

The Development and Implementation of Joint and Double Degree Programmes: Comparative Insights from the UK and Türkiye

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Abstract

This article reviews research on joint and double degree programmes (JDDPs), a form of transnational education (TNE), with particular attention to their development in the UK and Türkiye. Drawing on academic and policy-oriented sources in both English and Turkish, this scoping review first maps how JDDPs are conceptualised, structured, and implemented across different higher education contexts globally. The findings highlight persistent terminological ambiguities, diverse programme models, and uneven regulatory frameworks that shape the design and delivery of JDDPs. Next, focusing on the UK (a well-established, globally oriented TNE system) and Türkiye, (a more centralised and regulation-driven model), the findings reveal that variations across contexts are shaped by distinct national systems and policy environments. The UK context is characterised by quality assurance frameworks and institutional autonomy, whereas Türkiye demonstrates a TNE approach shaped by centralised regulation and national higher education policies. The study concludes by identifying key gaps in the literature, including the need for greater conceptual clarity, more comparative and context-sensitive research, and deeper engagement with issues of equity and student experience.

Keywords: transnational education (TNE); joint and double degree programmes (JDDPs); conceptual clarity; context-sensitive research; equity and student experience

Introduction

Background and Rationale

The internationalisation of higher education has intensified over the past two decades, with transnational education (TNE) emerging as a key mechanism through which institutions expand their global reach and diversify their provision. TNE broadly refers to educational programmes in which learners are located in a country different

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from that of the awarding institution (Knight, 2016). Within this landscape, joint and double degree programmes (JDDPs) have gained increasing prominence as collaborative models that enable institutions in different national contexts to co-design curricula and share responsibility for delivery and award (Knight, 2011; Obst et al., 2011). These programmes are often positioned as a more integrated and reciprocal form of international partnership compared to other TNE models, such as franchising or branch campuses, as they typically involve mutual recognition of credits, coordinated academic structures, and, in many cases, student mobility across institutions (Bamford, 2020).

The growth of JDDPs has been driven by multiple policy and institutional agendas, including the pursuit of international competitiveness, enhancement of graduate employability, and the strengthening of cross-border research and teaching collaborations (European Commission, 2026). In the European context, initiatives such as the Bologna Process and Erasmus Mundus Programme have played a significant role in promoting joint degrees as instruments of regional integration and standardisation (European University Association, 2007; Knight, 2011). Similarly, countries such as the UK have increasingly incorporated collaborative provision into broader internationalisation strategies, positioning TNE as both an educational and economic export (Universities UK International (UUKi), 2025). In Türkiye, policy frameworks have also evolved to support international partnerships, particularly through the regulatory role of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), although the development of joint and double degree provision has followed a distinct trajectory shaped by national accreditation requirements and institutional capacity (Özoğlu et al., 2015).

Despite this expansion, the literature highlights persistent conceptual and practical ambiguities surrounding JDDPs. Terminological inconsistencies—particularly between “joint,” “double,” and “dual” degrees—reflect variations in programme design, credit structures, and award mechanisms across national contexts (Knight, 2011; Obst et al., 2011). Moreover, while JDDPs are often associated with ideals of partnership and reciprocity, empirical studies point to challenges related to regulatory misalignment, quality assurance, administrative complexity, and asymmetries in institutional power and resources (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). These issues are further complicated in cross-national collaborations where higher education systems differ significantly in governance, funding structures, and academic conventions. Moreover, critical perspectives on internationalization (Buckner & Stein, 2020; Critical Internationalization Studies Network, n.d.; Stein, 2017) argue that collaborations in higher education are embedded within unequal global power structures. Rather than representing politically neutral forms of cooperation, initiatives such as JDDPs may reproduce existing geopolitical hierarchies and structural inequalities.



Although there is a growing body of research on TNE and collaborative provision, existing studies tend to focus either on broad typologies of TNE or on specific regional initiatives, with relatively limited attention to the comparative dynamics of JDDPs across different national systems. JDDPs cannot be understood independently of their broader internationalisation contexts. Rather than representing a uniform model of TNE, collaborative degree programmes evolve according to distinct institutional logics, governance arrangements, and home–host dynamics that shape both their design and implementation (Wasti & Bulut-Sahin, 2026). In particular, there remains a lack of systematic mapping of how JDDPs are conceptualised, implemented, and regulated in contexts such as the UK and Türkiye, where differing policy environments and institutional logics may shape both opportunities and constraints for collaboration. Furthermore, much of the literature is either policy-oriented or based on single case studies, making it difficult to identify overarching patterns and gaps.

In response to these limitations, this study conducts a literature review to map the current state of knowledge on JDDPs as a form of TNE, with a specific focus on the UK and Türkiye. The selection of the UK and Türkiye reflects their contrasting approaches to higher education internationalisation and transnational education. The UK represents a well-established, globally oriented TNE system, whereas Türkiye has developed a more centralised and regulation-driven model (British Council, 2021), making the comparison analytically valuable. By synthesising existing academic and policy literature, the review aims to clarify key concepts, identify dominant themes in programme implementation, and highlight areas where further empirical research is needed. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of JDDPs within the broader TNE landscape and provides a foundation for examining their feasibility and development in specific institutional and national contexts.

