



Studying Abroad in the COVID-19 Era: Challenges and Countermeasure Based on the Perspective of Chinese Students Abroad

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Abstract. The COVID-19 outbreak has not only brought tremendous challenges but also significantly influenced all aspects of society. Because of its influence, it is essential to reconsider the educational advantages of studying in another country. The study covered education abroad, which has taken on a new form in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak due to prior research. Additionally, several contemporary concerns have surfaced as a result of this paper. To begin, the change in pedagogical approaches has brought about a decline in the overall quality of the educational system. The third issue is that recurring tuition costs are assessed, and the second is that the school day has been shortened, leading to questions about students' academic credentials. To solve these problems, four different strategies can be implemented: improving teaching methods and elevating educational standards; preserving the legal and educational system and ensuring academic standards; standardizing tuition fees and eliminating the practice of selling academic credentials; and, lastly, combating opportunism and eliminating the environment of studying abroad.

Keywords: Chinese Students Abroad · Normal Condition of the COVID-19 · Overseas Education

1 Introduction

The increasing global demand for study abroad programs requires a comprehensive analysis of their long-term results (Zhou, 2020). Colleges and universities in Asian Countries and worldwide invest substantially in studying abroad as a significant aspect of their efforts to internationalize their campuses (McManus, Mitchell & Tracy-Ventura, 2014). In addition, studying abroad is generally regarded to provide optimal conditions to encourage second language (L2) development because of increased opportunities for casual L2 usage with expert users of the target language (Epprecht & Tiessen, 2012).

There may be no correlation between prior international experience and going overseas to study, according to the research of some researchers (Abrams, 1979). However, the vast majority of research shows that past foreign expertise Dwyer & Peters (2004) including international experiences before college, positively influences a student's willingness to study abroad (Exploring different countries for the first time allows individuals

to test if they can navigate an unexpected location) (Kevin, 2019). In addition, experiential learning abroad at a young age boosts confidence and prepares individuals to adapt to novel circumstances (Butin, 2010).

In December 2019, COVID-19 erupted unexpectedly and rapidly raced across the globe, causing devastating impacts and posing significant difficulties for the global population (Xie & Meng, 2021; Miller, Nancy, Penelope, Robert, 1999). As a result of the emergence of the novel coronavirus, countries around the world have had to take corresponding countermeasures (Bye, Dolores & Michael, 2007) such as closing the country, completing the city, closing the village, and even isolating the individual, resulting in social unrest, economic decline, and even changes to education and teaching (Nyaupane, Cody & Victor, 2011). The human race, however, will never admit defeat. People from all over the world unite to combat the COVID-19 outbreak, which is ravaging the globe (Bakalis & Therese, 2004). As a result, people have achieved progressive success after nearly three years of unrelenting struggle (Waibel, Petzold & Rüger, 2018). Countries worldwide have gradually returned to normal in all fields, and the COVID-19 pandemic has begun its typical phase (Athavaley, 2008).

During this time, the COVID-19 pandemic is still harming economic and social development, and humanity cannot afford to take it lightly (Bakalis & Therese, 2004). At the same time, China's educational system for students from other countries has taken on a look that has never been seen before and has resulted in several new challenges (Kevin, 2019). In particular, due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the United States has sped up the process of adjusting its policy towards China, and the attitude taken toward students studying abroad tends to become more stringent. It has been said so frequently (Hackney, David & Anci, 2012) that it is bewildering, and it has caused a great deal of uncertainty and fear among international students and the parents of those students (Durrant, & Dorius, 2007). The data on China's study abroad in 2021 shows, on the other hand, that 91% of the people who were initially scheduled to study abroad remain unwavering in their commitment to carry out their plans to travel overseas even during the epidemic (Zhou, 2020). The UCAS system in the United Kingdom has received over 610000 applications for studying abroad as of the 26th of January, 2022. Compared to the previous academic year, the number of students applying from mainland China has increased by 12%. In addition, according to the analysis done by the people's Daily Overseas Edition, in the typical scenario of the COVID-19 pandemic Beerkens, Souto-Otero, de Wit & Huisman (2016) the demand for Chinese students has not decreased, the destinations are more diverse, and the situation is more complex (Xie & Meng, 2021). This is based on the fact that the demand for Chinese students has not decreased despite the situation's complexity.

