From Innocence to Experience: the Politics and Projects of Cross-border Higher Education

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Abstract

Many developing countries are struggling to increase access to higher education (HE) since their Age Participation Rates (APRs) are well below the level that the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) consider necessary for sustained national development.

New providers are proliferating and more HE now occurs across national borders. Today programmes and institutions cross borders as well as students and the range of cross-border higher education (CBHE) includes branch campuses of reputable institutions, foreign open universities, for-profit providers, IT companies delivering certificate programmes and corporate universities. CBHE entered the political arena when the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) declared HE tradable in 1995. The debate triggered by this declaration continues today.

This chapter examines the politics and projects of CBHE by examining global trends and then looking at the challenges posed by private providers, open & distance learning (ODL) and eLearning, quality assurance and degree mills.

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Introduction

The origins of cross-border higher education (CBHE) go back many centuries. Early in the 7th century Huen Tsang was one of many Chinese scholars who studied in India at Nalanda University, which can claim to be the world's first international university. Paris was the great international university centre of the second millennium and Erasmus of Rotterdam, who studied there and in other universities around Europe in the 16th century, has given his name to the student exchanges that are re-uniting academic Europe.

Despite occasional hiccups – tradition has it that English students thrown out of Paris for rowdy behaviour went home and established Oxford as a centre of study – such academic mobility has been seen historically as a civilising phenomenon. Centuries later in the 1980s, when international student mobility declined as a result of rising tuition fees, Commonwealth countries responded by creating the Commonwealth of Learning in order to maintain the vital tradition of academic exchange by promoting the international movement of programmes as well as students.

In imperial days the famous – and relatively few – universities in the home countries were beacons for those bright natives of the colonies who aspired to join the elites. For some this involved travel, but the celebration in 2008 of the 150th anniversary of the External Studies Programme of the University of London, reminds us that staying at home and studying with a university overseas is a venerable phenomenon. The attraction of universities overseas remains strong.

Today, however, with both students and programmes crossing national borders in record numbers, some governments regard CBHE as less benign than in the past. In this chapter we shall begin by exploring the trends that have led to the explosion of CBHE and then examine key elements of the phenomenon in more detail.

Global Trends in Higher Education (HE)

The drive towards mass HE is now the defining trend in the worldwide development of the sector. Student enrolments are burgeoning. Already there are some 132 million tertiary students globally if part-time students are included (UIS, 2004). China and India have doubled enrolments in the past ten years, giving China the world's largest HE system with some 23 million students.

Most countries claim that they want to join the knowledge society by following the example of developed countries where age participation rates (APRs) in HE of 40-50% are now perceived as necessary for sustained and sustainable development. However, many countries in the developing world are very far from reaching such rates. There is a growing realisation that government action alone cannot satisfy the rising demand. Indeed, when calculated on a per capita basis, government allocations for HE show a steady decline. For example, due to massive enrolment increases, public expenditure per student in Africa fell from US $ 6300 in 1980 to US $ 1241 in 1995. (Martin and Sanyal, 2006). The inability of governments to respond to the

growing demand for tertiary education poses a political problem in countries that have previously assumed that state provision is the only way of supplying this public good.

Despite political hesitations the effervescent demand has encouraged diversification in the ways that HE is both provided and funded. Within the state sector open universities and regional universities are already making HE more accessible, especially to working adults and those in remote rural areas. Open and distance learning (ODL) and eLearning are growing in order to provide access to the wider student population now seeking higher education. One indicator of the growth of ODL is that there were only ten open universities in the whole 53-nation Commonwealth in 1988 but by 2005 there were 13 open universities in India alone.

The most significant and politically sensitive aspect of diversification is that private HE is now the fastest growing element of the sector worldwide. In principle private HE institutions fall into two categories: private non-profit (e.g. foundations) and private for-profit (e.g. quoted companies). However, in many countries this distinction is fuzzy because the legislative frameworks for charities are inadequate. Furthermore, many non-profit institutions make a profit when providing higher education outside their own borders. In this chapter we shall, therefore, not distinguish between them.

