



Research on the Online Learning Experience and Influencing Factors of Overseas Chinese Students in the Post-pandemic Era

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Abstract. In the post-pandemic era, the COVID-19 disease in China has been effectively controlled, but the global level it still rises and falls, and the internationalization of higher education countries slows down the global cross-border mobility of students, leaving Chinese international students to rely on online teaching to sustain their learning activities. This study provides insight into the experiences of Chinese international students in the UK, Canada, Japan, and Australia through interviews with seven Chinese international students located in the UK, Canada, Japan, and Australia, and analyzes the influencing factors behind their experiences of online teaching. Although they can learn the basics through online education, factors such as teacher teaching, educational evaluation, emotional atmosphere, and cultural experience influence students' learning experience of living abroad.

Keywords: Post-pandemic era, international students, internationalization of higher education, online teaching

1 Introduction

In the era of globalization, the internationalization of education is an important foundation and component of a globalized society, and the global mobility of human beings out of self-development needs is very active. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), "the number of international students worldwide exceeded 5.3 million in 2017, compared to 2 million in 2000[1]. However, in order to prevent and control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world took measures such as immigration control and campus control, which forced the physical flow of higher education internationalization to stop, resulting in the "largest disruption of education ever"[2]. In order to realize the "disruption of education" for international students, an unprecedented phenomenon of segregated education has emerged in the global education of international students. In the post-pandemic era, the COVID-19 pandemic in China has been controlled, but the development of the COVID-19 epidemic worldwide is still very uncertain and dangerous. Segregated education that relies on online teaching tools has worked in exceptional circumstances, but online classroom educa-

tion is not yet developed and the effectiveness of this form of teaching is difficult to guarantee. Although there are many studies on the problems and suggestions of online teaching at home and abroad, there are fewer studies on the experience of online courses for Chinese international students, who are the main force of international students in the world, and the Blue Book of China Study Abroad Development Report (2020-2021)[3] shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has not significantly affected the actual demand of Chinese students to study abroad. Not only that, analyzing the experience and influencing factors of online education from the perspective of international students reflects the student-centered online teaching model, which is conducive to promoting students' personalized development. Therefore, the theme of this study is the experience and influencing factors of online learning of college students in the post-pandemic era from the perspective of Chinese international students. From the perspective of Chinese international students, interviews were conducted with seven Chinese international students studying in the UK, Canada, Japan, and Australia to gain insight into their feelings about online teaching and analyze the influencing factors behind it, to promote the development of online education and the process of internationalization of higher education in China.

2 Research Methodology

2.1 Preliminary preparation

In order to ensure the authenticity and depth of the research results, the interview survey method adopted in this study focuses on the experience and influencing factors of online education of Chinese international students in the post-pandemic context. To leave a larger space for the interviewees to express their views, the research chose semi-structured interviews. The interview outline was determined based on the reading of online education-related papers, and the pre-drafted interview outline was adjusted during the interview process

2.2 Subjects

A total of seven Chinese students from four study destinations, including the UK, Canada, Australia and Japan, were selected as the key interviewees in this paper to ensure that the interviewees were sufficiently heterogeneous, especially in terms of study majors and study destinations, and that they had received online education for at least one semester. Except for one student who had already graduated, all the other six students were studying abroad for further education.

2.3 Process

After communicating with the interviewees by appointment, the author interviewed each interviewee for approximately one hour in a Tencent meeting or by QQ phone. After both sides of the negotiation initially entered into a cordial interview atmosphere,

the author conducted the formal interview according to the pre-drafted plan and recorded the whole process to take notes. After concluding the interviews, the author did qualitative processing of the interview data, converted the audio to text, examined the connections, and analyzed the commonalities in the overall context.

3 Study experience of Chinese students

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic is bound to have some impact on the internationalization of higher education, with a huge impact on international student mobility and a decrease in internationalized experiential learning. In the post-pandemic context, despite the gradual relaxation of closed-door policies in some countries, the physical flow of international students in higher education has not yet been fully facilitated, and many Chinese students are completing their studies through online teaching. As the concept of "student-centered" education is gradually becoming the consensus and pursuit of the global education community, many countries are applying it in practice[4]. Therefore, students' classroom experience plays a crucial role in testing the effectiveness of online teaching and improving the quality of online teaching. Through the analysis of the interview texts, Chinese international students generally approve of online undergraduate teaching, and they can gain a lot of basic knowledge through online education under the premise of ensuring learning autonomy, but it is not a complete study abroad experience. They think online education is just a useful tool to assist their learning and an emergency learning method for them during the pandemic period. Individuals' sense of self-directed learning, different course attributes and teaching styles of instructors all contribute to a different online learning experience.

