

Research on International Exchange Trends of Students in the Post-Pandemic Era and China's Response Strategies

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Abstract

In the post-pandemic era, students' international exchanges present new characteristics, the proportion of students' overseas exchanges has decreased significantly, new changes have taken place in students' teaching methods, local internationalization has been paid attention to, and the student mobility mode has been reorganized. This paper aims to put forward countermeasures in alignment with the current trend of students' international exchanges, enable online education and improve the education ecosystem; advocate local internationalization and internalize the form of education; strengthen the reform of system and mechanism and create a friendly virtual environment for international online education; strengthen the effectiveness of Sino-foreign cooperation in running schools and consolidate the level of foreign cooperation, so as to provide reference for international educators.

Key words: Post-pandemic era; Students' international exchanges; Strategy

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1. INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented impact on humanity and a series of challenges to higher education. Currently, the world is entering the post-pandemic era, with student mobility disrupted, teaching mode shifted to online, transportation disrupted, and international cooperation and exchange in higher education facing unprecedented challenges. According to Professor Anthony Welch of the University of Sydney, international cooperation in higher education will face increasing challenges, and the pandemic is catastrophically preventing the cross-border movement of people and the implementation of international cooperation (Yojiana, 2020). As can be seen, the combined effects of the pandemic, the international environment, and the international situation are beginning to cool down, and studying abroad is becoming one of the options for students to avoid in the foreseen future. At present, manipulating students' international exchange under the situation of restricted mobility, expanding new ways of international exchange, improving the internationalization ability of students in high-level universities, and helping the sustainable and high-quality development of internationalization in higher education have moved into the focus of higher education administrators and policy makers in the near future.

2. COMPONENTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXCHANGE

According to the analysis of Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2015), internationalization of university goes through four stages. First is pre-internationalization, in which campuses are culturally homogeneous. It gradually evolves to the second stage, structural internationalization, in which most universities are currently located. Students and staff at this stage have different cultures, but there is limited

cross-cultural interaction and integration. With the efforts of all staff and students and the support of sustainable resources, internationalization of university is expected to enter the third stage. At this stage a multicultural campus community with a high level of cross-cultural interaction and integration is formed. Ultimately, the university will enter the final stage, the internationalization of competencies, which will foster the students' development with a high level of intercultural interaction and integration and interculturally competent staff (Spencer-Oatey, & Dauber, 2015). According to this, the ultimate shape and destination of university internationalization is the development of interculturally competent faculty and students. This view coincides with Romuald Rudzki (1995) 's view that internationalization is a complex process that involves organizational change, curriculum reform, staff development, and student mobility (as shown in Figure 1). To avoid stagnation, decline, and eventual extinction, universities need to adapt to the changing international environment and use internationalization as a key tool for strategic planning and organizational change. Curriculum reform can be understood as the integration of leading knowledge and methods into the subjects taught, and can be realized both within and outside the higher education institution. Staff development is expressed as the various mechanisms that support the progress of staff, including financial support, personal development, and competency enhancement. Student mobility is understood as the intellectual mobility of the majority of students, rather than the physical mobility of a minority of students. In a sense, the majority of students will benefit from other aspects of internationalization, especially curriculum reform and staff development.

1. Organizational change (OC) 2. curriculum innovation (CI)

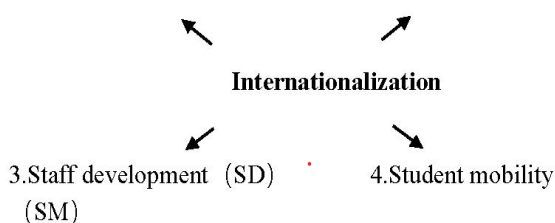


Figure 1
Four dimensions of internationalization

Source: Rudzki, R. (1995). The application of a strategic management model to the internationalization of higher education institutions.

According to Rudzki (1995), student mobility is divided into two parts: physical mobility and intellectual mobility. A total of nine aspects are included, five of which need to be achieved through field communication and four of which can be done online, as shown in the table of student mobility components (Table 1). In the post-pandemic era, students cannot leave the country on a large scale, so we try to improve the international

exchange of students through the internal construction of student internationalization and the guarantee of external conditions. The internal construction includes recruiting international students for online classes, promoting student online exchange programs, reforming teaching methods and approaches, strengthening foreign language teaching, and accessing foreign language resources, while the external conditions include organizational changes and staff development, combining internal and external aspects to realize student mobility and improve students' internationalization ability and comprehensive literacy.