This growing significance of private HE is somewhat masked by the situation in Western Europe, where only 10% of students enrol in private institutions, although Europe too is changing fast. Recent data indicate that in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe some 25% of HE enrolments are now in private institutions (Sadlak et al., 2007). In other parts of the world private HE institutions are already well established. For example in Asia-Pacific countries such as Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, 80% of students are enrolled in private institutions and governments have systems for regulating this sector (Altbach and Levy, 2005). In Latin America and the Caribbean there are more private than public higher education institutions and in countries such as Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic student enrolments in the private sector account for 50% to 75% of the total (Didriksson & Gazzola, 2008). In Africa there are many partnerships between private and public institutions and IT academies like CISCO deliver certificates. However, outside East Asia few countries believe they yet have appropriate policy frameworks to cope with the rapid growth of private HE.

The trend to diversification generally, and the ebullience of the private sector in particular, have imported into HE the language of markets and commerce. The development of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) through the World Trade Organisation, which includes HE as one of 12 tradable services under education, lit a slow-burning fuse that started a fire of discussion in the international academic community some years later (COL/UNESCO, 2006). Although the GATS dates back to 1995 it was only after an OECD/US Forum on Trade in Educational Services, held in Washington in 2002, pitted the academic and trade communities against each other in acrimonious exchanges, that the issue was placed firmly in the political arena. The wider academic community then began a lively debate about whether HE is a business and whether HE programmes are commodities (Uvalić-Trumbić, 2007)

The growing mobility of HE implied in the term cross-border higher education (CBHE) is another major global trend. CBHE means student mobility, institutional mobility and programme mobility. Some 2.4 million students went abroad in 2004 – a three-fold increase since 1980. African students are the most mobile, with one out of

every sixteen studying abroad in foreign institutions. The Global Student Mobility 2025 Report (Bõhm, Meares et al., 2003) predicts that demand for international education will increase to 7.2 million students in 2025. However, because of institutional and programme mobility many of these students will study with foreign institutions in their own country, without actually going abroad for any substantial period. In 2004, for example, 33% of all international students enrolled in Australian institutions were taking Australian programmes in their own countries, a figure which was up from 24% in 1996.

UNESCO and the OECD, in their Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education (UNESCO/OECD, 2006), describe CBHE as: "higher education that takes place when students follow a course or programme of study that has been produced, and is continuing to be maintained, in a country different from the one in which they are residing. Cross-border higher education may include higher education by private and/or for-profit providers."

China saw a nine-fold increase in foreign programmes between 1995-2003 and in 2000 more Singaporean undergraduate students accessed a foreign programme in Singapore than went abroad. With expanding connectivity and the rapid deployment of information and communications technology (ICT), the growth of ICT-enhanced CBHE is another trend.

All these trends raise policy issues for governments and institutions. We are losing our innocence as experience of the diversification of provision and funding reveals that each development presents both opportunities and challenges. Is private CBHE or online CBHE the answer to expanding access to HE in the developing world? What policies can governments and institutions adopt to ensure that CBHE makes a positive contribution? How do countries address the challenges in quality assurance and the recognition of qualifications? What about the growing threat of degree mills and bogus institutions to the integrity of national tertiary systems? How can we draw a line between institutions providing sub-standard programmes that are susceptible to improvement and the out-and-out degree mills? We shall examine in turn the issues in CBHE raised by private provision, ODL and eLearning, quality assurance, and degree mills.

The Private Provision of CBHE

Higher education is a private good, with direct benefits to those who participate, but it is also a public good. By tradition, governments control public goods like emergency services and defence in order to extend their benefits to all citizens and give full accountability to the electorate. Private militias are a sure indicator of the breakdown of civic order. But how far should the principle of public control apply to education? Practice, principle, and pragmatism all argue against treating higher education as a public monopoly as some developing countries continue to do (Daniel, Kanwar & Uvalić-Trumbić, 2006).

Past practice shows us that private bodies, notably churches and foundations, were providing higher education long before governments took an interest in it. The purpose of state involvement, when it came, was to make higher education truly a public good by widening access to it.

The challenge of principle is political and concerns the appropriate role for government. Experience suggests that apart from services like defence, government

may be most effective when it monitors and regulates the provision of public services by others, rather than controlling them directly.

Demography and demand present pragmatic challenges. An increasing proportion of the burgeoning numbers of young people in the developing world will want education at all levels. At a time when lifelong learning adds further demand beyond that of younger students, governments simply cannot underwrite all the education that people will need throughout life from the public purse. They will have to focus their contributions.

The emerging consensus is that governments should make primary education completely free and reduce the cost of secondary education, which is another huge challenge, as much as possible. No government has the resources to support primary and secondary education and fund all of higher education as well. A choice must be made between inadequate provision of higher education by a small public-sector monopoly or meeting the demand by a combination of public and private institutions. This is a political dilemma for many developing-country governments, which have relied solely on the first option but now realise that it is a serious drag on national development.

