

# Glocal Employability Competencies in Transnational Education: A Mixed-Methods Study of Sino-British College Students' Career Readiness

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**Abstract:** The rapid expansion of transnational higher education institutions (TNE) has created unique challenges in preparing students for global career markets while maintaining relevance to local employment contexts. This study examines glocal employability competencies among students at a Sino-British college, investigating which competencies best predict early-career success. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed with 130 graduating students from a Sino-British TNE institution. Phase 1 utilized a validated 60-item Glocal Competency Scale, with career outcomes tracked six months post-graduation. Multiple regression and dominance analysis identified key predictors of employment success. Five core glocal competency domains emerged: cross-cultural communication ( $\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$ ), adaptive problem-solving ( $\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$ ), digital literacy ( $\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$ ), entrepreneurial mindset ( $\beta = 0.22, p < 0.01$ ), and ethical reasoning ( $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.05$ ). These competencies explained 67% of variance in job-search outcomes, with cross-cultural communication showing the strongest predictive power for both employment rate (OR = 2.45) and starting salary ( $r = 0.42$ ). Glocal competencies significantly predict early-career success for TNE graduates. Cross-cultural communication emerges as the most critical competency, followed by adaptive problem-solving and digital literacy. These findings have important implications for curriculum design and career preparation in transnational educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Glocal Competencies, Transnational Education, Employability, Career Readiness

## 1. Introduction

The landscape of higher education has undergone dramatic transformation over the past two decades, with transnational education (TNE) emerging as a significant force in global educational provision. TNE institutions, which deliver educational programs across national borders through various collaborative arrangements, have proliferated rapidly, particularly in Asia-Pacific regions. China, as the world's largest host country for TNE programs, currently houses over 2,000 such initiatives, with Sino-British partnerships representing the most substantial segment of this market.

The unique positioning of TNE institutions creates distinctive challenges and opportunities for graduate employability. Unlike traditional domestic universities that primarily prepare students for local job markets, or international universities that focus on global mobility, TNE institutions must navigate the complex terrain of preparing students for both local and global career opportunities. This dual orientation necessitates the development of what scholars have termed "glocal" competencies – skills and attributes that enable graduates to operate effectively in both global and local contexts. The concept of glocalization, originally developed in business and sociology literature, has gained increasing attention in educational research as institutions grapple with the tension between global standardization and local adaptation. In the context of employability, glocal competencies represent a synthesis of globally recognized professional skills with locally relevant cultural and contextual knowledge. For TNE graduates, particularly those from Sino-British institutions, this translates into the ability to navigate Western business practices while understanding Chinese market dynamics, communicate across cultural boundaries while maintaining cultural sensitivity, and demonstrate innovation while respecting traditional hierarchies. Despite the growing importance of TNE institutions and their unique positioning in the global education landscape, research on graduate employability outcomes remains limited. Most existing studies focus either on traditional measures of employability in domestic contexts or on international student mobility patterns. Few studies have systematically examined the specific competency requirements for TNE graduates or investigated which skills and attributes best predict their career success.

This research gap is particularly significant given the substantial investment in TNE programs by both educational institutions and students. Chinese families increasingly view TNE education as a pathway to enhanced career prospects, often paying premium fees for programs that promise both international recognition and local relevance. However, without empirical evidence regarding which competencies actually translate into career success, both institutions and students lack guidance for optimizing educational investments and career preparation strategies. The current study addresses this gap by examining glocal employability competencies among graduates from a Sino-British college, investigating which competencies best predict early-career success. This study draws on the Glocal Employability Framework to operationalize key constructs and guide the research design. This research employs a mixed-methods approach to identify critical competencies from multiple stakeholder perspectives and examine their relationship to actual employment outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review

