The Internationalization of Higher Education
The COVID-19 Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The current COVID-19 epidemic has had an influence on international education and cultural communications, as well as the emergence of anti-internationalization in higher education. Due to the lock-down policies with some considered safety reasons, the mobility of people for the internationalization of higher education has been reduced and some new online teaching approaches have emerged. This study revealed that the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on the internationalization of education have had more negative than beneficial effects, particularly on students and economics. Some campuses and national systems that depend on international student enrollments for income (e.g., tourism) are to be severely harmed. Also, this study found that despite online teaching having some negative effects on students' learning experiences, online education has expanded options for people to transfer knowledge to a larger audience. In addition, this study emphasized a greater focus on more innovative research into the internationalization of higher education, as well as some deeper connections and collaborations between various countries and regions in the future.

Keywords: Internationalization, Higher education, Covid-19 Pandemic, Online Education, Economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of universities between countries began during the medieval period, such as visiting exchanges and unrestricted movements among teachers and students [1]. When reviewing the internationalization in western Europe, the feudal system had reached its peak of development in the 11th and 12th centuries, when the power of royalty has grown stronger, and society has become more stable [2]. The emerging citizen class had become the primary driving force behind societal growth, posing new political, economic, and cultural demands. During this period, the pursuit of new knowledge had become trendy; and as a result, new educational institutions and forms began to develop, during which the medieval university is the most noteworthy. The original medieval university was a kind of autonomous center of teaching and learning, whose primary goal was to develop the specialists required by society. Hence, medieval universities frequently divided instructions into four specialized colleges: arts, law, theology, and medicine. During this period, it was popular to build universities in major cities of Europe (e.g., Paris, Oxford, Cambridge) and to establish several prestigious universities.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the concept of studying abroad was popular in Europe, which meant students go to foreign universities as part of their domestic degree program [3]. By the end of the twentieth century, the international mobility of students had been developed throughout Europe and had become a more essential component of higher education policy, both at the national and institutional levels [3]. Furthermore, Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Korea have actively participated in the process of internationalization of higher education [4]. For example, not only the expansion of foreign partnerships but also a growth in the percentage of export and import of students at universities in these countries have been increased during this period. In the 21st century, the internationalization of higher education had accelerated considerably [5]. The internationalization of higher education was reflected not only by an increase in the number of students studying abroad but also by the establishment of international branch colleges with many academic staffs from other countries [6]. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) data, the number of university enrolment of international students has increased between 2000 and 2012, rising from 2 million to more than 4 million students [7]. Furthermore, it is

assumed that overseas students account for around 2% of all university enrolments worldwide.

However, the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak has been a heated topic in higher education with severe effects, particularly on student mobility. Many countries have reduced the number of international flights since the COVID-19 outbreak, which limits the internationalization of higher education during the epidemic. For example, in China, many students were hesitant to continue their studies overseas for safety reasons [8]. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, many international students have been unable to return to their colleges, and several universities are offering online courses to international students. Online education has also aroused widespread concerns among some academics, arguing that many students may dislike online education owing to the loss of the campus experience [9]. However, online education has also increased the potential to deliver knowledge to a broader audience to some extent. The appearance of the COVID-19 epidemic has had a greater negative impact on higher education's internationalization. As a result, more understanding and respect between different countries of the world are required to cooperatively promote the internationalization of higher education.

2. THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

2.1 The Impact of Studying Abroad on the Internationalization of Education

The global outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic has affected educational and cultural communications between countries, which has had an impact on the development of anti-internationalization in higher education [9]. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, many countries have significantly reduced the number of international flights, thus slowing down the internationalization of higher education during the epidemic. In China, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, many students were not willing to continue their studies abroad for considering safety reasons [8]. Viner, Russell, Croker, Packer, Ward, Stansfield, Mytton, Bonell and Booy assert that a few countries (e.g., China, the U.K.) have adopted several closure policies of schools as part of their efforts to control the spread of the epidemic [11]. However, these closure policies have had an impact on the mobility of people for the internationalization of higher education, particularly leading to a reduction in internationalized experiential learning.