Building on this contextual overview and identified gaps in the literature, the following section outlines the specific aim and research questions that guide this review.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to systematically map and synthesise the existing body of literature on joint and double degree programmes (JDDPs) within the broader landscape of transnational higher education. While JDDPs are often discussed alongside transnational education (TNE), not all such programmes fall neatly within TNE frameworks, particularly where delivery is evenly distributed across partner institutions in different countries or spend comparable time in each country (Knight, 2016). This study therefore considers JDDPs both in relation to, and beyond, TNE, in order to capture the diversity of programme models and conceptualisations present in the literature.

Guided by this aim, the review addresses the following research questions:

1. How are JDDPs conceptualised, structured, and implemented in the existing literature, and how are these understanding reflected in the contexts of the UK and Türkiye?
2. What key benefits, challenges, and regulatory dynamics are associated with JDDPs, and how are these reflected in and between the higher education systems of the UK and Türkiye?

In order to address these questions systematically and capture the breadth of existing scholarship, a structured review methodology was adopted, as outlined below.

Method

This study adopts a structured approach to reviewing literature on JDDPs, drawing on key principles of scoping review to map and synthesise the existing research in this area (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Given the exploratory nature of the research questions and the delivery of existing studies, this approach allows for a broader examination of how JDDPs are conceptualised, structured, and implemented across two different contexts.

Rather than aiming for an exhaustive or fully systematic review, the focus is on identifying and analysing relevant academic and policy-oriented literature that provides insights into the development, characteristics, and challenges of JDDPs. To ensure a comprehensive mapping of the landscape, the search strategy was conducted in two parallel streams, leveraging the linguistic and contextual expertise of the UK- and Türkiye-based research teams. The UK-based researcher carried out searches across primary English-language academic databases—including ERIC, British Education Index, and Education Research Complete—alongside grey literature such as policy reports from the British Council and Universities UK International (UUKi). Simultaneously, the Türkiye-based team searched Turkish-specific databases, including DergiPark, TR Dizin, and the YÖK National Thesis Centre, to capture localized academic discourse and regulatory documentation from the Council of Higher Education (CoHE).

Search terms were developed iteratively in both English and Turkish, utilizing keywords such as “joint degree,” “double degree,” and “dual degree,” as well as their Turkish equivalents like “ortak diploma” and “çift diploma”. This approach was designed to reduce language bias and ensure a nuanced understanding of how these programmes are co-designed, implemented, and governed across both higher education systems.

Studies were included if they focused on JDDPs in the UK, Türkiye, or collaborative initiatives involving institutions from both countries. Eligible studies were required to provide substantive information on the conceptualisation, structure, implementation, governance, or regulatory context of JDDPs. In addition, studies addressing broader forms of TNE were included where they explicitly discussed JDDPs or provided



relevant comparative insights. Studies were excluded if they did not concern higher education, did not examine collaborative degree arrangements, or focused solely on student mobility schemes (e.g., exchange programmes) without involving shared curriculum design or joint degree-awarding mechanisms. Publications focusing exclusively on national contexts unrelated to the UK or Türkiye, or lacking substantive discussion of JDDPs, and virtual degrees were also excluded.

The study selection process followed a two-stage approach. First, titles and abstracts were screened against the inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify potentially relevant studies. This was followed by a full-text review to determine final eligibility. The process was conducted in a systematic and transparent manner to ensure consistency. Data from the literature review were extracted using a structured charting approach. The charted data focused on key aspects relevant to the aims of the review, including how JDDPs are defined and conceptualised, programme structures and models, reported benefits and challenges, and the regulatory and institutional contexts in which these programmes operate. The analysis followed a qualitative, thematic approach aimed at identifying patterns and recurring themes across the literature. In line with scoping review methodology, the purpose of the analysis was to map the range and nature of existing evidence (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) rather than to evaluate the effectiveness of programmes or to synthesise findings quantitatively.

Having outlined the methodological approach, the following section presents an overview of how JDDPs are conceptualised and distributed globally, providing a foundation for understanding their development across different contexts.

Overview of JDDPs in the world

Conceptual mapping and terminology

A prominent theme in the literature is the inconsistent conceptualisation of terms, which is repeatedly flagged as a barrier to comparison, regulation, and quality assurance (Knight, 2008, 2011). In practice, the same programme structure may be labelled differently across jurisdictions, while the same label (e.g., “double degree”) may refer to substantially different arrangements in terms of enrolment, mobility design, curriculum integration and award mechanisms (Obst & Kuder, 2012). As a result, definition clarity has become a regulatory and operational issue, particularly for cross-border collaborations where programme approval, recognition and external review must operate across more than one system (European Higher Education Area, 2014).