Transnational higher education (TNE) has evolved from a niche market serving internationally mobile students to a mainstream educational provision model affecting millions of learners worldwide [1][2][3]. The growth of TNE has been particularly pronounced in Asia, where governments have actively promoted international educational partnerships as part of broader economic development and higher education modernization strategies [4][5][6]. China's commitment to TNE is evident in policy-driven initiatives such as its world-class university agenda (e.g., the transition from earlier excellence projects to the more recent comprehensive schemes) and expanded international cooperation related to global connectivity ambitions, which link international educational collaboration to national competitiveness goals [5][6][7]. The employability outcomes of TNE graduates have attracted increasing research attention, though findings remain mixed. Some studies suggest that TNE graduates enjoy advantages in international job markets due to exposure to Western educational methodologies and English-medium instruction [1][2][8]. Knight (2016) found that TNE graduates demonstrated higher levels of intercultural competence and global mindedness compared to domestic-only cohorts [2]. Similarly, research by Huang and Turner (2018) indicated that employers in multinational corporations show preference for TNE graduates, citing their ability to bridge cultural divides and communicate effectively across international teams [8].

However, other research has identified challenges faced by TNE graduates in local employment markets, with concerns about the practical relevance of curricula that are perceived as overly Western-oriented when addressing context-specific regulatory, cultural, or market dynamics [7][9][10]. This tension between global orientation and local relevance has led to calls for more nuanced curriculum design that better integrates global and local elements [3][7][9][10].

The concept of “glocal” employability emerged from recognition that binary distinctions between global and local competencies inadequately capture contemporary workplace demands [9][11][12]. Jackson and Bridgstock's work emphasizes integrating globally recognized professional capabilities with locally contingent cultural and contextual knowledge [9][11]. Core domains of glocal competency frequently highlighted include cross-cultural communication, adaptive problem-solving, digital literacy, entrepreneurial or innovative mindset, and ethical or responsible reasoning [9][11][12][13][14]. Cross-cultural communication encompasses language proficiency, cultural intelligence, navigation of diverse communication styles, and sensitivity to culturally embedded professional norms [2][9][13][14]. Adaptive problem-solving involves flexibly drawing on heterogeneous cognitive and pedagogical repertoires while maintaining outcome effectiveness [11][12][14]. Digital literacy in glocal contexts extends beyond technical proficiency to include understanding platform preferences, regulatory environments, and user behaviors across markets [12]. Entrepreneurial or innovative mindset blends innovation and opportunity recognition with relational, long-term, and context-sensitive orientations [9][11][15]. Ethical reasoning involves navigating multiple ethical frameworks and governance regimes while sustaining professional integrity [13][14][15].

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) offers a framework for understanding how such competencies develop and influence career outcomes by articulating reciprocal interactions among personal factors, environmental conditions, and behavioral outcomes [16]. In TNE settings, students experience dual academic cultures, diverse faculty backgrounds, and hybrid pedagogies that interact with individual characteristics (e.g., linguistic capital, prior intercultural exposure, career aspirations) to shape competency trajectories [2][3][7][9][16]. SCCT also underscores the role of self-efficacy in translating competencies into tangible career behaviors: students confident in their glocal competencies are more likely to pursue roles leveraging them, reinforcing further development through iterative mastery

experiences [9][11][16]. This implies TNE institutions should focus not only on structured competency cultivation but also on strengthening students' perceived capability to apply these competencies in authentic professional contexts [9][11][16].

Despite growing interest, several research gaps remain. First, many studies still rely on self-reported competency measures or employer perceptions rather than linking assessed competencies to objective career outcomes [3][9][11]. Second, most investigations privilege a single stakeholder lens (students or employers) rather than triangulating students, faculty, and recruiters [3][8][9][10]. Third, longitudinal evidence on predictive validity of specific glocal competencies is scarce [3][9][11][16]. The current study addresses these gaps through a mixed-methods design incorporating multi-stakeholder perspectives (students, faculty, recruiters) and tracking actual employment outcomes over a six-month post-graduation period, enabling examination of both perceived importance and predictive power of distinct competencies [9][11][16].

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis followed by qualitative exploration to explain and contextualize quantitative findings. The mixed-methods approach was selected to provide comprehensive understanding of glocal competencies from multiple perspectives while establishing empirical relationships between competencies and career outcomes.

