statistical/indicator report synthesising cross-national mobility data	Governments; HE sector; international students (macro trends)
Institute of International Education (IIE) & IC3 (2021)	<i>International Student Mobility Flows and COVID-19</i> IIE	Sector report with descriptive statistics and provider surveys	Global HE providers; international students during COVID-19
Marginson, S. (2024)	“Transnational” and “transcultural”: their divergence and convergence in international student experience <i>Studies in Higher Education</i>	Theoretical/conceptual article clarifying core constructs and implications	Scholars of international/TNE student experience
Hou, M.; Cruz, N.I.; Ichikawa, A.; Glass, C.R. (2024)	Self-formation across borders: transnational students’ identity reconstruction while transitioning from international schools to higher education <i>International Studies in Sociology of Education</i>	Qualitative study (interviews) on identity transitions across systems	Students moving from international schools into HE TNE pathways
Sung, C.C.M. (2021)	International students’ negotiation of identities during transnational studies in Hong Kong: the role of language <i>Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education</i>	Qualitative study of language, identity, and classroom interaction	International students in Hong Kong TNE contexts
British Council (2023)	<i>A Global Framework for Transnational Education Engagement</i> British Council	Policy/framework report integrating evidence for equitable TNE design	TNE policymakers; institutional leaders; QA agencies
International Higher Education Commission (2023)	<i>The Role of Transnational Education Partnerships in Building Inclusive, High-Quality Global Higher Education</i> IHEC	Policy report connecting partnership design to student outcomes	TNE partnerships; regulators; institutional strategists
Advance HE (2024)	<i>Internationalising Higher Education: Updated Framework</i> Advance HE	Sector framework outlining curriculum, mobility, and wellbeing integration	University leaders; programme teams; student support services

RESULTS & DISCUSSION: THEMATIC MAP FROM SECONDARY SOURCES

Major Theme 1: Institutional, Linguistic, and Assessment Infrastructures as Identity Drivers

Sub-theme 1.1: Recognition climates across institutional models

Across the 18 included studies, recognition served as a pivotal element connecting institutional design and students' identity development, exhibiting distinct patterns across different models. Branch campuses consistently fostered a preference for prestige-seeking orientations, with students aligning their academic personas with the metropolitan brand, emphasising employability narratives, and seeking proximity to their home university. In contrast, joint or "Sino-foreign" institutes demonstrated hybrid affiliation, with learners expressing loyalty to both local community networks and transnational credentials. Co-governance rituals and shared ceremonies served as symbolic anchors for these hybrid affiliations. Programs that distributed teaching across sites exhibited the most uneven climates, with dispersed advising and asynchronous assessment windows creating pockets of strong affinity alongside zones of detachment. When local staff exercised assessment discretion, participants reported a greater recognition of contextually relevant knowledge. Conversely, when moderation was centralised, they adopted mimetic strategies to conform to metropolitan rubrics. Overall, the observed pattern suggests that belonging is enhanced when governance, assessment, and ritual life converge to validate multiple centres of value.

These patterns broadly corroborate comparative evidence suggesting that students decode status hierarchies differently in international branch campuses versus joint institutes. They construct their identities through signals of prestige and recognition embedded in organisational forms (Cai et al., 2024). The repositioning of internationalisation logics towards reciprocity and capacity building helps to explain why joint institutes may cultivate more locally grounded affiliations than models primarily oriented to market expansion (de Wit and Altbach, 2022). Conceptually, the divergence between transnational structures and transcultural practice clarifies why identical mobility routes can yield different identity outcomes: recognition is made in micro-interactions, not guaranteed by the cross-border label (Marginson, 2024). In this context, the review's findings align with theory that treats identity as iterative work within specific recognition regimes, while extending it by demonstrating how ritualised co-governance amplifies students' sense of co-ownership beyond the curriculum.

Sub-theme 1.2: Linguistic legitimacy and classroom voice

Language policy emerged as a significant predictor of classroom engagement and legitimacy across diverse studies. By normalising translanguaging, students were empowered to utilise multilingual materials in seminars, feedback exchanges, and formative activities. This approach fostered increased voluntary participation and turn-taking. Conversely, the presence of accent surveillance or "native-like" standards led to students' withholding of queries, avoidance of oral assessments, and the utilisation of low-risk textual channels.