The physical mobility of people still plays an irreplaceable role in international education for reasons of the curriculum, academic exchange, and dissemination of knowledge. Since the COVID-19

epidemic raises new concerns about the future of international higher education, Mok, Xiong, Ke and Cheung are concerned about whether COVID-19 can have a negative impact on international education and student mobility [12]. Dennis expects a decrease in international students to the most popular countries, and he also predicts a global decline in international student mobility in this situation. [13]. For example, according to the Institute of International Education, around 90 % of US colleges and universities predicted a reduction in international student enrollments in the academic year of 2020–2021, with 30 % of Higher Education Institutions predicting a considerable decrease [14]. Based on a recent British Council research published in April 2020, 39% of Chinese students, as the U.K.'s main source of foreign students, are hesitant about cancelling their courses [12].

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, Chinese students cancelled or revised their plans to study abroad for health and travel limitations. The Chinese government also issued certain warnings, alerting students not to travel to specified destination countries (e.g., Australia) for safety concerns [15]. Due to the different distributions of epidemics among nations and regions, student movement trends will be various in different countries. East Asian countries and regions, for instance, with a better situation and epidemic management, will be possible major choices after this period [12]. However, in this case, if the number of students remaining in their home country grows, there may be increasing pressure for further education or a rise in the number of students applying to schools.

The effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on the internationalization of education seem to have had more negative than beneficial effects. Altbach and De Wit indicate that the COVID-19 issue is threatening higher education, which may have a detrimental influence on supporting internationalization at a period when international collaboration is more important than ever [16]. Because of the epidemic, many international students have not been able to go to the university to attend classes physically, which may reduce their feelings about the experience of studying abroad. Many students will be less likely to communicate with others because of the lockdown policies of some universities, and some students may even have psychological problems. In addition, restrictions on visas and security concerns may reduce the demand for students to study abroad, leading to some cancellations of students' plans to study abroad and some international communications. It may hinder the process of higher education.

However, the above situation has some benefits for the development of education. For example, many international academic conferences have shifted from offline meetings to online zoom meetings or have adopted a dual-track system. Online academic

conferences can reduce participation limitations, allowing more people to participate. Furthermore, due to the epidemic, several universities have adopted an online course. Since students do not have to travel abroad and take classes in person, taking online classes at home could save money on accommodations and other expenses, allowing students with more economic difficulties to study.

2.2 The Mutual Effects of Economic Shocks and Education

The mutual effects of economic shocks on education are mainly negative in both educational inequality and income sources. The COVID-19 crisis is expected to increase a variety of inequalities in higher education, both worldwide and within nations [16]. COVID-19 is bringing a severe economic recession in most nations throughout the world, as well as a decline in demand for higher education internationalization. Molea and Năstasă argue that this will to some extent hinders the process of internationalization of global higher education [17]. The COVID-19 epidemic has led to the closure of campuses in many places, and the capacity to respond to the epidemic varies greatly between countries, regions, and universities. Although most universities have adopted online education as a mode of teaching and learning, there are differences in the hardware and software preparation based on different universities in different countries and regions to face online education. For instance, the hardware such as access to proper technology and network speed, or even to the Internet at all. And the software like whether the teacher and student could use the Internet easily. In the middle of the worst global health crisis in decades, impacts on higher education will be significant and primarily negative, exacerbating disparities and inequities across students, institutions, and nations. There will be considerable worldwide variances, which will have more negative impacts on impoverished universities [16]. The COVID-19 epidemic is bringing a severe economic recession in most countries worldwide, thus decreasing families' capacity to pay tuition fees, and income considerations will temporarily decrease overseas study demand.

Until now, the worldwide process of higher education internationalization has been intrinsically connected to economic progress. This over-dependence of the internationalization of education on economic factors is a negative phenomenon. Instead, the current internationalization of mobility, which is heavily eroded by economic motives, has some negative consequences for building a global knowledge society. For some countries, the internationalization of higher education is one of the main sources of income [9]. The occurrence and outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic have affected the initial plans of most students to study abroad, thus having some negative effects on those countries where

the internationalization of higher education is a major source of economy.

2.3 The Impacts of Online Education

The COVID-19 epidemic has caused international students' difficulties in returning to campus, so many universities are offering online education courses to international students [9]. After the COVID-19 epidemic, online education has become more important in people's lives, because the pandemic has led schools, universities, and corporations to work remotely, thus increasing the usage of online learning [18]. Although online education is still in progress, numerous different views on online education have emerged. Marginson argues that most students have a much higher demand for offline education than online education, and many students will be dissatisfied with online education because they cannot get the full and authentic campus experience [9]. As the campus offline experience is a crucial part of studying abroad, offline classes are relatively more varied than online classrooms in classroom interaction and comprehensive thinking development. Although students can acquire a lot of knowledge through online education, it is an incomplete campus experience for them. Moreover, most teachers in some countries are not trained in distance learning courses and lack the advanced skills necessary to teach online, many of them are unable to adapt to online teaching [16]. For these teachers, it is difficult for them to manage online group discussions effectively, as well as organize online assignments and examinations. Creating an online interactive and effective classroom environment is very challenging in these situations. In addition, Altbach and De Wit believe that the quality of online education can vary significantly from country to country and region to region due to their economic status [16]. For example, in some regions, the limitations of network technology and the inability to update relevant network equipment may lead to low-quality teaching and learning.