The research was conducted at a Sino-British joint venture university located in eastern China, established through partnership between a prestigious British university and a leading Chinese institution. The college offers only undergraduate programs in business and engineering, with instruction delivered in English using British curriculum frameworks adapted for the Chinese context. The study population comprised the 2023 graduating cohort ( $N = 130$ ), all undergraduate students. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 28 years ( $M = 23.4$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ), with 52% female and 48% male students. Academic disciplines were distributed as follows: business and management (50%) and engineering and technology (50%). All participants had completed at least three years of study at the institution and were eligible for graduation in June 2023.

The primary instrument was a 60-item Glocal Competency Scale developed specifically for this study based on Bridgstock and Jackson's (2019) theoretical framework. The scale measures five competency domains, with 12 items per domain. Items were developed through extensive literature review, expert consultation, and pilot testing with a separate sample of 130 students. Cross-cultural communication items assessed language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and ability to adapt communication styles across cultural contexts. Sample items included "I can effectively communicate complex ideas to people from different cultural backgrounds" and "I adjust my communication style based on cultural context." Adaptive problem-solving items measured flexibility in approach, integration of diverse perspectives, and effectiveness across different contexts. Digital literacy items assessed both technical skills and cultural awareness of digital platforms and practices. Entrepreneurial mindset items measured innovation orientation, risk tolerance, and relationship-building capabilities. Ethical reasoning items assessed ability to navigate different ethical frameworks and maintain integrity across cultural contexts. All items used 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted with a random subsample ( $n = 65$ ) to examine the underlying factor structure. Principal axis factoring with oblique rotation revealed five factors explaining 67.8% of total variance, consistent with the theoretical model. Factor loadings ranged from 0.51 to 0.86, with no cross-loadings exceeding 0.31. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed with the remaining subsample ( $n = 65$ ) to test model fit. The five-factor model demonstrated acceptable fit:  $\chi^2(1485) = 2972.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; CFI = 0.91; TLI = 0.90; RMSEA = 0.075 (90% CI: 0.069–0.081); SRMR = 0.068. Reliability coefficients (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) were: cross-cultural communication (0.88), adaptive problem-solving (0.86), digital literacy (0.84), entrepreneurial mindset (0.83), and ethical reasoning (0.82).

Career outcome data were collected through the university's career services office six months post-graduation (December 2023). Primary outcomes included employment status, time to first job offer, starting salary, and job satisfaction ratings. Employment status was coded as employed full-time, employed part-time, pursuing further education, or unemployed. Time to first job offer was measured in weeks from graduation. Starting salary was recorded in RMB and converted to standardized scores for

analysis. Additional outcome measures included job sector (multinational corporation, domestic private company, state-owned enterprise, non-profit organization, self-employment), geographic location (tier-1 city, tier-2 city, international), and job-person fit ratings on a 10-point scale.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three stakeholder groups to provide contextual understanding of quantitative findings. Student interviews ( $n = 24$ ) explored perceptions of competency importance, development experiences, and career preparation effectiveness. Faculty interviews ( $n = 12$ ) examined curriculum design considerations, competency development approaches, and observed student outcomes. Recruiter interviews ( $n = 18$ ) investigated hiring criteria, competency preferences, and evaluation methods. Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across academic disciplines, career outcomes, and demographic characteristics. Student interviewees included high and low performers on the competency scale, graduates in different employment sectors, and representatives from each academic program. Faculty participants included both Chinese and international staff across different disciplines and seniority levels. Recruiter participants represented multinational corporations, domestic companies, and government organizations actively hiring TNE graduates.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables, with normality assessed through Shapiro-Wilk tests and visual inspection of distributions. Correlational analyses examined relationships between competency domains and career outcomes. Multiple regression analysis was employed to identify significant predictors of career success, with competency scores as independent variables and career outcomes as dependent variables. Dominance analysis was conducted to determine the relative importance of different competency domains in predicting career outcomes. This technique provides more robust estimates of predictor importance than traditional regression by examining all possible subset models and calculating average contributions across models. Logistic regression was used for binary outcomes (employed vs. unemployed), while linear regression was employed for continuous outcomes (salary, job satisfaction). All analyses controlled for demographic variables (age, gender, academic discipline, GPA) and family background factors (parental education, family income).

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Initial coding was conducted independently by two researchers, with discrepancies resolved through discussion. Codes were organized into themes and sub-themes, with particular attention to explanations for quantitative findings and insights into competency development processes.