The number of Chinese students opting to pursue their educations outside of China is continuing to rise, which has resulted in an increasingly complex scenario (Miller & Nancy, 1999). Therefore, it is vital to reexamine international students' education while simultaneously accepting the challenge. This study will first investigate the challenges posed by international students' education from the point of view of Chinese students studying abroad. Then it will explore potential solutions to these challenges. This study aims to provide a reference for resolving Chinese overseas students' education (Waibel, Petzold & Rüger, 2018) challenges and optimizing applicable overseas study policies in

the context of the typical situation posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (Carlson, Barbara, John & David, 1991).

2 Problems of Chinese Students Studying Abroad Under the Normal Situation of Covid-19

2.1 The Change of Teaching Methods Leads to the Discount of Education Quality

Teaching methods have changed due to the normal situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular impact on the education quality of international students (Robert, 2021). To effectively combat the outbreak and prevent the spread of COVID-19, countries worldwide are being more cautious, with most countries temporarily closing their borders. As a result, international students worldwide cannot attend school as usual (Butin, 2010). Furthermore, because Affiliated schools can only seek teaching reform, they have adopted online teaching to carry out their teaching activities (Boyatzis & Kolb, 1995).

Using Tencent conferences, ZOOM meetings, DingTalk, and other platforms like WeChat and DingTalk as pedagogical aids are becoming increasingly prevalent. Although online education extensively uses modern multimedia equipment and technologies such as computers, mobile phones, iPads, and apps, it is not the same as traditional teachers and students who gather together to carry out face-to-face teaching (Dwyer & Peters, 2004). People are all aware of this, and although online education makes full use of such equipment and technologies, it is not the same because there are several disadvantages associated with online education (Isabelli-García, 2006) including the fact that it is unable to monitor the academic progress of pupils Gardner, Gross & Steglitz (2008) effectively. Because students can open the teaching app, then go to work or do other things, even if they have low self-discipline or are being dishonest about something they are learning (Bown, Dewey & Belnap, 2015). Second, it is impossible to conduct an accurate evaluation of the efficacy of teaching (OECD, 2018).

It is challenging for students to acquire, but students can finish the homework assigned by the teacher with the network's or other people's assistance (Robert, 2021). Third, it is difficult for genuine outcomes to be achieved through the interaction between instructors and pupils (Nyaupane, Cody & Victor, 2011). During the interaction process, people can see each other through the screen; however, teachers are unable to accurately observe the actual situation behind the expressions of the students Epprecht & Tiessen (2012) as a result, they are unable to understand the students very well and therefore are unable to improve teaching (Carlson, Barbara, John & David, 1991). In a nutshell, in the typical scenario of the COVID-19 pandemic, offline education is replaced with online instruction, the physical distance between teachers and students increases, and the quality of teaching is unavoidably negatively impacted (OECD, 2018).

2.2 The Shortening of the Academic System Has Led to Doubts About the Academic Level

During the normal COVID-19 pandemic, colleges and universities in some countries have shortened the academic system, resulting in the educational qualifications of overseas

students not being worthy of the name, which everyone has questioned (Zhou, 2020). It is understood that the theoretical systems of foreign master's and doctoral students are two and three years, the minimum years to ensure the quality of education and educational qualifications (Abrams, 1979). However, with the help of the pandemic, some colleges and universities have shortened the academic system by using flexible teaching, which obviously cannot ensure the quality of education. For example, for a doctor of education management in a university, the original academic system was three years, but later the school shortened the educational system to two years (Boyatzis & Kolb, 1995). According to the announcement on the treatment of returning to school after graduation and the list of doctors to be introduced of the same type issued by the personnel department of Shaoyang University in Hunan Province, China, on July 7, 2022, the 23 Philosophy (Education) doctors introduced from a foreign university of the university studied from August 2019 to December 2021.

