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Internationalization at Home: Implications for Promoting Intercultural Competence of Domestic Students in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: With the deepening of economic globalization, the relations between China and other countries and regions are growing closer, the rising need for flexible knowledge workers drives the Chinese universities to develop the intercultural and global learning competence of students. The traditional ways are sending the students abroad and bringing international students in, then students can personally experience and be fully immersed in a different culture and education system, to promote their intercultural competence. The fluidity to some extent boosts the exchange of knowledge and the flow of talents. But compared to the number of students who stay in the homeland, mobility is still limited for the prevalence and development of internationalization in Chinese higher education. Therefore, internationalization at home becomes a vital part of equipping domestic students with global views and intercultural competence. The essay will review the explanations of internationalization at home given by many researchers, the premise and its importance of it. Then critically analyses the diverse aspects of it, the internationalization of teachers, the renewal of the curriculum and the "virtual" mobility (the distance knowledge exchange), the inspirations for Chinese universities to enhance the students' intercultural competence and its limitations additionally. Internationalization at home should be valued as an important guideline for universities to prepare students in a globalization world, and the strategy break through the limitations of the traditional approaches to cultivating an "international" student, the internationalization of higher education at home deepen and intensify the basic functions of education by the internationalization of teaching, students, curriculum, to cultivate the students with a global view, creative thinking and international competitiveness.

Keywords: Internationalization at Home, Chinese Universities, Intercultural Competence

1. Introduction

Macready and Tucker state that the proportion of the total international mobile student globally in higher education was 2% in 2007 [12], which shows that most students remained stable and the challenges faced by most universities. According to statistics published by the Chinese government in 2018, the total number of students who took part in the college entrance examination in 2017 was 9,400,000, while the total number of Chinese students studying abroad was 608,400, only 6% of the total student population realized the mobility. This means that in the context of economic globalization, most students entered a domestic university instead of being "international" students. Nevertheless, developing every student with global intercultural competence is necessary for today's interconnected and diverse society. Agnew and Kahn point out that apart from the traditional pathways such as sending the students abroad and bringing international students in, internationalization at home could be a comprehensive model to ensure all students have opportunities to be exposed in a global and intercultural learning environment and promote their intercultural competence [1].

The understanding of internationalization is the premise of defining internationalization at home. Knight gives a widely accepted definition of internationalization: "The process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary

education." [9]. This definition describes internationalization as a process and links it with education. Altbach and Knight further divide internationalization into different aspects, traditional internationalization, European Internationalism, developing-country internationalization and individual internationalization, which detailed the differences of various motivations and sources [2]. As internationalization is a universal and necessary process of education, higher education internationalization has become an integral part of higher education. Guan points out that the internationalization of higher education as a dynamic process is open, versatile and communicative, constituted of the internationalization of the curriculum, the mobility of students, engagement of international research program and so on [5]. Therefore, internationalization at home can be viewed as a branch to promote the overall international exchange.

2. Internationalization at Home, Concept and Practices

2.1. What Internationalization at Home Means

Internationalization is associated with mobility and intercultural exchange, while we always neglect the importance of promoting homeland internationalization but pursuing "just being there". Nilsson explains that "internationalization at home is "an any on-campus, internationally related activity – a process whereby international students engage with and thus enrich the lives of domestic students" [15]. Nilsson describes it as an interaction between international students and domestic students by setting diverse activities to fulfil its purpose. While Knight further explains this term by distinguishing between internationalization at home and internationalization abroad. The former one is cultivating the students' international view and intercultural skills while the abroad one includes all forms of education [10]. In other words, internationalization at home with the aim of training the skills while studying abroad is a subtle experiencing process. Baldassar and McKenzie add that the internationalization at home always along with "a set of units" selected to develop the academic content and improve cross-cultural competency [3].

Internationalization at home provides the potential mobile opportunities by internationalizing the curriculum and creating an intercultural approachable learning environment, which instead of benefitting the actual mobile few, reaches all students [3]. In addition, Beelen and Jones redefine the term as follows,

"Internationalization at home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments." [3].

Personally, the redefinition is the most completed and comprehensive one, including the emphasis of the internationalization at home, the curriculum-oriented activities, and implies its purpose and audience. It is selectively targeted to promote international and intercultural skills, knowledge and attitudes for all students.