Comparisons are often made between pairs of countries such as South Korea/Ghana and Malaysia/Zambia that had similar levels of GNP forty years ago but have developed very differently since then. There are numerous reasons why South Korea and Malaysia have developed more strongly than Ghana and Zambia. However, part of the explanation is that the Asian pair promoted the rapid development of higher education sectors with strong private-sector participation, while the African countries relied only on the state sector and ruled out tuition fees.

How can developing countries take best advantage of private-sector higher education? The answer boils down to achieving a balance between accessibility for students and quality of provision, along with returns for investors. The heart of the issue is fees.

Fees are a special problem for those countries that made higher education free – i.e., totally subsidised by the state--in the days when only a tiny proportion of the population was expected to go to university. At that time entry to higher education was highly competitive, but many believed that the combination of competitive entry and free tuition would produce equitable participation in higher education from all socio-economic groups. Abundant research now shows that this is simply not true. The socio-economic profile of students in countries that charge fees while providing scholarships and loans for poorer students is more broadly based than in those that do not charge fees. This is a very important finding, and one that governments are only gradually finding the courage to act on.

This change of attitude is important, because what the public sector does in relation to fees constrains the private sector. Having a free public sector alongside an expensive private sector does not create an effective higher education system. As countries gradually introduce fees in the public sector, either because of a conviction that it is more socially equitable or because there is no financial alternative, the private sector finds itself on a more level playing field. This gives private institutions much greater latitude to set fees, which makes them more attractive as investments.

This in turn makes it easier for the private sector to build arrangements for need-based scholarships and loans into their fees regimes. Only by attracting people from all social classes can the private sector claim that it is making a contribution to widening

access and contributing to the public good. There is a myth that private providers avoid disadvantaged students. This is often the reverse of the truth. In the USA 62% of Hispanic students and 47% of African-American students who earn two-year certificates earn them at private career colleges. Furthermore, those who start their tertiary education in private career colleges have higher completion rates than those who start in public institutions (Levy, 2006).

If all goes well, the net result of the expansion of this sector will be that within a decade or two private provision, already estimated at $350 billion worldwide, will likely account for a larger proportion of higher education in the developing countries than it does now in the industrialised world.

How will the private sector contribute to CBHE in the developing nations? Much of it will likely follow traditional patterns of classroom teaching on locally owned campuses but various forms of distance learning will have a growing profile. Providers will include new private open universities, such as Malaysia's Wawasan Open University, but also media companies, multinational companies, corporate universities, networks of universities, professional organizations, and IT companies.

The notion of private provision takes on a wider meaning when it goes international because nearly all cross-border higher education effectively operates for-profit in the receiving country. Even when the originating institution is a public institution in its home country, it must make excess revenue – or profit – on its operations in other countries in order to sustain those operations. Few governments want to subsidize another nation's students when they are having trouble meeting the educational needs of their own citizens.

By giving official recognition to CBHE the GATS has actually reinforced national sovereignty over higher education, even as the growth of CBHE creates anxieties about that national sovereignty. The border is a symbol for the special political, social, and cultural identity found within the national space. Accepting borders implies recognition of the roles and responsibilities of national governments within their jurisdictions, not simply for deciding whom to let into their country but also for overseeing the national higher education system.

The GATS recognises four modes of trade in HE: consumption abroad, where students travel to another country to study; the presence of natural persons, which in academic terms means visiting scholars or teachers; cross-border supply, meaning distance learning; and commercial presence or the establishment of branch campuses. Private CBHE is most interested in the last two of these. We shall comment on forms of distance learning.

Open & Distance Learning and eLearning

The Case of India

Open and distance education is a good way of reaching out to large numbers. The example of India, which accounts for a quarter of the population of the developing world and has the third largest higher education system in the world, is illustrative. Today 23% of all higher education enrolments in India are in distance education – specifically in 13 national and state open universities and 106 institutions, mostly public, which teach both on campus and by correspondence. The government's target is that by 2010, 40% of all higher education participation will take place using distance education.

Even so, India can only provide access to 7% of the 18-23 age group and missed an earlier target date of 2007/08 to reach a 10% APR (14 million students). For India to catch-up with neighbours like Thailand and Singapore, which have APRs of 20% and 34% respectively, it has to find even more cost-effective mechanisms for expanding access.