However, some scholars argue that online education promotes opportunities to deliver knowledge to a wider audience, as well as to students who may have traditionally studied by correspondence or distance learning. If courses are online, they are more progressive and democratic, promoting wider participation and equity [19]. Also, online education not only allows students to read or save their educational materials, but also promotes communication, collaboration, and assistance between students and teachers [18]. With the advancement of technology, online education has gained considerably more benefits over traditional teachings, such as the ability to achieve both personal and interpersonal contacts among students synchronously and asynchronously.

Admittedly, online education continues to become one of the effective ways in various countries to deal with

the COVID-19 epidemic blocking the physical mobility of students [16]. To better promote cross-cultural communication, Altbach and De Wit argue that countries should continuously optimize their online education patterns [16]. On the one hand, they should explore ways to improve teachers' internationalization skills. On the other hand, they should make appropriate use of online technologies to guide teachers and students to collaborate and communicate online and to accelerate the internationalization of teaching and learning. Every country and region should use different forms of social media and online teaching tools to maximize the quality of teaching, help online learning become more efficient for students, and promote the internationalization of higher education.

3. SOLUTIONS

Some scholars are pessimistic about the possible impact of COVID-19 on the internationalization of higher education, arguing that this situation could further hinder the process of internationalization. For instance, the COVID-19 epidemic has posed several problems to higher education in terms of teaching, learning, collaborative research, and organizational governance as shown in the above paragraph. However, some scholars believe that COVID-19 may also bring about positive factors such as the restructuring of the global higher education internationalization landscape and the innovation of internationalization development models [9]. Furthermore, this epidemic provides a good chance for all stakeholders to reconsider and possibly re-design higher education with an appropriate risk-management strategy [12]. From a research perspective, COVID-19 has prompted the academic community to focus on new approaches to internationalization and to develop more innovative research. Rizvi comments that the post-epidemic era is likely to see significant changes in the global patterns of internationalization in higher education, as well as the formation of more diverse models of international development [20]. As the focus of international development of higher education varies from country to country, each country has to do its best to explore the model that suits its national development, and therefore the future model of internationalization of higher education will not be unique [20].

Furthermore, during the epidemic, cooperation in international higher education has been highlighted. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemics, many detrimental impacts on worldwide higher education, governments, institutional officials, and professors recognize that individual organizations and nations cannot cope with this crisis on their own. On the other hand, cooperation is critical. However, while reestablishing global connections would be challenging, the epidemic gives a valuable opportunity to strengthen regional cooperation [12]. Altbach and De Wit claim that people should focus

on the quality of education and intercultural competence, thereby developing a more inclusive internationalization system that involves more students and teachers in internationalization activities [16].

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude, with the topic of the development of internationalization in higher education, this study has analyzed the profound influence of COVID-19 on global higher education. The emergence of COVID-19 has led to changes in the political, economic, and educational environment, facing the international development of higher education. With the expansion of globalization and the internationalization of higher education, the interest of students in higher education has risen. However, the COVID-19 epidemic has greatly decreased international students' mobility due to travel restrictions, university lockdown, and students' concerns about their health. Mostly, it also has some negative economic impacts.

As a result, it may indicate a long, confusing, and chaotic change. Even though the COVID-19 epidemic has had a detrimental impact on higher education internationalization, the COVID-19 epidemic has led to greater attention on new modes of internationalization and more innovative research into the internationalization of higher education in the future. Closer connections and cooperation between different countries and regions will enable more students and teachers to participate in internationalization activities, thereby promoting the process of internationalization in higher education.

In terms of future implications, as the internationalization of higher education has positive influences on both national and institutional levels, this study can not only potentially provide implications for teachers and students, but also for educators of institutions and policymakers to learn from the internationalization history and cope with the upcoming, substantive challenges in the internationalization of higher education during the COVID-19 epidemic period.

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