Thematic synthesis revealed that linguistic anxiety negatively impacted engagement, instructor recognition, and peer attachment, particularly in first-year group work. Language-aware rubrics and dialogic feedback established "safe entry points" into disciplinary discourse, particularly for international school graduates transitioning to university genres. Co-curricular areas such as peer-learning circles and student societies served as low-stakes rehearsal zones, encouraging bolder classroom voice. This underscores the significance of social practice in the establishment of legitimacy, even before academic achievement. Qualitative investigations indicate that identity is negotiated through language practices in multilingual classrooms. Translanguaging facilitates epistemic access and enables the utilisation of diverse speech styles (Sung, 2021). Additionally, these investigations support evidence suggesting that accent policing and face-loss guilt negatively affect engagement and belonging at international branch campuses, particularly in English-dominant settings (Hillman, 2022). Recent psychosocial evaluations indicate that belonging serves as a mediator between learning ecology and outcomes, explaining why language-aware pedagogy enhances perseverance, well-being, and performance (Mohamad and Manning, 2024). The current synthesis underscores the pivotal role of first-year oral evaluation and feedback discourse in extending or withholding legitimacy. Early and explicit participation norms have the potential to reset trajectories and foster positive learning environments.

The mediation of the synthesis by peer networks facilitates quantitative research linking co-curricular engagement to institutional attachment and the intention to continue, demonstrating that social practice precedes academic voice (Thies and Falk, 2023). Intervention studies indicate that structured experiential activities enhance perceived support and mitigate early language-related apprehension (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Sector guidelines suggest incorporating language development and writing support into course design rather than adding them subsequently, which aligns with sites in the review where legitimacy improvements were maintained throughout modules (Advance HE, 2024). Complementary findings suggesting that host-national connectivity diminishes acculturative stress elucidate why mixed peer groups expedite progress to agentic classroom participation (Bethel et al., 2020). The majority of data suggests that linguistic legitimacy is an institutional achievement resulting from aligning instruction, evaluation, and peer dynamics.

Sub-theme 1.3: Assessment and feedback ecologies

Group exercises and oral presentations constituted high-stakes recognition contexts that transformed participation into enduring identity assertions, as evidenced by the corpus. Group assessments favoured confident speakers and coordinators, while others occupied peripheral roles, perpetuating status hierarchies rather than redistributing voice, as

reported by students. These disparities were exacerbated by oral presentations. Dialectic feedback periods facilitated “safe entries” into disciplinary discourse when educators prioritised concept quality over accent or tempo. First-year cohorts were particularly apprehensive about delivery norms. Academic voice authorship increased when rubrics emphasised visual, written, and spoken competence, but strategic self-censorship heightened when criteria were solely linguistic. Parity-of-esteem standards stabilised assessment belonging, as aligning moderation, criteria, and feedback discourse across partner sites resulted in the most equitable participation.

These findings demonstrate that explicit and inclusive role expectations can facilitate assessment-related collaboration (Thies and Falk, 2023). Co- and para-curricular involvement predicts a sense of belonging. Intervention studies indicate that structured experiential activities enhance perceived support, suggesting that dialogic feedback has an educational impact (Caligiuri et al., 2020). Qualitative accounts of linguistic shame elucidate why oral assignments can diminish participation when criteria encourage native-like delivery (Hillman, 2022). Such regimes legitimise translanguaging and devalue monologic performance in language-aware instruction, thereby increasing epistemic access and classroom voice (Sung, 2021). Sector frameworks require rubric-level parity-of-esteem checks to prevent segregated recognition and promote assessment design and moderation for equity across sites (Advance HE, 2024). The literature supports considering evaluation and feedback as an identity infrastructure.

Major Theme 2: Mediational Ecologies of Belonging

Sub-theme 2.1: Host-national connectedness and peer capital

All examined research indicates that domestic peer relationships mediate cross-border transition and psychosocial adaptation. Regular interactions with host nationals facilitated cautious participation in agentic classroom voice. These partnerships reduced perceived threat during early assessment cycles and enhanced access to informal academic knowledge, including feedback discourse and group-work standards. Relationality, frequency, and variety predicted greater institution affiliation and academic self-concept than co-presence. Socially segregated students experienced prolonged participation norm uncertainty and lower oral contribution risk. Quantitative models demonstrated that host-national links mitigated acculturative stress and improved well-being, reinforcing a belonging-performance loop.

These patterns suggest that host-national connectedness enhances psychological adaptability and identity consolidation during transitions (Bethel et al., 2020). By establishing bridging capital with domestic peers, extracurricular activities foster belonging and intention to continue (Thies and Falk, 2023). Recent syntheses indicate that belonging facilitates social interactions to become academic agency, aligning with shared histories (Mohamad and Manning, 2024). Results-driven sector-level mobility monitoring should incorporate peer integration alongside enrolments (OECD, 2024).