Private provision of distance learning, both nationally and from outside India's borders, must be part of the answer. Privately managed institutions, mostly locally owned, already account for over 75% of professional education there. In 2008 India's private providers of distance HE came together to form a consortium under the leadership of Symbiosis, an impressive group of private HE institutions that enrols 125,000 students in its own distance learning arm.

At the same time the number of cross-border providers increased from 27 in 2000 to 114 in 2004. By 2006 the British Council reported that there were some 4,100 Indian students taking UK undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications in India and around 20 UK institutions were active. In the same year some 30 US institutions entered agreements with Indian institutions.

However, India is still a difficult market for foreign providers. For example, Sylvan International Universities (later Laureate Education Inc.), a US for-profit network of universities, opened a campus in Hyderabad in 2003 which was closed the next year due to difficulties obtaining accreditation and 'deemed universities' status from the University Grants Commission. Not surprisingly a number of US and Australia-based overseas providers interested in opening branch campuses in India are waiting to see changes introduced in legislation (the prospective Foreign Education Providers Bill) (Middlehurst and Woodfield, 2008).

In the context of India's potential student numbers, however, the role of foreign providers is still negligible. Moreover, the quality of some of them is problematic: a third of the institutions are not recognized or accredited in their country of origin, and an equal proportion of their Indian collaborators are not part of the formal higher education system either. Even when the foreign providers are universities, most are not in the premier league and have mediocre reputations in their own countries. Neither branch campuses nor franchise agreements have had much success, with the exceptions of 61 twinning and articulation arrangements that allow students to go to the source country in the final year and stay on for employment purposes.

But the additional market of 5 million students should be tempting for major providers. Perhaps because of this, India is proceeding very cautiously in developing policy for CBHE and does not yet allow avowedly for-profit providers to operate on its territory.

The Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth

In sharp contrast to the cautious approach being taken by India 30 of the world's smallest countries have embraced CBHE as a way of reinforcing their tertiary institutions and increasing national autonomy by acting collectively. They are doing this through the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) which aims to throw a wide bridge across the digital divide through a combination of eLearning materials development and training. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is coordinating the project on behalf of the Commonwealth ministers of education (COL, 2008).

The 30 small states, which are a blend of island, landlocked and coastal countries spanning the world, have chosen to focus on creating postsecondary, skills-related

courses, in eLearning formats, in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, professional development for teachers, disaster management and a range of technical and vocational subjects. These non-proprietary, electronically-held course materials, which can readily be adapted to the specific context of each country, are used in the offering of credit-bearing qualifications in the countries' post-secondary institutions, strengthening their educational capacity and outreach. Thus the VUSSC is not a new tertiary institution but a way of networking the existing institutions so as to expand access, deepen their curricula, improve the quality of their offerings and enable them to operate confidently in the eWorld.

To launch the development of eLearning materials in each new subject area COL convenes a three-week workshop in one of the small states. The other states that are interested in developing that subject send experts to the workshop. At the workshop they get training in methods of distance education design and development, collaborative development strategies and tools, and a range of different technologies that are used in eLearning development. Participants acquire these skills while working on real courses.

In order to facilitate the use of jointly developed courses in all states the VUSSC has worked with the South African Qualifications Authority to develop a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). Its purpose is to aid comparability between regions and help give credibility to the eLearning courses developed within the framework of the VUSSC and offered internationally.

During 2008 a portal or hub was created for VUSSC that will provide access to online programmes offered by accredited institutions in VUSSC countries. These institutions, having already received accreditation from their national system, will be able to promote selected programmes to the international market, through the VUSSC portal. Once eLearning programmes have been provided by these countries and approved by the national and regional structures, they will be posted on the VUSSC website. Posting of programmes on the VUSSC website will signify that the programme is credible, i.e. it accords with national and regional qualifications structures and relates to the TQF.

Clients will register for these programmes with the knowledge that programmes offered through the portal carry the national accreditation of the country in which the providing institution is based. In addition to this, clients will be able to review the comparability of the qualification with their own country by reviewing the qualification's registration in the TQF. This question of credibility is particularly important for small states some of which, advertently or inadvertently, have acquired reputations as havens for degree mills.