2.2. The Internationalization of Curriculum, Teachers and "Virtual" Mobility

As discussed before, the realization of internationalization at home is unity from multiple aspects of internationalization. Based on the current studies about the practices carried out by many universities, the transformation of the original education is concentrated on the diversity and internationalization of curriculum, the internationalizing of teachers, and the distance communication exchange.

2.2.1. Internationalization of Curriculum

Knight points out the heart of the internationalization of home is the curriculum. The curriculum has a fundamental role, including curriculum and programs, teaching and learning processes, extra-curricular activities combined with cultural diversity [10]. In higher education, the curriculum setting in a university is a combination of electives and compulsories. The class, designed to broaden the students' views and promote multicultural understanding, was used to locate in an elective position. In comparison, Beelen and Jones argue that an accomplishment of the internationalization of curriculum should firstly relocate the curricular position to a formal, assessed one [4]. The results should be measurable, and what's more, the informal curriculum (non-assessed elements) can also work as a supplement with compulsory one to develop international and intercultural competencies in all students.

Scholars conclude a number of approaches to internationalizing the curriculum. First of all, the revision of textbooks and courses in correspondence to the content of global challenges and cross-regional issues. Then, comparative studies could be employed to unfold the existing educational programs. In addition, the joint power from the multiple sides to internationalize the courses, such as more international cooperation among universities, the acceptance of more international students in programs and research, and the collaboration between the regional and international to improve the quality of the courses [23]. The most typical feature of internationalizing the curriculum among Asian regions is the introduction of English-teaching courses. Even though the policy is being stereotyped about internationalization, the English-versed resources and sources remain the mainstream worldwide. Hence the language as a medium to spread diverse content and for smooth communication is of great importance. Ishikura researched the realization of internationalization at home in Japanese universities; the results have shown that the opening of English-medium courses in Japanese universities has been a strategy that can maximize student learning motives and decrease student course attrition rates [7]. Apart from the courses designed for improving students' language ability, offering more opportunities and smoothen their intercultural communication skills, the setup of the multicultural class also could be helpful. Agnew and Kahn state that creating global

learning communities in the classroom could benefit students to link their local experiences and international situations [1]. Enrolling in global coursework and attending internationally themed lectures will positively boost students' GII (global, international and intercultural) competencies [20]. In conclusion, the internationalization of the curriculum, with a basis of language (English), constituted by both the formal setting of multicultural courses and the informal intercultural activities, can primarily create an international learning context and promote corresponding competence.

2.2.2. Internationalization of Teachers

The internationalization of teachers is also a vital aspect related to this theme widely proposed. Olmedo and Harbon stress the importance of internationalizing teacher education for a display in the global arena [16]. They mainly research the ways teachers could employ to prepare themselves for intercultural teaching and the methods teachers conducted during a class to internationalize curricula and teach students effectively. The Midwest University in the United States initiated a cooperation with a local school for developing the teachers' linguistic and intercultural competence; instead of gathering all the teachers in a classroom and lecturing them, the university sent the teachers to a different country to experience and accompany with some historians and linguists. This educational program allowed teachers to learn about their students' "transnational" reality and influence their teaching views and approaches. As for me, the short-term shifting program for teachers will help them build a globalized classroom; back to the definition of internationalization of home we discussed before, the typical feature of it is for all. Selectively sending teachers could benefit more students; for one, experienced teachers could inject fresh blood into their original content and better link with the world development. For another, new teachers could be trained and adopt an intercultural teaching approach.

Internationalization at home needs the joint effort of students and teachers, which means the teachers need to modernize the whole instructional process. Then apart from the initial preparing training of teachers, during a class or a lecture, the role of teachers still needs to be internationalized. Kissock and Richardson view that the action plan for teacher educators should first embrace a global perspective, integrate diverse cultures and views into their teaching, and then be aware that the standards of effective teaching are transferable instead of being rigid [8]. The teachers should also demonstrate a broader understanding of local culture and our global village. Mak also finds that the small group activities' culturally diverse classes reinforce the learning environment [13]. The teachers during a class should build alliances across cultures. There is a range of inclusive practices such as group discussion, critical reflection, and using diversity within a class as a resource. In their case study, the teachers will encourage the small group members to share personal intercultural experiences, then display diverse solutions towards one global issue under different cultural backgrounds, and eventually explore the underlying values and dig the

transposition thinking of students. Therefore, teachers have to be internationalized by enhancing their expertise and preparing themselves for multicultural teaching [16]. The short-term mobility training program can personally effectively set up their global view and enhance their intercultural ability. The whole teaching process runs through the intercultural conceptual framework is the realization of internationalization of teachers.