A joint degree programme is generally understood as a collaborative programme leading to a single qualification jointly awarded by two or more partner institutions (European Higher Education Area, 2014; Knight, 2008). Such programmes result in one joint credential upon completion of an integrated curriculum designed and delivered collaboratively by the participating institutions (Knight, 2008). A defining

feature of joint degree programmes is therefore the issuance of a single award that formally recognises the shared responsibility of partner institutions.

In contrast, a double degree programme (also referred to as a dual or multiple degree programme) typically involves students completing coordinated requirements across two or more institutions and receiving separate qualifications from each participating institution (Obst et al., 2011). While such programmes often include elements of curriculum alignment and credit transfer like joint degree programmes, they do not result in a single jointly conferred award (Knight, 2011). The distinction between joint and double degrees is therefore primarily located in the type of award granted, though they both require high levels of collaboration involved in programme design and delivery. To summarize, a joint degree results in a single qualification jointly awarded by two or more partner institutions, whereas a double degree leads to two separate qualifications, with each institution awarding its own degree (British Council, 2023).

Despite this formal distinction, the boundaries between joint and double degree programmes are often blurred in practice. Empirical studies have shown that institutional interpretations of these terms vary significantly, influenced by regulatory constraints and local academic traditions (Knight, 2008). Bamford (2020) further argues that such programmes should not be understood solely through their formal structures, as their implementation is shaped by various factors such as pedagogical practices, institutional relationships, and student experiences across different national and cultural contexts. From this perspective, JDDPs represent dynamic and evolving forms of international collaboration rather than fixed programme categories.

JDDPs are commonly situated within the broader framework of TNE, which refers to the delivery or organisation of higher education across national borders through different modes of supply, including cross-border provision, commercial presence, and the movement of academic staff (Bosire & Amimo, 2017). In many forms of TNE, educational provision is structured around a distinction between sending and host contexts, where programmes, curricula, or qualifications are developed in one system and delivered in another (Knight, 2016).

By contrast, JDDPs are characterised by collaborative arrangements between partner institutions, involving joint or coordinated curriculum design, shared delivery, and negotiated academic responsibilities (Bamford, 2020). Rather than being based primarily on the transfer of programmes from one context to another, JDDPs typically involve a higher degree of institutional interdependence and coordination, even though the extent of collaboration may vary in practice (Knight, 2016). In many cases, these programmes also require students to study at more than one partner institution across different national contexts (Bamford, 2020). As such, while JDDPs can be understood as a form of TNE, they represent a distinct mode of cross-border higher education that combines programme collaboration with structured forms of student mobility.



Global prevalence and geographical contexts

Although precise global counts remain difficult—partly because terminology and reporting practices vary—available large-scale survey show that JDDPs expanded significantly from the early 2000s onwards, with growth concentrated in systems and regions where internationalisation policies and cross-border frameworks reduce barriers to collaboration (Kuder & Obst, 2009; Obst et al., 2011). The Institute of International Education (IIE) global survey report (covering institutions across multiple countries) has been particularly influential in mapping how institutions describe JDDPs, where they are concentrated, and what rationales and obstacles shape their development (Obst et al., 2011).

Regionally, Europe has played a central role in shaping the development of JDDPs through coordinated policy frameworks associated with the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). These initiatives have promoted the comparability of qualifications, the use of shared credit systems, and the recognition of joint programmes across national systems, thereby facilitating the development of collaborative degrees between institutions in different countries (European Higher Education Area, 2005; European University Association, 2006). In the transnational context, survey evidence from the EU-US Atlantis era also shows deliberate policy support for collaborative degrees, alongside persistent challenges in aligning regulations and institutional procedures (Kuder & Obst, 2009).

Outside Europe, JDDPs are increasingly documented in Asian higher education systems, though they are often embedded in wider ecosystems of cross-border collaboration (e.g., joint institutes and cooperative universities) rather than reported under a single, stable label. In the Chinese context, recent scholarship has examined transnational dual degree arrangements from the perspective of student experience and programme participation, highlighting motivations (international credentials and positioning) alongside practical frictions such as administrative complexity and uneven support across institutions (Oladipo et al., 2024). Related work on Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China further illustrates how transnational programme models are shaped by local regulatory frameworks and institutional design choices, which suggests that cross-border degree collaboration may operate through institutionally distinctive “cooperative” forms rather than through a uniform JDDP model (Lai & Jung, 2024). Beyond China, comparative evidence from Japan positions JDDPs as a prominent form of transnational degree collaboration, while also showing how their development reflects shifting policy priorities and institutional strategy (Doi & Ikeda, 2024).

Characteristics and structures of JDDPs

Across regions, several relatively stable patterns appear in how JDDPs are structured and implemented. First, sector surveys repeatedly indicate that JDDPs are especially common at master’s level, where curricula are more readily modularised and

internationally marketable, and where a one- to two-year structure can be aligned across partners with fewer sequencing constraints than many undergraduate programmes (Obst et al., 2011). Field-wise, reports and conceptual syntheses often highlight concentrations in internationally oriented and professionally framed areas (e.g., business/management and engineering), where there is clear student demand and where cross-border professional recognition is sometimes more navigable than in tightly licensed professions (Knight & Lee, 2022).