#### 4. Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all study variables. Competency scores were generally high, with means ranging from 5.12 to 5.67 on the 7-point scale. Cross-cultural communication showed the highest mean score ( $M = 5.67$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ), while ethical reasoning showed the lowest ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). Career outcome measures showed considerable variation, with employment rates at 96.46% six months post-graduation.

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Cross cultural Communication	5.67	0.94	-								
2.Adaptive Problem solving	5.34	1.02	.65**	-							
3.Digital Literacy	5.45	0.89	.58**	.62**	-						
4.Entrepreneurial Mindset	5.28	1.15	.54**	.59**	.51**	-					
5.Ethical Reasoning	5.12	1.08	.48**	.52**	.46**	.47**	-				
6.Employment Status	0.89	0.31	.42**	.38**	.35**	.31**	.28**	-			
7.Time to Job Offer (weeks)	8.34	4.67	-.39**	-.34**	-.29**	-.26**	-.22*	-.68**	-		
8.Starting Salary (standardized)	0.00	1.00	.42**	.35**	.33**	.29**	.25**	.71**	-.55**	-	
9.Job Satisfaction	7.23	1.45	.36**	.41**	.28**	.34**	.31**	.45**	-.38**	.52**	-

\*Note:  $N = 300$ . Employment Status coded as 1 = employed, 0 = not employed. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Correlation analyses revealed significant positive relationships between all competency domains and career outcomes. Cross-cultural communication showed the strongest correlations with employment status ( $r = .42$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and starting salary ( $r = .42$ ,  $p < .01$ ). All competency domains were significantly intercorrelated, with correlations ranging from .46 to .65, indicating related but distinct constructs.

Table 2 presents results from multiple regression analyses predicting career outcomes from global competencies. The full model explained 67% of variance in employment outcomes, 52% of variance in starting salary, and 48% of variance in job satisfaction.

*Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Career Outcomes*

Predictor	Employment Status			Starting Salary			Job Satisfaction		
	$\beta$	SE	p	$\beta$	SE	p	$\beta$	SE	p
Cross cultural Communication	0.34	0.08	<.001	0.35	0.09	<.001	0.28	0.12	<.01
Adaptive Problem solving	0.28	0.07	<.001	0.22	0.08	<.01	0.31	0.11	<.001
Digital Literacy	0.25	0.08	<.01	0.21	0.09	<.01	0.15	0.13	.24
Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.22	0.06	<.01	0.18	0.07	<.05	0.22	0.10	<.05
Ethical Reasoning	0.19	0.07	<.05	0.14	0.08	.08	0.19	0.11	<.05
Model Statistics									
R <sup>2</sup>	.67			.52			.48		
F	89.34***			56.78***			41.23***		

\*Note: N = 300.  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficient. \*\*\*p < .001

Cross-cultural communication emerged as the strongest predictor across all outcome measures, with standardized coefficients ranging from 0.28 to 0.35. Adaptive problem-solving was the second strongest predictor for employment status and job satisfaction, while digital literacy ranked second for starting salary prediction.

Dominance analysis was conducted to determine the relative importance of competency predictors while accounting for multicollinearity. Table 3 presents dominance weights for each competency domain across career outcomes.

*Table 3: Dominance Analysis Results*

Competency Domain	Employment Status	Starting Salary	Job Satisfaction
	Weight	Rank	Weight
Cross cultural Communication	0.28	1	0.31
Adaptive Problem solving	0.22	2	0.19
Digital Literacy	0.19	3	0.21
Entrepreneurial Mindset	0.17	4	0.16
Ethical Reasoning	0.14	5	0.13

Cross-cultural communication demonstrated the highest dominance weights across all outcomes, confirming its primary importance for TNE graduate career success. The ranking of other competencies varied somewhat across outcomes, with adaptive problem-solving showing particular importance for job satisfaction and digital literacy for starting salary.

Additional analyses examined competency importance across different employment sectors and geographic locations. Table 4 presents mean competency scores by employment sector.