Table 1
Table of student mobility components

No.	Components	Method of realization
1	the recruitment of overseas students - (defined as non-EC students as EC students are now regarded as being 'home students') - who are permanent members of a course	online
2	the existence of exchange programmes, where students spend time abroad	offline
3	the availability of overseas work placements	offline
4	the way in which transnational student gatherings are encouraged	offline
5	field trips as a learning method and the way in which institutions can assist visiting staff and students who are on field trips	offline
6	the way in which the acquisition of cross-cultural skills and cultural awareness is made explicit in being able to understand other cultures and the desirability of this as a part of education	online
7	the desirability of learning a foreign language either as a compulsory or optional part of study	online
8	access to foreign materials in the home institution, for example books, journals, case studies, computer networks	online
9	improved career prospects from working or studying abroad	offline

3. NEW FEATURES OF STUDENT INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

3.1 The Proportion of Students Going Abroad for Exchange Declined Significantly, and Cross-Border Mobility Was Restricted in Phases

QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) (2020), a global higher education analyst, released a report entitled "How COVID-19 is impacting prospective international students across the globe" in December 2020, which investigated the plans and schedules of international students from various countries to study abroad for two years. According to the survey, 59% of international students decided to postpone their study plans in March-April 2021, with the highest increase of 71% in July-August 2021. 67% of international students decided to postpone their study plans in September-October 2021. 48% of Chinese students decided to postpone their study

plans; 6% of Chinese students decided to change their country of destination; 4% of Chinese students decided to give up studying abroad. In the past two years, potential international students have chosen to postpone or change their study plans to the second year of their studies. According to the survey, 54% of students decided to postpone their study to the following year in March-April 2020. However, while the percentage of students changing their study destination is lower, the percentage increases slightly from 8% in March-April 2020 to 16% by the end of 2020 and stabilizes at 14% until the end of 2021. Overall, global student mobility will see a downward trend, with a phased restriction of cross-border mobility, followed by varying degrees of recovery. The changes in the global higher education market are mainly manifested in the strengthening of regional mobility. The pandemic has caused a temporary decline in the scale of Chinese studying abroad, while bringing the overseas study boom of Chinese students over the past 20 years to a virtual end (Liu, Gao, Altbach & Vit, 2020). The University of Wisconsin predicts a loss of \$170 million in spring 2020 just to return dormitories, dining halls, and parking spaces, and \$150 million from Bucknell's \$867 million endowment (Friga, 2020).

3.2 New Changes in the Way Students Attend Classes, With Online Instruction Becoming the Preferred Option for Schools

The sudden outbreak of the pandemic caused a change in the way students attended classes, with most schools adjusting from offline courses to online instruction, teachers beginning to explore new teaching models, and students choosing online classes when they were unable to leave the country. For the acceptance of online classes, QS conducted a survey on global student satisfaction. According to the report, 47% of students were willing to choose online classes in March-April 2020, 27% were not willing to choose online classes, and 26% were not sure; May-June 2021 was the lowest, only 44% of students were willing to choose online classes; 52% of students were willing to choose online classes in September-October 2021, 30% were not willing to choose online classes, and 19% were not sure. It can be seen that students hold conservative ideas about online courses at the beginning of the pandemic, with less than half willing to choose online courses. Along with the increased uncertainty of offline courses, more than half have chosen online courses as an alternative by the end of 2020. Currently, the most urgent challenge for higher education institutions is that they lack the necessary technology to increase student engagement and interaction with online courses. To respond to student demand, educational institutions should address student demand for online courses by strengthening infrastructure, improving the online environment, and increasing fundings. Educators around the world are faced with the dual difficulties of not only

adjusting course delivery methods, but also raising their own awareness of online courses. With online learning no longer on the margins and new pedagogical practices emerging, educators are experimenting, broadening the boundaries of their knowledge and considering more carefully the art of teaching. With the growing popularity of blended multiple classroom settings, more attention is being paid to issues of accessibility and learner variability. At the same time, teachers and students have a certain unfamiliarity with online teaching and learning that requires adjustment over time. Changes in the classroom environment undermine student engagement, and teachers are increasingly concerned about the level and manner of interaction with students as they are unsure whether they need to teach online or return to face-to-face instruction and are unable to adapt pedagogy appropriately to either scenario.