Secondly, evidence from large-scale institutional surveys shows the predominance of double/dual degree models over joint degrees. For instance, a survey conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), based on responses from 134 institutions, found that dual degrees accounted for approximately 78% of reported programmes, whereas joint degrees represented only 22% (American Council on Education, 2014). The same study also draws attention to asymmetries in student mobility and participation. Enrolment in JDDPs administered by U.S. institutions was found to be heavily skewed towards students from partner countries, with comparatively limited participation from domestic (U.S.) students. This imbalance suggests that such programmes may function as strategic tools for international student recruitment (American Council on Education, 2014; Knight & Lee, 2022). Even studying in two countries is central to the value proposition, institutions may design flexibly (e.g. varying duration at each site; semester exchange embedded in a degree pathway; or blended delivery) to balance academic coherence with cost, visa, and student support constraints (Chan, 2021; Knight & Lee, 2022).

The literature in the next section provides a substantial body of work evaluating both their perceived benefits and the challenges associated with their implementation.

Benefits of and challenges in designing and delivering JDDPs

JDDPs are widely promoted as key instruments of internationalisation in higher education, offering significant academic, institutional and socio-cultural benefits. At the same time, the literature consistently highlights substantial challenges associated with their design and delivery across different national and institutional contexts. This section synthesises existing research to examine both dimension, to emphasise the complex and often contradictory nature of JDDPs.

Benefits of JDDPs

One of the most frequently cited benefits of JDDPs at individual level lies in their potential to enhance students' academic and intercultural learning experiences (Bamford, 2020; Palermo et al., 2018; West, 2015). By enabling students to study across multiple institutions and national systems, these programmes provide exposure to diverse pedagogical approaches and cultural contexts (Auschner et al., 2016; Yarosh et al., 2018). Such experiences are often associated with the development of intercultural competence, adaptability, and global awareness (Bamford, 2020; Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Yarosh et al., 2018). In particular, Bamford



(2020)'s qualitative study highlights how students' engagement in multiple educational and cultural settings fosters international transitions, through which learners negotiate identity and different learning styles across contexts.

Additionally, literature shows that dual-degree graduates report that holding two degrees (and the underlying cross-cultural experience) helps them stand out to employers and access international opportunities (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Haupt et al., 2021; Manning, 2021; Palermo et al., 2018; West, 2015). Empirical studies have found that graduates from joint programmes may self-assess stronger employability skills, attributing this to their international and intercultural experiences during the programme (Chen, 2025).

From an academic perspective, JDDPs can also enrich curricula through collaborative design and delivery. Partner institution contribute complementary expertise, allowing for the development of integrates and often interdisciplinary programmes that may not be achievable within a single institutional framework (European Higher Education Area, 2014; Knight & Lee, 2022; Obst & Kuder, 2012; Palermo et al., 2018). Additionally, joint programs can spur research collaboration. Faculty involved in co-teaching or advising students together may launch joint research projects, and students often engage in cross-campus research as part of their studies (Palermo et al., 2018).

At the institutional level, JDDPs are often associated with strategic benefits related to internationalisation. They can enhance institutional reputation and increase global visibility (Council of Graduate Schools, 2010; Steagall et al., 2021). In addition, such programmes may contribute to student recruitment strategies, particularly by attracting international students seeking international mobility and multiple qualifications (Knight & Lee, 2022). This dynamic underscores that JDDPs are not just educational ventures but also carry diplomatic and economic significance.

Despite these widely recognised advantages, the literature consistently emphasises that such outcomes are accompanied by significant practical and structural challenges.

Challenges in designing and delivering JDDPs

The literature consistently highlights that the design and implementation of JDDPs involve complex, multi-layered challenges spanning institutional, regulatory, academic, and relational dimensions. At the institutional level, forming and sustaining international partnerships is itself a major obstacle. Empirical research based on UK universities identifies a wide range of barriers, including misaligned institutional objectives, lack of trust between partners, communication difficulties, unequal commitment, and constraints in time and resources (Ayoubi & Al-Habaibeh, 2006). Administrative and structural complexities are also widely documented. The Council of Graduate Schools report shows that early-stage development of JDDPs is often hindered by difficulties in negotiating agreements, aligning fee structures, and securing sustainable funding, while implementation raises additional concerns related to accreditation, programme approval, and coordination across institutional systems

(Council of Graduate Schools, 2010). In particular, the issue of “double counting” academic work in double degrees introduces concerns about academic integrity and equivalence, requiring careful calibration of credit systems and learning outcomes.

Regulatory and recognition challenges further complicate JDDPs (Bosire & Amimo, 2017; Chan, 2021; Hou, 2020; Knight, 2008; Knight & Lee, 2022; Kuder & Obst, 2009; Lane & Kinser, 2014). Studies on qualification recognition highlight that joint degrees do not belong to a single national system, making their formal recognition more complex than conventional degrees and requiring coordination across multiple quality assurance regimes (Hou et al., 2017). This is particularly evident in Europe-Asia collaborations, where differences in regulatory frameworks and accreditation systems can create uncertainty for both institutions and students (Hou et al., 2017).