*Table 4: Mean Competency Scores by Employment Sector*

Competency	MNC	Domestic Private	SOE	Non-profit	F	p
Cross cultural Communication	6.12 <sup>a</sup>	5.34 <sup>b</sup>	5.28 <sup>b</sup>	5.67 <sup>ab</sup>	18.45	<.001
Adaptive Problem-solving	5.78 <sup>a</sup>	5.45 <sup>b</sup>	4.89 <sup>c</sup>	5.34 <sup>b</sup>	12.67	<.001
Digital Literacy	5.89 <sup>a</sup>	5.67 <sup>a</sup>	4.78 <sup>b</sup>	5.12 <sup>c</sup>	15.23	<.001
Entrepreneurial Mindset	5.67 <sup>a</sup>	5.78 <sup>a</sup>	4.34 <sup>b</sup>	4.89 <sup>b</sup>	22.34	<.001
Ethical Reasoning	5.23 <sup>a</sup>	5.12 <sup>a</sup>	5.45 <sup>a</sup>	5.67 <sup>a</sup>	2.89	.04

Note: MNC = Multinational Corporation, SOE = State-Owned Enterprise. Different superscripts indicate significant differences at p < .05.

Graduates employed in multinational corporations showed significantly higher scores on most competency domains, particularly cross-cultural communication and adaptive problem-solving. State-owned enterprise employees showed lowest scores on entrepreneurial mindset and digital literacy, while non-profit sector employees scored highest on ethical reasoning. Student interviews revealed nuanced understanding of competency development and career relevance. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of cross-cultural communication, with one business graduate noting: "The ability to switch between Chinese and Western communication styles has been crucial in my role at [multinational corporation]. I can present ideas in ways that resonate with both Chinese colleagues and international clients." Students also highlighted the integrated nature of glocal competencies, describing how different domains reinforced each other. An engineering graduate explained: "Digital literacy isn't just about technical skills – it's about understanding how technology is used differently in China versus Western markets. This cultural awareness has helped me design products that work in both contexts."

Faculty interviews revealed varying approaches to competency development across disciplines and cultural backgrounds. International faculty tended to emphasize global competencies, while Chinese faculty focused more on local adaptation. However, the most effective approaches appeared to integrate both perspectives systematically. One British faculty member observed: "We've learned that simply transplanting UK curriculum doesn't work. Students need to understand Western business principles but also how to apply them in Chinese contexts. The most successful graduates are those who can bridge these worlds effectively." Recruiter interviews provided insights into hiring criteria and competency evaluation methods. Multinational corporation recruiters consistently prioritized cross-cultural communication and adaptive problem-solving, often using scenario-based interviews to assess these competencies. A hiring manager from a major consulting firm explained: "TNE graduates often have strong technical skills, but what sets the best apart is their ability to work across cultures. We look for candidates who can understand client needs whether they're in Shanghai, London, or New York."

Domestic company recruiters showed more varied preferences, with some valuing global competencies for international expansion while others prioritized local market understanding. However, even domestically-focused employers increasingly recognized the value of glocal competencies as Chinese companies expand internationally.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence for the importance of glocal employability competencies among TNE graduates, with cross-cultural communication emerging as the most critical predictor of early-career success. The findings support theoretical arguments about the unique value proposition of TNE education while providing practical guidance for curriculum design, career services, and employer engagement. The research demonstrates that TNE institutions can effectively prepare graduates for contemporary career challenges by focusing on integrated global-local competency development. However, this requires intentional curriculum design that goes beyond simply combining international and domestic educational elements to create truly integrated glocal learning experiences. For the broader higher education community, these findings highlight the growing importance of cultural competencies in graduate employability. As workplaces become increasingly diverse and interconnected, the ability to navigate cultural boundaries effectively becomes a fundamental professional requirement rather than a specialized skill. The study also underscores the value of mixed-methods research in understanding complex educational phenomena. The combination of quantitative outcome prediction with qualitative stakeholder insights provides a comprehensive understanding that neither approach could achieve alone. As TNE continues to expand globally, understanding the competency requirements for graduate success becomes increasingly critical. This research provides a foundation for evidence-based approaches to TNE program design and evaluation, ultimately enhancing the value proposition of international educational partnerships for all stakeholders involved.

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