Open Educational Resources

We noted above that countries are collaborating through the VUSSC to develop open educational resources (OERs). These are but the latest example of the common dilemma that tends to accompany new modes of learning, which present both opportunities and challenges. The good news is that OERs have the potential massively to increase access to quality CBHE by creating a global intellectual commons of quality learning content. The bad news is that the quality assurance of OERs is a challenge because of the open and collaborative way in which they are usually developed.

In this respect the VUSSC is not typical, because it brings to the development of OERs most of the discipline and rigour of developing courses in teams that has placed the UK Open University so high on the quality charts ever since its foundation. Most OERs, however, are developed by solo individuals who do not usually have much training in instructional design or, at most, by fairly casual and unstructured forms of online collaboration. Furthermore, any single version of a particular OER is by its nature ephemeral, since the great virtue of OERs is that each user can adapt them to their own needs. How do institutions quality assure such academic putty?

The history of OERs is a nice example of a development that has become very political as we have progressed from innocence to experience. OERs are an expression of the freedom culture, of which Wikipedia is the most famous product. Protagonists of this culture are convinced that democracy will yield truth. In other words, they believe that the examination and collaborative revision of an article on, say, solar energy, by all who might have views and knowledge about solar energy, will produce an accurate and reliable statement on that topic. Whilst this might be true in many cases, academic quality assurance can hardly be based on such an act of faith.

Another issue raised by OERs, which carries over into HE the tensions between open-source and proprietary software, is how open they should be. The political issue is between those who consider that OERs should be freely available for any use or adaptation whatsoever – preferably with acknowledgement of the source but no more than that – and others who think that circumstances sometimes justify restrictions on either the onward use of the OER for profit or its adaptation into new versions. The debates between the two camps are surprisingly acrimonious.

In the end time and experience will resolve these issues. Meanwhile institutions must tread carefully as they take advantage of the growing pool of OERs to enrich and improve their own teaching and to foster the notion of a global intellectual commons by contributing OERs to it.

Quality Assurance

New approaches to providing products or services tend to raise questions about quality in all areas of endeavour, but especially so in education - particularly when the aim of the new approaches is to expand access. All aspects of CBHE ring alarm bells with governments: it involves foreigners; it sees a bigger role for the private sector and it often uses distance learning, which has been under suspicion ever since it was called correspondence education. One response to these concerns has been for governments to work together internationally through their intergovernmental agencies.

For example, a recent outcome of UNESCO's standard-setting activities was the development, jointly with the OECD, of the 2005 Guidelines for Quality Provision in CBHE. The Guidelines address six groups of stakeholders in HE: governments, HE institutions, student bodies, recognition bodies, quality assurance bodies and professional bodies. They recommend actions based on collaboration, foster mutual trust and confidence and encourage access to reliable and transparent information. The overall aim is to promote quality as cross-border higher education grows. Recently, the Bologna Ministerial Conference in its 2007 London Communique has encouraged the use of the Guidelines by all signatories to the Bologna process.

To foster ongoing attention to the issue of quality in CBHE UNESCO has created a space for policy debate through its Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications that was launched in 2002. The

Global Forum was conceived as a response to the ethical challenges and dilemmas facing HE in an era of globalisation. Its mission was to provide a platform for exchange between different partners and initiate debate on the social, political, economic and cultural dimensions underpinning globalisation and higher education.

Its third meeting was held in Tanzania in 2007 and brought together stakeholders around the theme, "Guiding Learners in New Higher Education Spaces: Challenges for Quality Assurance and the Recognition of Qualifications". Since the key theme of the Global Forum was empowering learners, it discussed issues ranging from mobility and migration to academic fraud. The meeting urged a strong focus on capacity building for quality assurance at all levels and the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border higher education were held up as a useful tool for this work as CBHE spreads.

We also stress the importance of capacity-building because we believe that good quality assurance systems require only limited adaptation to address the new challenges of private providers, ODL and eLearning. The key goal is to establish and develop good quality assurance systems for higher education in all countries.

Given the centrality of capacity building, UNESCO and the World Bank launched a new partnership in 2008, the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity (GIQAC) (UNESCO, 2008). This aims to create a global framework to support capacity development in developing and transition countries. In the first year, GIQAC will support regional quality assurance networks in Africa, the Arab States, the Asia/Pacific region, Latin America and the Caribbean; as well as the international network for quality assurance agencies, INQAAHE. The Central and Eastern European QA network will be eligible for GIQAC funding in 2009.