Pedagogical and curricular differences also pose significant challenges (Bosire & Amimo, 2017; Knight, 2011, 2014; Knight & Lee, 2022). Variations in academic traditions, assessment practices, and curriculum design can make it difficult to achieve genuine integration across partner institutions. Research on transnational higher education more broadly points to tensions arising from differences in pedagogical approaches, language use, and academic cultures, as well as concerns about the transferability of curricula across contexts (Bosire & Amimo, 2017). These issues are amplified in JDDPs, where programmes are not simply delivered across borders but co-designed and jointly implemented (Knight, 2014).

Many of the challenges identified above become particularly visible when examined within specific national contexts. The following section therefore turns to Türkiye, where regulatory structures and policy frameworks play a central role in shaping the development of JDDPs.

History and current state-of-art of Türkiye JDDPs

The Council of Higher Education (Yükseköğretim Kurulu, CoHE/YÖK) functions as the principal authority responsible for regulating, approving, and supervising all higher education programs, including those developed in collaboration with international partners. Turkish universities are required to obtain CoHE’s approval before launching any joint or double degree program to ensure compliance with national academic standards, legal frameworks, and degree recognition requirements (Erdoğan & Bulut Şahin, 2024). The formal legal basis for joint degree programs was established through a regulation published in 2006 and revised in 2007, which authorized Turkish higher education institutions to develop joint programs at associate, bachelor’s, and graduate levels with foreign universities (Şengül & Serpil, 2018). Prior to this regulation, collaborations were typically governed by institution-specific protocols, resulting in uneven practices across the sector. A further regulatory revision in 2016 introduced a stronger emphasis on qualifications, recognition, and quality assurance, aligning Turkish joint degree policy more explicitly with Bologna Process principles and European higher education norms (CoHE, n.d.). The



procedural logic of this framework is highly structured. Partner institutions prepare a detailed protocol outlining curriculum design, credit equivalencies, governance structures, and degree outcomes; this protocol must pass multiple approval stages, including CoHE review, before implementation. Student intake numbers and subsequent amendments to the program are likewise subject to approval. While this centralized process aims to safeguard academic standards and international recognition, the literature consistently notes that it also lengthens timelines and introduces administrative risk, particularly in partnerships with institutions from more decentralized systems, such as the UK (Erdoğan & Bulut Şahin, 2024; Şengül & Serpil, 2018).

Türkiye's approach to joint degrees is closely tied to broader national internationalization strategies. Efe and Özer (2023) argue that Turkish higher education policy discourse has historically emphasized state-centred goals and performance indicators, particularly student and staff mobility numbers, international student recruitment, and global visibility. In the context of UK-Türkiye relations, Erdoğan and Bulut Şahin (2024) report that Turkish institutions view joint degree programs as one of the most meaningful mechanisms for establishing long-term, trust-based cooperation with UK universities. Unlike short-term mobility schemes, joint degrees are understood as structurally embedded collaborations that can anchor broader research and educational partnerships.

Historical development and early experimentation

Türkiye's engagement with joint and double degree programs gained momentum in the early 2000s, coinciding with its participation in European cooperation initiatives such as the Erasmus Programme. This period marked a shift toward more structured international collaboration, even before a comprehensive national regulatory framework was in place.

A frequently cited early example is the SUNY-Türkiye collaboration launched in 2000 between the State University of New York system and CoHE (SUNY Türkiye, n.d.). Through this initiative, several Turkish universities, including Middle East Technical University (METU), partnered with SUNY campuses to offer undergraduate programs in fields such as Global Politics and International Relations, Business Administration, and English Language Teaching. Students completed portions of their studies both in Türkiye and the United States and graduated with degrees awarded by both institutions. The SUNY-Türkiye collaboration is frequently cited as one of the earliest and most prominent examples of an international dual degree programme involving Turkish higher education institutions (Asgary & Robbert, 2010). Such early initiatives demonstrated both the potential and the fragility of joint degrees: while they enhanced international visibility and academic exchange, they also exposed the need for clearer legal frameworks, standardized credit recognition, and long-term sustainability planning.

Scale and current state of joint degree activity in Türkiye

Recent policy data indicate that joint degree activity in Türkiye has expanded substantially. According to the *Internationalization in Higher Education Strategy Document 2024-2028* published by CoHE (Yükseköğretim Kurulu, 2025), as of September 2024 Turkish higher education institutions had signed 327 joint education and training program agreements with international partners. Of these, 173 were at the bachelor's level, 98 at the master's level, 34 at the doctoral level, and 22 at the associate degree level.

The distribution of partner countries highlights the strategic orientation of Türkiye's international collaborations. The United States ranks first with 98 agreements, followed by the United Kingdom (53), Germany (37), and France (32). This pattern situates the UK as one of Türkiye's most significant partners in joint degree provision, reinforcing the relevance of examining past Turkish experiences when designing new UK-Türkiye joint programs.

