

Transnational research experiences: Global perspectives in educational research

An invited guest editorial

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The landscape of academic research is rapidly evolving, with researchers becoming more interconnected than ever. As a result, transnational research has gained traction, and a growing number of researchers have engaged in multi-country teaching and research, as evidenced by many journal publications. This means that researchers who may be teaching in their home or a host country may also be doing research and collaborating with other researchers from other countries. Ward et al. (2021) define transnational research as involving “research in one country that benefits that country, and where the findings are compared to the extant studies in the larger field” (p. 342). Although Ward et al. (2021) differentiated transnational research from international research collaboration, they explained that transnational research involves researchers operating both within and beyond their own countries (e.g., formulating studies, gathering and analysing data, and engaging in collaborative activities). In contrast, international research collaboration typically involves researchers working on joint projects while remaining in their respective countries. In other words, transnational research centres around the subject of research (cross-national issues), while international research collaboration focuses on the collaborative process across national boundaries.

In this editorial, I use ‘transnational research collaboration’ to include ‘international research collaboration’, where researchers are either from different countries working together on a research project (see Aini et al., 2024; Waluyo & Anita, 2024; Zarei et al., 2024) or researchers from the same country but working on a research project outside their country (see Cheema & Pervez, 2024; Foomani, 2024; Sarwari & Mohd Adnan, 2024). I adopt this broader definition because, while transnational research primarily focuses on cross-national issues, it can also involve international research collaboration, where researchers work together to address educational issues through a collaborative process. Such a phenomenon is noteworthy as it not only interrogates the traditional research collaboration model, where authors from the same country typically work together, but also creates opportunities for diverse perspectives by exploring educational issues within and outside one’s country.

As a Filipino academic teaching in Thailand, I also conduct transnational education-related research about the Philippines, and IIER has witnessed this endeavor. My engagement with IIER started in 2018 when I published my first two solo-authored papers (Ulla, 2018a; 2018b), one of which is a transnational research paper (Ulla, 2018a). Since then, I have regularly followed IIER and read many of its published studies. In 2020 and 2021, I published two other papers, which were transnational research (Ulla et al., 2020; Ulla et al., 2021), in collaboration with my friends and fellow academics from universities in the Philippines. Like other research collaborations, when aligned with shared interests,

friendships in academia may sometimes lead to co-authoring papers on educational research.

Lund et al. (2016) recognised that friendship and research collaboration are mutually reinforcing elements contributing to a more effective and fulfilling research experience. Thus, although we were oceans apart, physical distance did not hinder us from doing research. Our friendship, which began when we met at a conference, became the foundation for our transnational research collaboration. At that time, my primary purpose for engaging in research collaboration was to reconnect with my home country and understand its educational landscape after being away for nearly ten years. The experience turned out to be both transformative and enriching. Not only did I get a good grasp of what is happening in my home country, especially on education matters, but I was also able to explore cross-national trends, problems, and opportunities for more research that could inform researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in addressing some educational concerns. I realised that the educational issues we face in Thailand are, in one way or another, similar to those in the Philippines.

Initially, my decision to pursue transnational research was personal, and I enjoyed reconnecting with my academic friends to conduct transnational research. However, due to an increased emphasis on international research collaboration as a key indicator in world university rankings, transnational research has evolved into a more institutional mandate, placing additional burdens on some members of faculties. To enhance their 'international outlook', many universities worldwide have encouraged faculty to collaborate with international researchers, signifying engagement in global research through the number of publications produced with international partners (Ulla & Tarrayo, 2021). Thus, academia has increasingly become a "metric society", where numbers serve as the primary measure of performance, reflecting what Mau (2020) described as "governance by indicators" (p. 19). In other words, the focus on improving visibility in world university rankings has made "a number of universities [to compete] to become highly placed in university rankings" (Fauzi et al., 2020, p. 79). Faculty members are assessed not only by their teaching performance but also by the number of publications and how many of them are published with international collaboration. Thus, many universities reward faculty members who may have fulfilled this international research collaboration criteria, motivating them to engage in this transnational research. Pohl (2020) noted:

Several international ranking schemes reward internationalisation aspects, and there is thus a double incentive for higher education institutions (HEIs) to invest in international collaboration: it often improves performance indicators such as citation impact, and it directly supports HEIs in their ambitions to climb in the rankings (Pohl, 2020, p. 288).