Degree Mills

Among the challenges posed to HE by the combination of burgeoning demand and global communications through the Internet is the phenomenon of degree mills, a general term for spurious HE enterprises that sell qualifications without the demonstration of learning competency required by genuine institutions. Degree mills pose a threat to personal and national security. There is a continuum between the degree mill that gives a customer a Ph.D. by return mail in exchange for their CV and the low quality institution that requires the customer to do much less work than a serious programme.

Employers, most of whom are lazy about checking the credentials presented to them, are deceived into thinking that the holders of phoney diplomas actually have the knowledge and skills they claim. Phoney medical qualifications are particularly alarming to the public but all bogus qualifications are potentially a danger to society. Terrorists and criminals try to gain illegal entry to countries by using fake degrees to obtain skilled-worker visas.

The Internet is giving degree mills new opportunities to deceive people and to change the colour of their operations quickly, like chameleons, when trouble hits. Websites can be even more ephemeral than post-office boxes. The Web also makes it easy to attempt to borrow credibility from international bodies such as UNESCO by aping aspects of their websites. However, the Internet is a game that anyone can play and the worldwide quality establishment could do much more to use the Internet to steer people away from the spurious operators.

Small and fragile states are a favourite prey of degree mills. Until recently some of these states had few aspirations to build a credible HE system so politicians were tempted to make deals with bogus institutions, which could thereby claim a degree of political approval without bothering to present themselves to the national accreditation agency – if one existed. When a country gains a reputation for hosting degree mills it risks being put on informal blacklists; governments and bona fide institutions in other countries may refuse to accept any educational qualification from the blacklisted country. Furthermore, because bogus degrees are usually offered over the Internet some jurisdictions have imposed an outright ban on the recognition of any online degrees.

Now that some of these small countries want to develop an indigenous capacity to offer higher education they are realising that it was not a smart move to have allowed a foreign provider to appropriate their country's name for its local outlet, nor to have created the situation that all qualifications emanating from the country figure on the informal blacklists in the more alert jurisdictions in the rest of the world.

There is no magic bullet that will kill degree mills. The attack requires joined-up government and a pincer movement. Governments should take action, through legislation and enforcement, to close the out-and-out scams. Trade ministries should not give business licences to HE institutions without reference to the national quality assurance systems. Employers, academic admissions officers and immigration authorities should check the authenticity of all credentials presented to them and senior politicians should be more careful about giving photo opportunities to smooth-talking confidence tricksters.

Quality agencies should work from the credible end of the continuum between established universities and degree mills and extend the proportion of credible institutions. The key is to instil a professional quality assurance culture that obliges institutions to internalise their quality processes. All branches of government must back these agencies and see that their remit covers all higher education institutions, private and public.

Once countries know which institutions on their territory are credible and which are not they can list them on the portal of legitimate accredited institutions that UNESCO is creating.

At the international level intergovernmental agencies should toughen their procedures for protecting misuse of their name (bogus operations often claim a spurious accreditation relationship with groups such as COL, UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization). They should also put the issue on the agendas of international meetings of ministers to encourage action at the national level.

Conclusion

Open Educational Resources, which are just one of its new components, provide a nice metaphor for the maturation of CBHE from innocence to experience. In the case of OERs the bright prospect of a global intellectual commons of quality learning materials has been somewhat dimmed by anxieties about the quality of OER content and disputes about the degree of openness, in terms of copyright licenses, that is necessary or desirable. However, a large community of OER enthusiasts is tackling both of these issues.

Similarly, traditionalists alarmed by the idea of private for-profit HE institutions now see that private institutions, like public institutions, can be good or bad. Indeed, public institutions offering CBHE outside their home countries sometimes operate with a looser code of ethics than commercial operations. Moreover private institutions have ready access to modern business practices in product development and service delivery and so may be better equipped to ensure the quality of their offerings through newer modes of CBHE like ODL and eLearning. The debate about the GATS has also cooled, partly because the Doha round of trade negotiations is stalled, but also because the debate itself is leading governments to try to ensure that all HE providers on their territory work within similar frameworks of quality assurance and accreditation.

Creating such frameworks is a challenge that will require time, particularly when CBHE is delivered electronically with no physical presence in the country. However, there is a new maturity within governments and CBHE providers about the need to build capacity, to focus on quality and to be alert to the cultural and social contexts in which HE is offered. Serious players who are in CBHE for the long haul have an interest in contributing to the development of effective regulatory frameworks and supporting collective action to close down degree mills and bogus operators.

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