3.3 Traditional Study Abroad Methods Are Changing, and Local Internationalization Is Being Emphasized

According to the European Association for International Education (EAIE), as of 2015, 56% of European universities have incorporated in-place internationalization into their strategic planning, and 64% declared that they will take substantial actions to promote this process (2015). Universities in Latin America, Africa, and other regions are also gradually moving forward with the implementation (Chan, 2012). According to a 2011 study by Krista M. Soria et al. that tracked 213,160 undergraduate students in the United States, students with studying abroad experience compared to those who received an international education locally had higher levels of global, international, and intercultural competencies, and intercultural competencies (Soria & Troise, 2014). The reasons for this are that cross-border learners cannot effectively integrate into the local learning environment and lack participation in cross-border learning; cross-border learners learn one-sided knowledge and cannot fully absorb the knowledge system of the home country; cross-border learners are unable to understand the local culture while learning and cannot achieve overall transfer. The concept of "local internationalization" was introduced by Bengt Nilsson, Vice Rector of Malmö University, Sweden, at the 1999 European Association for International Education (EAIE) Spring Forum. In his report "Internationalization at Home-Theory and Praxis", he first fully explained the concept of "internationalization at home". The concept of "in situ internationalization" was first fully explained in his report "Internationalization at Home-Theory and Praxis" (Zhang & Liu, 2017). "Local internationalization" is understood as "the integration of international and intercultural dimensions into formal and informal curricula for all students." The focus and essence of local internationalization lies in the content of the curriculum and the way it is taught. Therefore, for the

majority of students, the introduction of international and intercultural elements into the curriculum, the participation of quality foreign teachers, and the transformation of teaching methods and approaches in the post-pandemic era will impact the content of education and lead to more effective outcomes and values than student mobility. Knight (2001) divides internationalization into two trends, namely internationalization abroad and internationalization at home. She emphasizes that internationalization abroad involves various forms of cross-border education, including the mobility of academics, students, scholars, curricula, and research programs. Whereas, internationalization at home encompasses activities that encourage students to develop global thinking, cross-cultural skills and international understanding. Compared with the traditional international talent cultivation model in universities, the most distinctive feature of in-situ internationalization is its group inclusiveness, which seeks to ensure that all students on campus can receive international education and cross-cultural enrichment (Tsai, 2021). In the current context, “local internationalization” should be proposed and studied as a major issue.

3.4 Reorganization of Student Mobility Patterns and Changes in Study Abroad Destinations

According to Simon Marginson (2020), it will take at least five years for international higher education mobility to recover. Atterbach argues that the pattern of international higher education mobility may be reorganized after the end of the pandemic. There is a gradual shift in study destinations from Europe and the United States, among others, to Asia and the Middle East (Zhou, 2020). According to the 2021 U.S. Open Doors Report published by IIE, the total number of international students in the United States for 2020-21 was 914,095, a decrease of 15%. As China has made good progress in its pandemic prevention and control posture with countries such as South Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore, which have transformed from international student outflow countries to emerging inflow countries in recent years, it is foreseeable that Asian countries will become new study destinations favoured by international students in the coming years. Some studies have shown that the aforementioned countries have consistently pursued an open policy towards international student mobility, emphasizing the balance between inflows and outflows and actively joining the competition in the international student mobility market (Zhong, 2019). At the same time, the pandemic has restructured the political landscape and adjusted the educational landscape and governance system with it. The pandemic disrupts the original educational ecosystem and tests the governance capacity and capability of educational administrators. Online courses replace traditional classrooms, online teaching methods face great challenges, and teachers’ online teaching capacities are being tested, forcing

university governance system to reconsider how to reform education methods and approaches, improve management effectiveness, reduce management costs, achieve high-quality teaching results and promote education and teaching reform in a deeper way under the new situation. The improvement of management effectiveness will bring great benefits to institutions’ governance, and management staff should summarize it in time and solidify the efficient working model through the network, so that it can become a regular mechanism for management operation.

4. CHINA’S STUDENTS INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROMOTION STRATEGY

Xi Jinping (2020) pointed out that in the face of the severe and complex international pandemic and the world economic situation, we should adhere to the bottom-line thinking and be ideologically prepared to cope with changes in the external environment for a longer period of time and be prepared to work. In the post-pandemic era, the previous physical communication, which was mainly in the form of cross-border movement of people, has turned into online communication, which is mainly in the form of information interaction; the traditional cross-border education cooperation of students and cross-border research cooperation of teaching and research staff have turned into the development of online international education courses and online joint research and development. However, we still need to adhere to the concept of opening up education to the outside world, implement the educational ideology of “high-level cooperation with world-class resources”, and explore a new paradigm of regular international cooperation and exchange in pandemic situations.

