



RESEARCH TO IMPROVE CROSS-NATIONAL TERTIARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Richard T. Hezel, Hezel Associates, USA

Summary

From its base in the US, Hezel Associates has conducted numerous studies of the international market for higher education. We explicate the context, the method, and some of the important findings from country-by-country analysis, program demand studies, and partnership analysis for online and face-to-face education.

Hezel Associates has explored the likely role of various factors--such as population shift, prerequisite education, economic conditions, national education policy, and propensity to seek international programs—on the development of markets for international online tertiary education programs. Two factors emerge above all: multi-stratified economic status and national education policy toward international education. In other studies the analysis of multiple site locations for international tertiary education centers of online and face-to-face learning hinges on disposition toward a particular country by learners in numerous different countries.

The research can be replicated from many perspectives--angles and countries of focus—to gain a triangulated view of cross-border education. The research leads institutions, in their consideration of international education partnerships, to use data from such market and demand studies toward better decision making and more cost-effective education delivery.

I. Introduction

Education has long been a pathway for greater international cooperation and understanding, and online learning even more so. International education, however, has multiple market components and resulting ethical implications: the supply push of education institutions from one country into another country; the demand pull of students from multiple countries into one's own country; the push-pull, give-and-take of visiting students across multiple borders; and the internationalization of local curricula. All of these components and implications are considered in an institution's global strategy for online and face-to-face education.

While many studies of international education have been conducted, most treat the issue of transnational, border-crossing education opportunities from a descriptive point of view. The research has been oriented toward policy, demographics, culture and ethics. Further, much of the research begins from a context of cultural difference, learning styles, and needs. To date, few studies have regarded the topic from a market view.

This research begins from a market-driven view and in large part was designed for US institutions seeking to develop postsecondary programs and courses for delivery to other nations. We realize, however, that the factors under study are applicable for consideration by tertiary institutions in any country. In fact, the principles of market driven education, whether via distance education or face-to-face approaches, apply to most countries that envision offering learning “product,” for a fee or not.

In this paper we offer for consideration not only the market factors that we believe are important, but also strategies for developing a global education system within the institution.

II. Research to Improve Cross-National Tertiary Education Opportunities

Tertiary institutions need strategies for cross-border, international delivery of online education. The expense of developing, producing, marketing, and delivery of programs can be extraordinary and inhibiting. Unanticipated and unplanned, the cost can result in the downfall of entire online learning initiatives at a college or university. With planning, though, a postsecondary institution can cover the cost of delivery and potentially even earn a net revenue or profit on international online learning.

Very clearly, the opportunities for cross-border online learning are abundant. It is estimated that online learning accounts for an increasingly larger share of all learning, and is especially critical for international delivery of education. India and China are examples of high-population nations that are conducting more education online. India, in particular, is expecting that many imported academic programs will arrive online. With the annual value of online learning in the hundreds of billions of dollars, more university administrators are considering, if not clamoring for, the export of their best programs.

What are the strategies for academic export? Included are: (1) determining the market potential in target countries, (2) assessing one’s institutional capacity for international market positioning, (3) analyzing the competition, and (4) compiling data and making decisions on the basis of the data. This paper considers especially the first activity, determining the market potential. In particular, we believe that the selection of target countries arises from a comparison and prioritization on many factors. The multiple indicators and factors comprise market potential delivery of online learning include, most centrally: demographic, economic, political, technological, language, and education. Each of these factors is further comprised of multiple facets.

1. **Demographic.** The most important factor in building a promising long-term market-driven partnership in a country is its population size and shift. A strong global push depends on a sufficient population of postsecondary age, roughly 18-35 years of age, to include adults who might have opportunities to return to university studies. The gross size of the population is important by itself (e.g., comparing India with Yemen), but even more germane is the size of the college-age segment. That age segment is larger in China than the entire population of many nations. Further, population trends, which include birth rate, net migration, and aging reveal country differences. Poland, for example, has a rapidly aging (and dying) population with a low birth rate, whereas the United Arab Emirates has a very rapidly increasing population under 24 year of age, and that youthful population will continue to grow at least until 2040.
2. **Economic.** The cost of tuition, at least for US postsecondary institutions, represents an economic challenge to people in many parts of the world, especially in developing regions. Ability to pay tuition factors into the decision to target

particular countries. We look at per capita income within countries, and we look for a rising middle class with a sufficient segment of population that can afford college tuition. Although a majority of the population of India would find US tuitions unattainable, a large and growing middle class can now afford the tuition.

3. **Education.** Entrance requirements for US colleges are highly variable, but most institutions require completion of secondary school at a recognized level of quality. The attainment of a secondary diploma by a significant part of the population would render the country a better target than a country in which only a small percentage of people complete high school. Further, the value placed on higher education by the people of the country and the government suggests a target that is open to more postsecondary education opportunities. For example, more than any other nation, South Korean families spend a higher percentage of their disposable incomes on their children's educational opportunities, a clear sign of education value.

We also regard international student exchange as an indicator of acceptance of foreign education degrees and systems. For example, Chinese student represent a high proportion of all international students studying in the USA. One might assume that the delivery of US postsecondary education to China would be warmly received.

4. **Language.** Delivering online education to a country with a different primary language requires some consideration of the cost to translate courses into the target country's language. Some institutions find the cost of translation prohibitive or faculty members are unprepared to teach in a different language. Although the issue is not exclusive to the USA, American faculty appear to have less facility to teach in other languages than European faculty. Therefore, the ability of a sizable population to speak English becomes an important aspect of the target country for an English speaking country of origin of online learning. Percentage of English speakers, therefore, represents a measure of readiness to adopt US courses.
5. **Technology.** For online learning to be immediate, content-rich, and successful, some level of technological diffusion is necessary. This factor can be expressed in multiple ways, but ultimately the availability of computing and high speed networks stands as a central aspect of this factor. We look particularly at the percentage of population (or households) within a country that have access to the Internet. In addition, the rate of Internet growth, current and projected, reveal a telling characteristic of market opportunity.
6. **Policy and politics.** The country policy toward foreign education could operate as a facilitator or a barrier to external institutions. China and India, along with many other countries, place restrictions on foreign education institutions' ability to operate independently. India requires clearance with the Ministry of Education; China requires partnership with a local education institution. Political risk, represented by the stability of the target nation's government and economy, must be considered. Policy is the only factor that does not have a measurable component.

In its assessment of 42 countries as potential targets, Hezel Associates weighed all of the above factors and their subfactors to arrive at an indicator of the target country in comparison with other countries. The assigned weights for this study were internally derived based on our client experience. Applying the weights, we determined that the chief targets, at least for US institutions, were: South Korea, Japan, Germany, UK, and China. All 42 countries are listed in priority order according to these factors and the weights assigned.

III. Conclusion

The development of country factors and subfactors has been revealing in determining the market appeal of each nation as a target for international education. We leave for later research the application and weighting of the factors. A second study must be conducted to gain educator perceptions of the factors and their weight values. It should be understood also that the factors are entirely market oriented and do not take into account other values, for example, of internationalization of curriculum, study abroad opportunities, and student foreign exchange.

References

Hezel, R. T. (2005). *The global e-learning opportunities for U.S. higher education*. Syracuse, NY: Hezel Associates.