Sub-theme 2.2: Co-curricular participation and learning communities

Structured experiential activities, peer-learning circles, and student groups facilitate low-stakes disciplinary debates and practice of academic personas. Reflective tasks and collaborative deliverables outside the classroom enhanced seminar speaking turns and group work role allocation. Students indicated that co-curricular activities aided their learning in areas such as feedback absorption, supervisor approachability, and assessment pacing. Participants observed a shift from instrumental attendance to identity-affirming commitment, with peer responsibility extending to study practices during the semester. Intervention outcomes suggest that semester-long experience designs enhance social support and academic agency, particularly for newcomers (Caligiuri et al., 2020).

These initiatives align with prediction models that demonstrate extracurricular engagement and informal networks significantly influence university membership and persistence (Thies and Falk, 2023). Co-curricular groups enhance adjustment and performance because position belonging mediates psychological processes (Mohamad and Manning, 2024). Sector frameworks promote co-curricular activities as integral pedagogy by supporting peer mentorship and respecting program review cycles (Advance HE, 2024).

Sub-theme 2.3: Hybrid/digital mobility and continuity of support

Remote start and staggered relocation have modified the temporal “when” and spatial “where” of network formation, resulting in identity trajectories that relied on support visibility and portability. Without platform-mediated advising, writing support, and peer-mentoring coordinated across time zones, online students experienced delayed speaking confidence. Participants reported faster relocation transitions and fewer deferral requests during assessment peaks when cross-site services “traveled” with learners using shared portals, rubrics, and aligned feedback. Fragmented digital ecosystems slowed down the pace due to repeated onboarding and inconsistent recognition of previous work.

The structural nature of belonging and voice issues is evident in hybrid routes in post-pandemic sector surveys conducted by the IIE and IC3 (2021). Remote urban branch schools teach and advise in separate regions with distinct infrastructures, making coordination more challenging (Hickey and Healey, 2024). Consequently, framework guidance emphasises language-aware writing and integrated, cross-site student assistance approaches in curriculum design (Advance HE, 2024). Macro-level monitoring advises integrating enrolment data with digital engagement and service acceptance to assess distributed delivery equality (OECD, 2024).

Major Theme 3: Design and Governance for Equitable Identity Development

Sub-theme 3.1: Co-created curricula and language-aware assessment

Students' participation and confidence in curriculum committees and assessment review panels extended beyond individual units. When cohorts collaborated on learning outcomes or negotiated assessment procedures, first-year students demonstrated increased engagement in seminars and feedback loops. The identification of oral, written, visual, and multilingual semiotic resources reduced self-censorship in group presentations and redistributed responsibilities from language-proficient "default speakers" to others. Dialogic formative checkpoints decreased assessment peak deferral requests and the variance in grades based on language background spoken. In sites without these procedures, students preferred solitary work and strategically avoided oral assessments, asserting their identity solely through written performance. The cross-site trend indicates that "voice" is crucial when curricular governance and rubric design acknowledge diverse repertoires as disciplinary competence demonstrations.

These findings align with sector frameworks that promote inclusive co-creation and student voice in programme review cycles for curriculum and assessment equity (Advance HE, 2024). The National Training Exchange (TNE) policy prioritises parity of esteem in learning, teaching, and evaluation across partner sites, enabling benefits when rubric language explicitly values multilingual and multimodal expression (British Council, 2023). The transition from transnational frameworks to transcultural practice elucidates why co-created curricula affect class recognition (Marginson, 2024). The literature suggests that language-aware evaluation redesigns epistemic access to establish academic belonging, not provide remedial measures.

Sub-theme 3.2: Portable, cross-site support ecosystems

According to corpus analysis, advising, mental health, and writing aid that "travel" with students between nodes are essential for maintaining identity work continuity. Single-intake-to-graduation programs with shared portals, coordinated advising caseloads, and writing centre processes reported smoother relocation handovers and reduced help-seeking surges before important submissions. Even when teachers changed schools or modes, students retained feedback and referencing expectations, thereby decreasing cognitive cost. Fragmented ecosystems required frequent onboarding, diagnostics, citation, and oral delivery coaching, which decreased participation and encouraged informal peer fixes. The cross-site comparison reveals that portability extends beyond technical integration to institutionalise recognition across time and place, ensuring that students' earlier efforts are recognised when they move. In remote metropolitan branch campus evaluations, distributed teaching and advising designs enhance coordination and make portable services a design necessity rather than an advantage (Hickey and Healey, 2024). IC3 and IIE, 2021). Remote starting and staggered relocation indicate post-pandemic transitional risk without embedded and cross-site support. Sector frameworks advocate for integrating academic, language, and wellness support into course design rather than adding it on, which aligns with portability's more consistent participation and lower deferral rates (Advance HE, 2024). A macro-indicator study involves correlating enrolment counts with service consumption and digital engagement to identify discrepancies among multi-node providers (OECD, 2024). The literature suggests that equitable belonging necessitates cross-site continuity.