On the one hand, respondents generally believe that online classes have little impact on learning the basics. In the post-pandemic era, many foreign schools support simultaneous online and offline teaching, and present online courses on multiple screens. Students in the cloud can see not only the instructor but also their classmates sitting in the classroom, and can interact with the instructor by unmuting, raising their hands, chatting boxes, etc., creating a learning experience almost identical to that in the traditional classroom. In addition, the online teaching process, looking for online teaching resources, extracting the important and difficult points of the chapter content, and preparing sufficient pre and post-class practice questions for students, the instructor invested more energy and time than in normal teaching. Therefore, most students could feel the objective and subjective support from the teachers, and generally believed that the teachers could provide them with more learning assistance. In addition, almost all respondents acknowledged the convenience that online courses bring to learning, such as the way online can be repeated, the freedom to control the pace of learning, the reduced commuting time to class, and the flexibility of the study schedule, so that some Chinese students also take advantage of the time difference for internships, where they work during the day and take classes at night to prepare for recruitment after graduation. Of course, online courses also greatly reduce the cost of studying abroad.

On the other hand, experiments and practice are an important and indispensable part of science and technology majors. Although some courses have carried out virtual simulation experiments to break the limitation of resources and space, "virtual" cannot replace "real" after all. The students still need proper operation practice to consolidate the learning contents and improve the learning effect. More importantly, for international students, the meaning of studying abroad is not only to learn the courses and develop professional skills, but also to explore their own diversity and possibilities under different education modes, to experience the exotic scenery and special culture in different countries, to develop language skills and critical thinking in cross-cultural communication, so as to expand the circle of friends, expand horizons, and become more tolerant and open. However, all these are difficult to achieve through online teaching.

4 Influencing factors

Based on the analysis and reasonable attribution of the interview contents of seven Chinese international students' online learning, the factors that affect their study experience are mainly the following four aspects

4.1 Education evaluation

In online classroom education, teachers lack real-time supervision of students to a certain extent and are not able to understand students' dynamics in all aspects[5]. For this reason, the tests, quizzes, and assessments conducted during online classroom education, due to their non-transparent nature, many of which amount to open-book exams on the Internet, can make students skeptical of the results of their online classroom education and distrust the results of online classroom education, believing that it affects the fairness of the assessment results and thus the satisfaction of online classroom education. Some respondents and their families even worry about the social recognition of the quality of online education for international students, which in turn affects the gold value of studying abroad in the future job market.

In addition, some schools directly put the content of offline exams from previous years online, which basically become open-book exams due to the lack of supervision, and therefore the assessment content is too simple; while some schools make up for the lack of supervision as much as possible by increasing the difficulty of the test papers, resulting in the assessment content being beyond the ability of the students. Moreover, for the assessment of laboratory classes, students cannot enter the laboratory to operate, and some students' grades are affected as a result. These do not truly reflect the student's learning outcomes and have an impact on their learning experience. Happily, teachers are constantly exploring the assessment methods and contents of online education, so that they can detect the real results of students' learning and increase the rationality and fairness of the combined assessment, thus improving students' learning experience.

4.2 Emotional atmosphere

When people cross borders, their relationship experiences, etc. are more transformative. If international students form cross-cultural contacts or connections with local people, they will learn more accordingly. In this process, most international students will build friendships with teachers, classmates, etc[6]. International students already face difficulties in cross-cultural communication such as cultural differences and language barriers, and online teaching provides few opportunities for Chinese international students to communicate with their classmates and fails to provide opportunities for Chinese international students to meet professors and participate in academic exchanges and international practices, which greatly affects Chinese international students to make foreign friends and expand their friendship circle.

In terms of teacher-student emotion, it is difficult for international students to establish personal contact with their teachers. Most of the interviewees reflected that they could not communicate with their instructors face-to-face in online courses, and although they could send emails with their teachers, they only revolved around study issues and rarely had emotional communication, and emails were a particularly cold thing, the immediacy was not that high, and the teachers would not reply quickly.