Table 1. Distribution of Joint Education and Training Program Protocols Approved by the Council of Higher Education by Country

Country	Number	Country	Number
United States	98	Belgium	2
United Kingdom	53	Spain	2
Germany	37	New Zealand	2
France	32	Bulgaria	2
Azerbaijan	14	Austria	2
Uzbekistan	13	Ukraine	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	13	Mongolia	2
Kazakhstan	11	Jordan	1
The Netherlands	8	North Macedonia	1
Erasmus Mundus / Multinational	7	Kosovo	1
Malaysia	5	Taiwan	1
Northern Cyprus (Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus)	5	Slovenia	1
Kyrgyzstan	4	Czechia	1
Russia	3	Indonesia	1
Canada	3	TOTAL	327

Source: Yükseköğretim Kurulu, 2025

However, studies collectively suggest that interpreting numerical growth cannot be counted as evidence of uniform success. While the number of agreements is high, existing research suggests that not all approved programs reach full implementation



or achieve long-term sustainability, underscoring the need for qualitative evaluation alongside quantitative indicators (Şengül & Serpil, 2018).

Overall, the literature portrays Türkiye's experience with JDDPs as one of strategic ambition constrained by regulatory complexity. Joint degrees are widely recognized as high-value, prestige-bearing forms of internationalization, yet they are also among the most governance-sensitive and resource-intensive collaboration models. Türkiye's centralized approval system and performance-oriented internationalization discourse shape both the opportunities and limitations of such programs. For future UK-Türkiye joint degree initiatives, the literature suggests that success depends less on symbolic alignment and more on governance-aware design (British Council, 2021). Effective programs are likely to be those that anticipate regulatory timelines, address structural and assessment differences explicitly, embed robust quality assurance mechanisms from the outset, and plan for sustainability beyond initial prestige or pilot funding. In this sense, Türkiye's past experiences offer not only cautionary lessons but also a foundation for more resilient and mutually beneficial joint degree collaborations.

An emerging trend that has received little scholarly attention is the growing use of 3+1 articulation models by Turkish universities, particularly foundation universities, in collaboration with international partners. Unlike traditional JDDPs requiring extensive curriculum integration and regulatory approval, these models often rely on student mobility during the final year of study while leading to dual qualifications. This development suggests that collaborative degree provision may be evolving towards more flexible institutional arrangements, warranting further scholarly attention.

While Türkiye's experience highlights the role of centralised regulation and structured governance, the UK presents a contrasting model shaped by market-oriented internationalisation and evolving TNE strategies. The following section examines the development of JDDPs within the UK context.

History and Current State-of-the-Art of UK JDDPs

Methodological note

Official UK datasets on TNE do not currently disaggregate JDDPs as a separate category. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) classifies provision by mode—distance/flexible learning, collaborative/partner-taught arrangements, and overseas campuses or partner organisations—within which JDDPs are typically embedded (Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), 2023). This means their precise scale is obscured in national statistics, and analysis must triangulate HESA data with sector reports, policy documents, and historical surveys.

Early 2000s: European alignment and the policy foundations for JDDPs

The UK's expansion of collaborative degrees in the early 2000s coincided with the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005) ministerial communiqués explicitly prioritised the establishment and recognition of joint degrees and urged the removal of legal obstacles, embedding joint awards within a pan-European quality and recognition agenda (EHEA, 2003; 2005).

During this period, the UK's participation in Bologna and related initiatives ensured that its degree structures (including the adoption of the three-cycle framework and the use of ECTS) were compatible with European partners. This alignment laid the foundation for later joint and double degree collaborations.

2004–2016: Erasmus Mundus and structured collaboration

During the 2000s and mid-2010s, UK universities were prominent participants in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (EMJMDs). (European Education and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], 2024). These highly integrated joint programmes—requiring multiple partners across different national systems—set a benchmark for curricular integration and recognition, with UK institutions often acting as coordinators (European University Association, 2006).

The 2011 Institute of International Education (IIE)/Freie Universität Berlin global survey of JDDPs provides a useful snapshot of UK activity (Obst et al., 2011). The survey showed that most UK institutions launched their first JDDPs between 2001 and 2009—later than many continental European peers but rapidly integrated into institutional strategies. Distinctive features included a stronger emphasis on the social sciences (compared to the global dominance of business/engineering) and higher levels of provision at master's (43%) and doctoral (31%) levels.

The 2011 survey also shows that UK JDDPs were typically small in scale: three-quarters enrolled fewer than 15 students per cohort, yet institutions emphasised their strategic value for international visibility, new partnership creation, and diversification of income streams. Key partners at the time included France and China, illustrating both EHEA-driven collaboration and the emergence of Asian partnerships.

During this time period, UK universities also began using the Bologna tools (ECTS, Diploma Supplement) to structure collaborative provision with partners in Europe. This period firmly established JDDPs as a “gold standard” of TNE, distinguished from less integrated franchise or validation models.