4.1 Empowering Online Education and Improving the Education Ecology

It is undeniable that the new coronavirus pandemic has had a significant and potentially lasting impact on international higher education. On the one hand, COVID-19 acts as a disruptive force that impedes international travel and limits students’ international educational experiences. On the other hand, the past two years have been a catalyst for change in the education industry. New models for internationalizing online education have been proposed and applied to the education sector. Online courses developed by countries during the pandemic are becoming more sophisticated, and distance learning will become a standby to offline courses as an option for future international students (Engestro, 1987). As S. Marginson points out, “online education” will no longer be seen as an standby to the traditional classroom and an inefficient imitation of face-to-face instruction, but as a unique product and an important branch of higher education (Zhou, 2020). Through the Internet, teachers

and researchers can communicate with each other and with students. Online education may remain as a module of internationalization of higher education.

First of all, our country should play a leading role in the culture of online education and focus on improving the quality and scope of online learning as we continue to promote online education and bring light to a more sustainable and flexible approach to education. At the same time, we should be mindful that face-to-face and/or physical interaction is arguably what universities are all about. Universities play a pivotal role in shaping the direction of humanity and society as important social institutions, with human interaction and interconnectedness at the core of humanity. Digital courses and platforms complement and enhance the mission of the university, but cannot replace physical interaction and connection. In the long run, digital courses, MOOCs products and micro-credentials will enhance the quality of the educational experience and will be seen as an additional learning resource. Related research shows that while international students recognize the benefits of online learning, there is still a strong desire to study abroad in person and take full advantage of the experience. Because COVID-19 exists to varying degrees around the world, there is relative flexibility in choosing a study destination, and how a country responds to the coronavirus pandemic may influence this choice.

Second, in the context of the normalization of the pandemic, the network is used as an advantage to build faculty research teams, to give strong play to the power of international masters, to coordinate and allocate resources, to target the strategic needs of national science and technology development, and to actively explore new modes of online collaboration in international research. Encourage teachers to strengthen cooperation with international organizations and international academic institutions, actively participate or take the lead in organizing international and regional major scientific programs and scientific projects, propose or participate in international standard-setting and technical assistance, and enhance the power to speak in the international academic and industrial communities. In addition, we actively recommend high-level talents to hold important positions and undertake core work in international academic organizations, promote and advance academic experts to undertake the work of editor-in-chief and editorial board members of important international academic journals, as well as to undertake the work of chairpersons of top international academic conferences or program committees, and actively support professional teachers to participate in international education rule-making, international education and teaching assessment and certification, and enhance teachers' scientific research ability and level.

4.2 Promoting Local Internationalization and

Internalizing Educational Patterns

Local internationalization plays a crucial role for developing countries in the search for educational equity. In Brazil, only 2% of graduates have had an international course of study. Local internationalization facilitates the extension of international and intercultural training processes to the vast majority of students and contributes to the achievement of educational equity in the context of restricted cross-board mobility. At the same time, in-place internationalization is highly compatible with the value pursuit of universities, which takes the growth and success of students as the core orientation and ultimate destination of university development. Therefore, in the current context, in-place internationalization is recognized by most countries as a method and means to achieve universal internationalization.

In terms of the scale of students from outgoing countries, China holds the top position, with India follows behind. Before the pandemic, internationalized education was not so focused by the public due to the high cost of study. After the pandemic, local internationalization as a branch of internationalization of higher education has been highly respected by the student population. The current trend of establishing global campuses is not decreasing, and it is foreseeable that this trend will increase along with the development of the global pandemic. Firstly, China should rely on its strong educational advantages, find its own positioning during the period of great changes in the global educational landscape, improve its educational system and mechanism, attract more international students to study in China, improve the educational management of international students, further improve the management of convergence, and strengthen international students' sense of identity and belonging to China to build a higher education plateau. Secondly, using the existing international resources and platforms of higher education, opening up the sharing mechanism of information resources, especially international information resources, providing students with online learning resources, interspersing online courses in the traditional lecture mode, integrating online education into formal education, incorporating traditional teaching methods, and consciously running through intercultural courses and their internationalization concepts in the teaching process to create an immersive international experience.

