

Transnational education: Expanding access to world-class learning in Bangladesh



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— Salvador Carbajal Lopez Director of Education for South Asia, British Council

For many students, pursuing higher education abroad remains an unattainable dream due to high costs and logistical challenges. However, transnational education (TNE) is reshaping the global learning landscape, offering internationally recognised degrees without the need to leave one's home country.



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TNE broadens access to high-quality higher education, enhances employability, and equips students with globally competitive skills while retaining talent within local economies, thereby reducing brain drain, said Salvador Carbajal Lopez, director of education for South Asia at the British Council.

In an interview with this newspaper, Lopez highlighted that TNE could also help Bangladesh save foreign currency. The cost of obtaining an education through TNE is significantly lower than studying abroad.

"TNE boosts employability and helps curb brain drain by equipping graduates with globally competitive skills while keeping talent within local economies," said Lopez, who visited Dhaka this week.

"On average, the tuition and other academic fees for one year of higher education in the UK range from £20,000 (around Tk 31.50 lakh) to £30,000 (around Tk 47.25 lakh). For a TNE student in Bangladesh, it is about £2,000 (around Tk 3.15 lakh per year)," he added.

TNE refers to higher education programmes where students study in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. These programmes are delivered through online learning, overseas branch campuses, or partnerships with academic institutions in other countries. Students in the host country receive the same certificates, with identical validity, as their peers studying at the awarding institution.

Citing a recent report, Lopez said in the 2022–23 academic year, approximately 2,145 Bangladeshi students were studying for UK higher education qualifications in Bangladesh. However, this number remains relatively low compared to countries such as India and Sri Lanka, which have around 15,000 and 54,000 UK TNE students, respectively.

The report also noted that Australian and Malaysian universities have offered TNE in Bangladesh over the past few decades.

Lopez said the advantages of TNE extend beyond students to both the host country and the country providing the qualification.

For instance, TNE significantly expands access to higher education. In Sri Lanka, one-third of higher education students are enrolled in TNE programmes. In Bangladesh, where the gross enrolment rate in higher education is around 23 percent, TNE presents an opportunity to provide access to more aspiring students, he explained.

The UK higher education model is outcome-based, emphasising employability and strong industry-academia linkages. Another benefit is the increased capacity of teachers.

"In most TNE models, teachers from the local institution receive training from the host institution. Similarly, teachers from the host institution travel to be trained by the local partner. This process fosters substantial capacity-building," Lopez said.

Furthermore, universities have a mission to expand research. By engaging with partner institutions, they can venture into other fields, facilitate mobility for students, teachers, and researchers, and

secure funding from industry, international organisations, and governments -- bringing substantial infrastructure benefits to local institutions.

Lopez said TNE enables Bangladeshi students to access high-quality education. Teachers involved in such partnerships gain exposure to the educational systems of both institutions, fostering mutual learning.

In the UK, regulations mandate that universities must comply with the same quality standards, irrespective of where the education is delivered. A robust quality assurance system is in place to maintain and continuously monitor these standards.

When asked how UK universities regulate partner institutions, Lopez suggested that Bangladesh could follow India's example, which requires any institution entering the TNE market to comply with its national quality standards.