From around 2014/15, UK providers shifted away from large-volume validation arrangements toward smaller numbers of higher-value partnerships (Bennell, 2023). This period of consolidation slowed overall offshore enrolment growth but raised the profile of integrated collaborative models such as JDDPs. Quality assurance and reputational risk management were increasingly prioritised, with JDDPs viewed as



more sustainable and prestigious than legacy validation models (British Council and UUKi, 2024).

This recalibration was reinforced by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which introduced more detailed frameworks to guide collaborative provision. The *Characteristics Statement on qualifications involving more than one degree-awarding body* (Quality Assurance Agency, 2020) set out principles for designing and managing joint and double degrees, including clarity of governance, shared regulations, and award standards. Later, the *Quality Evaluation and Enhancement of UK Transnational Higher Education Provision 2021-22 to 2025-26* extended this by providing operational guidance on partnership oversight, due diligence, and student experience (Quality Assurance Agency, 2022). These frameworks helped UK universities formalise JDDPs as high-quality, risk-managed ventures aligned with national and international expectations.

Post-2020: repositioning amid Brexit, Covid-19, and digitalisation

The post-2020 period has reshaped UK TNE through Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and a turn to digital delivery. Brexit ended the UK's programme-country role in Erasmus+ (2021–27), meaning UK universities could no longer coordinate Erasmus Mundus joint programmes. Although they may still join as associated partners, the loss of Erasmus+ funding and coordination roles has weakened the UK's position in European JDDP consortia (European Commission, 2024). The UK's replacement, the Turing Scheme, supports outward mobility for UK-based students but does not fund institutional joint degree consortia (Lewis, 2021). These shifts have encouraged institutions to develop bilateral JDDPs outside EU frameworks, while continuing to use Bologna-compatible structures for recognition.

The Covid-19 pandemic initially disrupted mobility but accelerated the mainstreaming of online and hybrid TNE. UK universities integrated digital modalities into joint programmes, sustaining student mobility windows and harmonising curricula across partners. National statistics show resilience and growth: UUKi reported 606, 485 students studying wholly outside the UK in 2022/23 (Universities UK, 2023). The UK Government (2025a) also valued education-related exports, including TNE, at £32.3bn, with TNE alone contributing nearly £3bn in 2022.

These structural changes have coincided with regulatory adjustments. Quality Assurance Agency has placed renewed emphasis on student protection, academic integrity, and institutional risk management (Quality Assurance Agency, 2022). This context has reinforced the attractiveness of JDDPs as higher-trust, prestige-bearing forms of collaboration.

Geographically, Asian institutions continue to represent the primary partners for UK institutions. More than 260 UK–China joint degree partnerships were active in 2022, with over 81,000 students enrolled in UK programmes in China (British Council, 2023). New markets are also emerging in the Middle East (notably Saudi Arabia) and

South Asia (Sri Lanka), while within Europe, Cyprus and Greece remain important hubs for UK collaborative provision (ibid.).

Current state-of-art

Overall, UK TNE continues to expand in both scale and strategic importance. The UK Government positions international education as a key export sector, targeting growth to £40 billion by 2030 (Department for Education, Department for Business and Trade, & Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, 2026). Within this landscape, TNE has become increasingly critical as a mechanism for delivering UK education globally while responding to capacity constraints and mobility limitations.

Recent data demonstrate the scale and momentum of UK TNE. In 2023–24, there were over 650,000 students studying for UK higher education qualifications overseas, representing a 70% increase over the past decade (Universities UK International (UUKi), 2025). Notably, TNE enrolments are now approaching parity with international student numbers in the UK, and are projected to surpass them if current trends continue. This reflects a structural shift in international education, whereby provision is increasingly delivered in country rather than through physical mobility (ibid.).

The UK's exit from Erasmus+ disrupted established mobility pathways, which increased the importance of structured, programme-level collaborations that can sustain long-term institution ties (European Commission, 2024). However, recent policy developments signal a partial reconfiguration of this landscape. The UK and EU have agreed that the UK will rejoin the Erasmus+ programme from 2027, restoring opportunities for students and staff to participate in study, training and exchange activities across Europe (UK Government, 2025b).

In conclusion, the UK and Türkiye contexts illustrate how JDDPs are shaped by distinct yet intersecting policy environments. These insights provide a basis for considering future directions for research and practice.

Future Perspectives and Suggestions

The findings of this review highlight both the growing importance of JDDPs in international higher education and the persistent challenges that shape their development. Although both the UK and Türkiye witnessed the expansion of joint and double degree programmes during the early 2000s, their trajectories were shaped by fundamentally different internationalisation models: while the UK built on its long-established tradition of international higher education through market-oriented partnerships, Türkiye's development was largely driven by the Europeanisation of higher education, particularly through the Bologna Process and Erasmus Programme, within a more centralised regulatory framework. Building on the existing literature, several key directions for future research and practice can be identified.