4.3 Strengthen the Reform of Institutional Mechanism and Create a Soft and Hard Environment for Internationalized Online Education

In terms of the irreplaceability of value, the three major functions of higher education are firstly, talent cultivation, secondly, scientific research and secondly, social service. At its root, talent cultivation is long-term and fundamental, and needs to be given priority in order to avoid haste (Wang, 2021). The 4th generation of industrial

revolution triggered by the new round of technological revolution represented by information technology and digital technology will also bring a comprehensive and profound impact on the global division of labor (Research groups of development research centre of the State Council, 2019). Talent competition becomes an important factor of international competition in the coming years. According to this principle, the primary task of universities is talent cultivation, especially intercultural competence cultivation. Although there is no clear definition of intercultural competence, it is widely recognized as a process involving intergroup and self-transformation, in which the individual's attitude towards the target and native culture drives significant changes in his or her perception. Intercultural competence must always involve a mutual and active process of knowledge transmission that contributes to the refinement of individual knowledge, personal and/or group knowledge, and group knowledge (Yang, 2021).

First, our universities should make full use of existing high-quality international educational resources to create an international campus with local characteristics and invite international scholars to teach online so that students can receive the latest cutting-edge knowledge of internationalization and realize the transfer of students' intercultural competence. Secondly, in order to cope with the technological requirements of online teaching and research, relevant national administrations should play a leading and coordinating role, invest in information and technology infrastructure, establish a reliable and effective national digital network, and improve teachers' digital literacy and effective participation skills. National regulatory authorities should establish a quality assurance monitoring mechanism and evaluation system for online courses. Again, we will vigorously create cross-cultural exchange courses, improve the international knowledge structure system, and form a comprehensive knowledge network. By holding online international conferences and sharing scientific research information, we provide students with an international environment and exposure to cross-cultural things, thus enhancing their international comprehensive literacy.

4.4 Strengthen the effectiveness of Sino-foreign cooperation and consolidate the level of foreign cooperation

Facing the new and higher requirements for China's higher education in the new era and new situation, we should expand the opening of education and conduct high-level cooperation with world-class resources to run schools. The Implementation Plan for Accelerating the Modernization of Education (2018-2022) issued in February 2019 proposes to accelerate the cultivation of high-level international talents and improve the quality of Sino-foreign cooperative education (Guo, 2019). As a new form of absorbing international resources in China,

Chinese-foreign cooperative schools have been developed for decades and have stockpiled considerable educational resources. At present, Sino-foreign cooperative education institutions (projects) mainly establish cooperative relationships with foreign universities and jointly train students in China and abroad. In the context of the normalization of the pandemic, there is a need to release the educational potential through Sino-foreign cooperative education, create an educational highland, bring into playing the great energy of international educational resources, and solve the current problem of students' inability to leave the country.

First, expand cooperation with world-class universities, actively explore new forms of Sino-foreign cooperative institutions (projects), declare nationally urgent professional fields, and provide a platform and solid ground for the country to address international talent training. For example, Zhejiang proposes to introduce 20 famous universities at home and abroad, including 3-4 new Sino-foreign cooperative colleges, and support provincial universities to hold about 10 second-level colleges in cooperation with high-level universities at home and abroad (Li, 2019). Secondly, the natural advantages of Chinese-foreign cooperative schools are brought into play by using foreign teaching materials, interspersing a lot of internationalized contents in the domestic teaching environment, and using the virtual environment to develop horizons. We will develop more diversified online internationalization programs to enrich students' international exchange knowledge. Again, by releasing the vitality of schooling and increasing the number of enrolment quotas, the high-quality development of Chinese-foreign cooperative schools can be realized. In the fall semester of 2020, China has provided more options for students who are hindered from studying abroad to attend school by appropriately increasing the enrolment quotas of some Chinese-foreign cooperative institutions and programs (Ma et al. 2021). Chinese-foreign cooperative education should become the preferred solution and an important grasp to deal with the global pandemic.

5. CONCLUSION

Internationalization is a process and a change in mindset, and internationalization has now shifted from structural diversity to cultural diversity. The arrival of the pandemic is destined to make a return to the previous way of learning in universities impossible in the near future, forcing universities to take a giant leap towards digitization and the development of virtual learning, which has many potential spaces to be explored. However, "physical learning," face-to-face interaction and social interaction will never go away. The year 2022 and beyond will be a period of experimentation with virtual learning and a new balance between fully virtual and face-to-face

communication. In this phase, educational administrators in universities should try to find new models of international cooperation and communication.

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