Student and student emotions: First, classroom communication and discussion is not possible. Although participation in class discussions has a lot to do with personalities, online discussions also discourage students from communicating. Online grouping is difficult, and even when grouped, there are APP restrictions - only typing and no voice - which, combined with language barriers or cultural differences may lead to less motivated discussions. Second, group collaboration lacks emotional communication and makes it difficult to build connections. Collaboration is only a collision of knowledge itself, but due to cultural differences and other reasons, it is difficult to get acquainted and there are few opportunities to stay in touch. For business students, they are missing a lot of human resources. Not only that, but online group collaboration can also result in misunderstanding of tasks due to language barriers. Finally, academic networking events, student activities, etc. are not available. For activities that are relatively low in attendance and not required to be offered by the school, most of them were canceled during the pandemic. Some interviewees believe that offline is better than online participation, even though it is sometimes difficult to integrate into club life. Chinese students going out to study not only need to learn basic courses, but also need to enhance their international perspective, participate in academic exchanges and international practices. Obviously, this is difficult to achieve by online teaching alone.

4.3 Cultural Experience

Experiential learning is very important for international education. Students improve their cultural understanding mainly through their own life experience in the country, i.e. experiential learning. Most Chinese students are eager to improve their foreign language skills and experience foreign landscapes and cultures during their study abroad. Due to the pandemic, Chinese students cannot go abroad, and online teaching

can hardly provide them with an immersive language environment and the opportunity to directly experience a foreign culture.

4.4 Learning atmosphere

Through the analysis of the interview texts, during the pandemic, the interviewees mostly took online classes in their dorm rooms or at home, and the devices required for online courses, such as cell phones, computers and other learning terminal devices themselves, were highly likely to affect their concentration. Not only that, the online classes lacked interaction with the teachers, they could not observe the teachers' expressions and body language, etc. up close, and they also lacked the opportunity to communicate with their classmates, which made it difficult to form a learning atmosphere. International students, some students are unable to study according to the school's arrangement due to time difference, and can freely arrange time to watch the video. However, students who lack learning initiative and motivation cannot plan their studies reasonably, so they gradually get out of the school schedule and cannot keep up with the teacher's teaching progress. Therefore, in the absence of school atmosphere and teachers' supervision, some students may lack self-discipline and self-control, and thus slacken their study, fail to plan their study time schedule rationally, and indulge in games and internet, resulting in students' poor experience during receiving online learning.

4.5 Learning environment

Time difference. Through the analysis of the interview texts, the time difference not only affects the class time of international students, but also has a certain impact on the completion of students' class work. When the pandemic first broke out, many students from other countries chose to stay in China or return to China for online study, which created a time difference problem. Although the lectures were repeatable, the recorded classes were even more interactive, increasing the inertia of learning and making the learning experience of international students suffer. As a result, many students insist on listening to live classes, and one interviewee studying in the UK mentioned, "My latest class last year was probably until after 1 am, or 2 am." This poses a great challenge to international students' interest and effectiveness in learning, and disrupts their biological clocks, requiring them to adjust their original time for rest and study, and staying up late affects their learning and work efficiency the next day.

Internet. In online classroom education, the word 'online' indicates the need for a quality wireless network, and for international students taking classes in China, the need for the network is extremely high for online learning of foreign live courses. Most of the interviewees believe that the network is generally stable, although there are lags during the course, due to the good network construction of the school and the high level of development of the online teaching platform. However, due to the network domain setting in China, Chinese students are often unable to log on to foreign schools' web-

sites to watch course recordings, submit assignments, etc., or communicate with their classmates inside and outside the classroom through foreign software, which in turn affects the learning experience and brings a lot of inconveniences.

5 Conclusion

In the post-pandemic era, Chinese students believe that although they can complete their basic courses through online higher education, it is not a complete study abroad experience. Studying abroad is not just about learning knowledge, it is a valuable opportunity to expand your circle of friends, appreciate foreign cultures and develop an international perspective. Obviously, these are things that online learning are difficult to achieve. The difficulty of ensuring the fairness of educational evaluation, the difficulty of establishing teacher-student emotions, and the difficulty of experiencing an immersive cross-cultural environment all have an impact on the study abroad experience. In this study, the author did not select enough interviewees due to the difficulty of obtaining interviewees and the high workload of interviews. Moreover, the interviewees' destination countries were not diversified enough and mainly focused on popular countries, which reduced the generalizability of the research findings. Future researchers can pay more attention to the heterogeneity of interviewees, increase the number of interviewees, and ensure the universality of the study.

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