Compared with the original “three-year academic system” and the “four-year academic system” of domestic universities in China, this has considerably “shrunk” (Athavaley, 2008). The case of Shaoyang University teachers studying abroad for a doctorate in Philosophy (Pedagogy) at a foreign university has aroused widespread doubts about the academic qualifications of the university; Shaoyang University and doctoral teachers and the leaders of the university have also been severely punished. It can be seen that although shortening the academic system accelerates the frequency of talent output and increases the number of talent cultivation, it can not guarantee the quality of education and the correct academic level and ultimately brings many adverse effects to universities and overseas students (Kevin, 2019).

2.3 Nonstandard Tuition Collection is Suspected of Selling Academic Qualifications

During the new normal COVID-19 pandemic, some colleges and universities do not follow the standard in charging students tuition fees. This illegal charging is mainly reflected in three aspects: the tuition is too expensive. According to statistics, in the case of online teaching, it will cost at least 200,000 yuan to complete three years of doctoral studies, and the tuition fees of some colleges and universities are even higher. Furthermore, higher education is also a public welfare undertaking (Miller, Nancy & Penelope, 1999). Therefore, colleges and universities should not raise the tuition standard too high, which is not conducive to the majority of students receiving education and disseminating progressive educational ideas in Colleges and universities (Ruggeri, 2010).

However, students' growth and progress may not match the high tuition fees (Bakalis & Therese, 2004). Second, the charging items are not transparent. Since studying abroad is mainly coordinated between schools and students through overseas study service agencies, tuition fees are generally collected and paid by agencies, so it is difficult for students to know the specific charging items of schools. Third, the charging method is unreasonable (Michael Paige, Fry, Stallman, & Josic, 2009). Some colleges and universities require students to pay half their tuition fees in the first semester, and some even require them to pay all their tuition fees at one time, which goes against the original intention of tuition collection. Such a way of charging tuition fees in Colleges and universities can easily give people the wrong impression of “spending money to buy

academic qualifications”. Moreover, it may damage the international image of colleges and universities (Dewey, 2017).

2.4 Opportunists Take the Opportunity to Seek Profits

Under the normal situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, speculators studying abroad took the opportunity to seek corresponding benefits. On the one hand, some universities in China act as opportunists. In the development process, some domestic universities need to rapidly increase the proportion of doctoral teachers in the school to obtain further development, such as applying for master’s authorization points, doctoral authorization points, and upgrading to universities. On the other hand, colleges and universities have neglected the quality and professional counterpart in pursuing the number of doctors. China’s relevant reports show that among Southeast Asian students and PhDs, some colleges have invested much money in training and introducing; there are some cases where the majors are not suitable, and the actual level is not high (Nyaupane, Cody & Victor, 2011).

Some teachers with low academic qualifications have become opportunists (Bakalis & Therese, 2004). Under the situation that the work units urgently need the doctor’s index, teachers with low educational qualifications see the dawn of hope and thus spend much money to apply for a master’s degree or a doctor’s degree abroad. There is nothing wrong with pursuing progress, but it is inappropriate to ignore whether the profession is right and the sustainable development of one’s profession in the future. Third, foreign universities act as opportunists (Isabelli-García, 2006). Taking advantage of the epidemic, some foreign universities took the opportunity to lower the entry threshold and expand enrollment. This way, it can expand its international influence and earn many economic benefits. In addition, study abroad service agencies act as speculators. Because of the urgent needs of domestic universities, foreign universities, and students, overseas study service agencies also see substantial business opportunities. Out of the original intention of seeking profits, they ignore regulating their behavior in the coordination process (McManus, Mitchell & Tracy-Ventura, 2014). In short, education and growth are noble in themselves, and serving education and the development of students is also noble. Nevertheless, if all parties have impure motives and only want to make profits, it will only backfire (Robert, 2021).