First, the need for greater conceptual clarity and terminological consistency remains a central issue. As widely noted in the literature, the inconsistent use of terms such as joint, dual, and double degrees continues to complicate comparative research, policy development, and quality assurance processes (Knight & Lee, 2022; Obst & Kuder, 2012). Future research would benefit from more systematic conceptual frameworks that distinguish between programme structures, award types, and levels of institutional integration, while remaining sensitive to contextual variations.

Second, future work should adopt more context-sensitive and comparative approaches to the study of JDDPs. This review has demonstrated that programme design and implementation are strongly shaped by national regulatory frameworks and geopolitical conditions (Bosire & Amimo, 2017; Hou et al., 2017). In particular, comparative studies across different higher education systems could provide deeper insights into how regulatory environments and institutional logics influence programme sustainability, recognition, and collaboration dynamics (Knight, 2015).

Third, there is a need for more empirical research on student experiences and outcomes within JDDPs. While existing studies often emphasise benefits such as intercultural competence and employability, the evidence base remains relatively limited and uneven. Bamford (2020), for example, demonstrates how students navigate complex international transitions across academic and cultural contexts, highlighting both opportunities for learning and challenges in adapting to different modes of study. Further longitudinal and qualitative research could provide a more nuanced understanding of how students experience and evaluate JDDPs over time.

Fourth, future research should engage more critically with issues of power, asymmetry, and equity in international degree collaboration. Although JDDPs are often presented as mutually beneficial partnerships, the literature on TNE suggests that cross-border collaborations are frequently shaped by unequal resource distribution, institutional hierarchies, and asymmetric mobility patterns (Bosire & Amimo, 2017; Caruana & Montgomery, 2015). Survey-based evidence also points to imbalances in student participation, with mobility flows often skewed towards particular regions or groups (Knight & Lee, 2022). Moreover, JDDPs may also involve less visible and unexpected tensions arising from competing priorities between partner institutions, which should be considered alongside more apparent regulatory and operational challenges when designing and sustaining such partnerships (Wasti & Bulut-Sahin, 2026). Addressing these issues requires a more critical perspective on how JDDPs are designed and implemented.

Conclusion

This article examined how JDDPs are conceptualised, structured, and implemented in the existing literature, and explored key benefits, challenges, and regulatory dynamics associated with these programmes in global contexts. In doing so, particular attention was given to the UK and Türkiye contexts, situating these national contexts within

broader international developments in transnational higher education. The contrast identified in this review is also reflected in the Erasmus Mundus programme. While UK universities have consistently been among the leading coordinators and partners in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's programmes, Türkiye has remained a comparatively limited participant, highlighting the different institutional capacities and internationalisation trajectories of the two higher education systems (European Education and Culture Executive Agency [EACEA], 2024).

The findings suggest that JDDPs are best understood as complex and context-dependent forms of international collaboration, rather than as standardised programme models. While they are frequently characterised by shared curriculum design, cross-border mobility, and institutional partnership, their actual forms vary significantly depending on regulatory frameworks and institutional capacities (Knight, 2011; Kuder et al., 2013). The focused analysis of the UK and Turkish contexts in this paper further illustrates how such variations are shaped by distinct national systems and policy environments.

In addition, this review traced the historical development and current state-of-art of JDDPs in both countries, highlighting differences in their trajectories and implementation logics. In the UK, JDDPs are often embedded within broader TNE strategies and shaped by quality assurance frameworks and institutional autonomy, whereas in Türkiye, their development is more closely influenced by centralised regulation and national higher education policies. These differences underscore the importance of understanding JDDPs not only as global phenomena but also as practices embedded within specific governance and regulatory structures.

Moreover, the comparison suggests that the development of JDDPs has historically followed different institutional dynamics in the two countries. While initiatives in the UK have largely evolved through institution-led partnerships supported by an established internationalisation ecosystem, the Turkish model has traditionally been shaped by a more centralised regulatory framework. However, recent initiatives, such as the British Council's TNE Exploratory Grants, indicate a gradual shift towards greater institutional engagement in shaping the future regulatory and operational environment for transnational education partnerships (British Council, 2026).

At the same time, the review highlights a tension between the aspirational framing of JDDPs—as vehicles for intercultural learning, academic innovation, and international collaboration—and the practical realities of their implementation, which involve substantial administrative, regulatory, and pedagogical challenges (Bamford, 2020; European University Association, 2006). These challenges are embedded in broader structural conditions, including differences between national systems and institutional inequalities.

Importantly, the review also reveals significant gaps in the literature, particularly in relation to empirical evidence on student experiences, comparative analyses across



regions, and systematic data on the prevalence and outcomes of JDDPs. These gaps are also evident in the limited comparative scholarship directly engaging both UK and Turkish contexts, suggesting a need for more integrative and cross-national research.

Overall, this review contributes to a more nuanced understanding of JDDPs by bringing together diverse strands of literature and highlighting both their potential and their limitations. It underscores the need to move beyond simplified narratives of international collaboration and to recognise JDDPs as dynamic, negotiated, and contextually embedded practices within global higher education, while also emphasising the value of comparative perspectives in advancing both research and policy development.

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