Not only does research collaboration increase the number of publications for universities, but many universities also believe that transnational research collaboration improves performance indicators, especially citation impact (Aldieri et al., 2018; Leydesdorff et al., 2019). In other words, research involving international collaborations is believed to have a

greater reach, improving exposure and citation rates, which benefits the institution's academic reputation in the world university rankings.

Although conducting transnational research may present challenges (Groenewald & Teise, 2024) and can burden some academics, its benefits should not be underestimated. The unique perspectives that researchers with international experience contribute make transnational research particularly valuable. These researchers, who are also classroom practitioners, having worked with various educational systems, pedagogies, and sociocultural contexts, may provide valuable comparative insights into how to improve education across borders. This can reshaping the educational landscape and help to create a more globally relevant bodies of knowledge.

In IIER, we have also observed this phenomenon, as some of our authors have multi-country teaching and research experience and have worked together on common research projects across various countries (see Aini et al., 2024; Cheema & Pervez, 2024; Foomani, 2024; Sarwari & Mohd Adnan, 2024; Waluyo & Anita, 2024; Zarei et al., 2024). This not only builds a more inclusive academic community but also welcomes and celebrates the contributions of international scholars doing transnational research.

Why is it important to acknowledge transnational research? Acknowledging transnational research is important not merely because it aligns with institutional policies or contributes to university rankings, but more significantly because it promotes inclusivity in creating and disseminating knowledge. Through transnational research, we can break away from traditional, often localised, approaches, enabling research to become more global in scope and impact.

Furthermore, recognising transnational research enhances academic discourse as it describes and presents various cultural, educational, and socio-political perspectives from different contexts. According to Ward et al. (2021), researchers involved in transnational studies provide distinctive perspectives that transcend the constraints of an individual nation's educational framework. These academics may identify and tackle global concerns that matter most in improving the educational landscape, including educational equity, access to quality learning, and technology integration. Therefore, recognising transnational research may also mean recognising the significance of expanding our understanding of education in a globalised context. It not only promotes creativity but also enables researchers to leverage diverse experiences to formulate more comprehensive and effective ways of tackling current educational challenges.

In the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) context, where I am coming from, transnational research between and among countries in the region is also growing. IIER has also witnessed this, evident from its number of publications, where several researchers collaborate with other researchers within the same region. The geographical proximity among the countries in the ASEAN region makes it convenient for these researchers to work on transnational research. For instance, in IIER 34(3) scholars from Malaysia and Indonesia collaborated on a research project examining the integration of artificial

intelligence in education, specifically at an Indonesian university (see Aini et al., 2024). Additionally, Waluyo and Anita (2024), from Thailand and Indonesia, conducted a study on gender awareness in English as a foreign language (EFL) pedagogy, exploring the perspectives of both students and teachers in Indonesia. Such regional collaboration is important as it empowers researchers within the region to create knowledge and share it not only among researchers within the region but also throughout the world. Creating and disseminating knowledge within the same region not only enhances the visibility of researchers, helping them gain recognition in the global research publication landscape, but this could also become an avenue where these countries unite together in tackling educational issues persistent in the region. Ponds et al. (2007) recognised that “geographical proximity is beneficial for successful collaboration and knowledge exchange” since “collaboration across greater distances remains more costly than collaboration at closer range” (p.425-426) despite better transportation options and the development of ICT.

Furthermore, ASEAN research collaboration between and among scholars from the region could also potentially address what Groenewald and Teise (2024) referred to in their IIER 34(2) guest editorial as the North-South research gap, where researchers from the Global South were always marginalised as to resources and knowledge creation. In other words, research originating from and published in the Global North has frequently been favoured, undermining scholarly efforts and perspectives from the Global South researchers. Thus, ASEAN scholars can address this disparity through regional collaboration by establishing a more unified collective voice in their transnational research.

Although transnational research collaboration is evident in journals such as IIER, it is crucial to further promote such collaboration, particularly among Global South countries and those within the same region. Journals should encourage transnational research collaboration, particularly in exploring issues and problems in education, as such collaboration enhances our understanding of educational issues and developments worldwide and allows for more diverse and inclusive perspectives in the research landscape. Future research should, thus, explore this further from teachers' perspectives to inform policy and practical implications.

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