3 Countermeasures and Suggestions for Overseas Study During the Normal Situation of Covid-19

3.1 Optimize Teaching Methods and Improve Education Quality

During the new normal situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, overseas universities must optimize teaching methods and improve teaching quality. As countries have not entirely unsealed, teaching is mainly conducted online, so we need to focus on how to avoid the disadvantages of online education (Butin, 2010). The key to overcoming the drawbacks of online teaching lies in promoting offline face-to-face communication between teachers and students. However, during the normal COVID-19 pandemic, domestic students and

university teachers can not get together and have face-to-face exchanges. Therefore, “local learning” can be adapted to assist teaching and ensure teaching quality. “Local learning” is a teaching method designed and implemented by American colleges and universities for international students stranded in various parts of the world. The specific method is to open overseas campuses for students to study nearby or choose to sign inter-university exchange agreements with colleges and universities across the globe so that international students can study at local first-class universities and learn online courses at American universities. In addition, excellent teachers from local universities can also be hired to teach students centrally nearby (Michael Paige, Fry, Stallman & Josic, 2009).

In areas with a relatively high concentration of international students, it is possible to make arrangements with qualified local teachers to bring instruction to the student’s homes flexibly and conveniently (Kevin, 2019). Furthermore, to make it easier for students to attend schools nearby, educational institutions in various nations can increase their level of collaboration and open the door to reciprocal credit recognition. Take, for instance, the fact that Syracuse University and East China Normal University have agreed to collaborate.

As a result, students hailing from the Chinese mainland can enroll in courses at East China Normal University if they cannot continue their education in the United States during the fall of 2020. The Chinese Ministry of Education also stated that it would continue to support relevant colleges and universities in their efforts to accept international students for short-term study. This support would come from inter-university exchanges, entrusted training, and other forms of mutual credit recognition. In addition, the Chinese Ministry of Education would provide these students with a domestic learning platform (Abrams, 1979). To summarize, while the epidemic is in its normal state, there are many ways in which instruction can be improved to achieve the goal of higher educational standards (Dwyer & Peters, 2004).

3.2 Maintain the Proper Academic System and Ensure the Academic Level

During the normal COVID-19 pandemic, overseas universities must maintain the original academic system to ensure that the corresponding academic qualifications have a fundamental level. As mentioned above, some foreign universities have shortened their educational system by taking advantage of the epidemic, resulting in the academic level not being worthy of the name and a series of adverse consequences. Online teaching is less effective than offline teaching, even for the same class hours. Shortening the academic system by one year will make ensuring the right qualifications even more challenging. Long years of study do not mean a high academic level, but short years do not mean a high academic level. For a complex education project, only slow work can produce good work.

The Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, for instance, has not made any adjustments to the original structure of its academic program due to the pandemic. On the contrary, the university is even actively researching countermeasures to make up for the shortcomings of online teaching McManus, Mitchell & Tracy-Ventura (2014), garnering the favor of the vast majority of Chinese students in the process. Therefore, on the one hand, colleges and universities that allow their students to study abroad

should not meet the needs of the outside world without a bottom line. Instead, they should maintain sufficient determination, adhere to the academic system under normal conditions Carlson, Barbara, John & David (1991), ensure that the teaching quality is not affected, and get rid of any doubts about the educational level of students from the outside world.

On the other hand, based on the assumption that all involved parties are willing to agree to it, the standard length of time spent in school can have the minimal amount of time spent studying suitably increased. In a nutshell, we can ensure that the number of teaching hours is sufficient to guarantee the valuable content of educational qualifications by adhering to the academic plan or suitably extending the length of study. This can be accomplished by maintaining the academic program or extending the analysis length (Bye, Dolores & Michael, 2007).