Sub-theme 3.3: Partnership quality assurance and data governance

Equity benefits persisted when partners incorporated parity-of-esteem and data-sharing in quality assurance. Program dashboards featuring identity-sensitive metrics such as belonging scores, oral assessment participation, site advancement, and language background resulted in more focused interventions and expedited gap closure. Secure cross-partner data pipelines monitored cohorts throughout remote starts and site transitions, highlighting recognition challenges and underutilization of support. Limited partnerships that aggregated enrolments encountered difficulties in diagnosing node-specific issues, leading to repeated "pilot fixes" without systemic learning. This comparative trend underscores the significance of governance when it requires recognition and belonging proof, not merely compliance.

These findings complement policy guidance that reframes TNE quality from input compliance to outcome fairness and advocates for common metrics that integrate student voice and identity-relevant indicators during review cycles (British Council, 2023). Sector frameworks require audit trails from curriculum design to student results to promote assessment parity and recognition across sites (Advance HE, 2024). Similar to dashboards, international indicator work employs consistent definitions and disaggregation to analyse the persistence and well-being effects of hybrid routes (OECD, 2024). These sources support the synthesis that data governance transforms partnership intentions into actionable oversight, facilitating parity-of-esteem.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper elucidates how recognition, language practice, and assessment design contribute to the institutionalisation of transnational schooling identity formation. Metropolitan-branded branch campuses emphasise prestige and credential imaginaries, joint institutions foster hybrid attachment through co-governance and locally ingrained rituals, and distributed or remote models disseminate instruction and support across sites to enhance variability. Translanguaging and language-aware rubrics facilitate epistemic access, while accent policing diminishes classroom voice and a sense of belonging. Linguistic validity stands as the most immediate participation barrier. Multimodal criteria and dialogic feedback promote authorship, while restricted delivery standards perpetuate stratified roles. Participants acquire identity through evaluation and feedback. Belonging—established through peer ecologies, co-curricular groups, and timely

assistance that “travels” with students through remote commencement and relocations—mediates mobility and outcomes. Evidence redefines the quality of transnational education as rubric-level parity of esteem, student-support architecture’s portability, and identity-sensitive indicator equality. When government, pedagogy, and services acknowledge diverse repertoires as disciplinary competence, mobility becomes formative.

Recommendations

Curriculum and assessment governance should incorporate student involvement on programme boards and periodic reviews of cyclical rubrics that acknowledge multilingual and multimodal learning. Staff development should prioritise translanguaging in seminars, provide dialogic feedback, and include oral assignments that emphasise the quality of ideas over the accent or tempo of delivery. Programmes could allocate funds for peer-learning circles, mentor pairs with host-national students, and coordinate community efforts with assessment schedules to amplify classroom voices from rehearsal zones. To minimise relocation expenses, leaders should establish a single cross-site portal, implement uniform writing-centre processes, align advising caseloads, and create interoperable mental health and disability referral pathways for dispersed or hybrid pathways. Partners should establish quality assurance parity-of-esteem through cross-partner moderation, shared evaluation glossaries, and visible recognition of local knowledge. Lastly, dashboards should monitor identity-relevant indicators such as belonging scores, oral assessment participation, site progression, and language background, with rapid “feedback-to-action” loops to resource targeted interventions when recognition or uptake lags.

Suggestions for future studies

Through longitudinal, multi-site designs that track cohorts through remote starts, relocations, and graduations, it is possible to discern how recognition, language practice, and evaluation evolve. Experience-sampling can measure daily language confidence fluctuations around assessment peaks, while learning analytics and social-network analysis can investigate whether feedback routines or co-curricular frameworks influence classroom voice and belonging. Comparative studies should disaggregate branch campus, joint institute, and remote metropolitan institutional models to quantify model-specific effects and determine which governance characteristics most effectively stabilise recognition. Language-aware assessment (rubric revisions, dialogic feedback protocols), and portable support package intervention studies should disclose subgroup attainment, persistence, psychological, and equity outcomes. Researching South–South TNE partnerships and African hubs can enhance external validity and reveal contextually grounded approaches. Data-governance scholarship should also provide ethical, interoperable principles for communicating identity-sensitive indicators between partners to ensure reproducible evaluation without compromising privacy. Finally, meta-analytic syntheses that weight research quality and institutional form can transform heterogeneous case data into design principles with known policy and practice effects.

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