3.3 Standardize the Collection of Funds and Eliminate the Sale of Academic Qualifications

Under the normal COVID-19 pandemic, all parties should standardize the collection of relevant funds, not turn universities into shopping malls, nor turn academic qualifications into commodities. First, universities studying abroad should standardize tuition standards. Specifically, it is to maintain a relatively stable tuition level for a certain period rather than take the opportunity to increase the tuition of international students (Steve, 2020). High tuition does not mean high-quality teaching quality, and low tuition does not mean low teaching quality. Secondly, overseas study service institutions should standardize the collection of service fees. As a bridge and link between the university and international students, the role of overseas study service agencies is fully recognized by all parties (Gardner, Gross & Steglitz, 2008).

Therefore, the collection of service fees by abroad study service organizations should be reasonable, open, and transparent so that international students can pay for them without hesitation (Broadbridge, Gillian, Susan & Ogden, 2007). Thirdly, universities and service institutions doing international research should harmonize their billing practices. The tuition cannot be charged in advance or entirely at once. Universities in several Southeast Asian nations, for instance, collect all tuition payments in a single amount through abroad study service firms, putting considerable financial strain on international students (Steve, 2020). Finally, as a massive public welfare endeavor, education should not become a profit-making venture. It may abolish the falsification of academic credentials and the selling of educational credentials by standardizing the collection of various funds (Beerkens, Souto-Otero, de Wit & Huisman, 2016).

3.4 Crack Down on Opportunism and Eliminate the Atmosphere of Studying Abroad

Under normal circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, all parties must crack down on opportunism and guarantee that the foreign education cause is pure. First, prevent domestic colleges from indiscriminately upgrading teachers' academic credentials in groups. The application for master's authorization points necessitates domestic universities to boost the proportion of instructors with master's and doctoral degrees (Durrant, &

Dorius, 2007). Still, they cannot hurry their way to success and make a tremendous leap forward. Second, avoid universities studying abroad and take advantage of the opportunity to decrease the admissions bar. Universities that study overseas should closely adhere to the bottom line, prioritize education quality, and avoid mass manufacturing. Thirdly, students studying abroad should avoid neglecting professional reality and seize opportunities to increase their academic credentials without consideration (McManus, Mitchell & Tracy-Ventura, 2014).

It is reckless opportunism for units and people not to blindly improve their educational capabilities in tandem with their professional reality. Fourth, be wary of abroad study service providers who seek to earn profit through this chance. There are increasing service institutions for studying abroad in China, but the quality of service varies. This is owing to the high demand for studying abroad. To achieve this objective, we must perform good oversight of all service organizations, prevent them from amassing wealth, and concentrate on enhancing service quality (Robert, 2021). Only through the concerted efforts of all parties to eliminate all forms of opportunism will we eradicate the atmosphere of studying abroad and promote its healthy growth (Epprecht & Tiessen, 2012).

4 Conclusion

This study investigates the challenges present in the education that international students currently receive from the Chinese students' point of view. The COVID-19 outbreak serves as the background for this investigation. Concurrently, due to the nature of these issues, investigations into the appropriate corrective actions are being carried out. This offers some reference points for colleges, students, and service institutions located overseas, allowing them to make rational decisions during the usual COVID-19 epidemic. However, this study does have a few drawbacks, including the following: Second, the majority of the coping mechanisms are standard practices, which are not innovative enough, and the feasibility is also up for question.

First, the problem analysis is shallow, without a deep-seated theoretical framework and appropriate data support. To summarize, under the typical circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of international students will continue to rise, the education of international students will grow more extensive, and at the same time, there will be an increasing number of issues and difficulties to contend with. In this unique period, the question of how to ensure the quality of education and the level of academic qualifications, how to put an end to the sale of educational qualifications, and how to suppress speculation so that the cause of overseas education can be better and better has become a relatively urgent and essential cause at present. This is because of the particular circumstances that have arisen.

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