2.2.3. Virtual Mobility

The continued advancements of society bring us several new approaches to realize internationalization at home. Not only modernize the teaching process but also create an immersive learning environment for all students, which is of great importance for the realization of full internationalization at home. Robson, Almeida and Schartner state that the development of digital learning provides students with a platform to interact with peers and professors from other cultures, which will facilitate and intensify the "global mindsets" of students [18]. By sitting in front of a computer, the students practise their foreign languages and engage with diverse cultures, and virtual mobility shapes their minds and promotes their cross-cultural competence. The construction of the university network base and modification of the e-learning environment can prepare a student with an ability to manage difference, change and complexity [14].

Altbach and Knight also stress the importance of e-learning when it functions as a motivation to internationalize higher education [2]. A new view is the international acceptance of degrees, especially in developing countries, as a new educational product will become more spread and a domestic education program. "The presence of technology had revolutionized academics when knowledge was externalized." [17]. The technologies such as virtual reality and 3D modelling reshaped the transmission of knowledge flow and traditional communication pathways. Instead of "being there", the students could virtually sit in a classroom to accept "cross border" educational lessons. In contrast, Beelen and Jones define this as campus internalization, with a focus on the overall improvement of electronic equipment, campus information technology and the exploitation of online resources, the applications of online tools [4]. Personally, national investment in higher education and the introduction of the latest equipment on campus indicates that virtual mobility is becoming a focus of realization of internalization at home in higher education.

3. Implications for Promoting Intercultural Competence in Chinese Universities

In his study about the path to internationalization in Chinese research universities, Yuan points out that the critical point is how to intensify internal strengths and create a better learning environment for attracting more international attention [22]. At the same time, the current problems are the limited number

of international students and the waste of local internationalization resources. To be more specific, in pursuing internationalization, the first choice is sending students abroad, which has potential problems such as the narrow audience and the high cost. Moreover, taking Peking University as an example, there are 2752 students from 108 different countries, the school hired more than 500 foreign experts, and hundreds of international conferences were held annually. However, a result showed that only 3.8 per cent of students participated in such conferences, and only 3.1 per cent chose to major in a course taught by foreign professors [21]. Huang also states the significance of maintaining a balance between global citizenship and regional identity [6]. The author points out that China is a typical example of one-way importing western ideas, academic norms and standards. Therefore, the problems that hinder the internationalization at home in China could be concluded as the traditional cognitive misunderstanding, the waste of inner resources and the balance between being international and maintaining own characteristics.

With a basis on totally different national policies and strategies, Huang develops three approaches: a government-regulated approach, a market-oriented approach, and a transitional approach [6]. The situation in China is obvious a government-regulated approach. The author pointed out that the limitations of incoming foreign programs in China and the involvement of authorities' control hinder the internationalization at home in Chinese higher education.

Back to the solutions, the Chinese universities should focus on developing the talent with a global vision, by the curriculum and educational content reform, and not only simply providing a platform for student mobility, but also prompting the teachers overseas training program [22]. In other words, the universities in China should, with an emphasis on developing internal international resources for a wider audience, increase publicity about the importance of being an intercultural talent nowadays, train the native teachers instead of simply hiring foreign instructors, and internationalize the curriculum should accompany with the focus on regional issues.

4. Conclusion

The internationalization of higher education cannot simply rely on sending students abroad, especially when cultivating each student with intercultural competence in a globalization era is of great importance. Agnew and Kahn argue that the universities should design, deliver a curricular and co-curricular activity for all students to increase their knowledge and understanding of the world [1]. Also, deliberately integrate and create an international, intercultural learning environment. Currently, the internationalization at home is mainly around the curriculum, the teachers, and the introduction of new technologies, which all offer the universities a clue to develop.

While Baldassar and Mckenzie put forward another project in this field that is seldomly being discussed [3]. The

engagement of domestic students, no matter their engagement with the internationalizing curriculum, teachers or equipment, also their interaction with international students. The students as the audience should be considered when implementing all policies, and the outcomes should also be better evaluated. Soria and Troisi also stress that the student's participation in activities is closely related to the internationalization at home [20]. Moreover, they also emphasized the experiences of international students during the process, and the universities are meanwhile creating a "comfort zone" for them.

Knight state that "there is no 'one size fits all model of internationalization" [11]. The strategy of internationalization at home should be adapting the regional identity and feature. Therefore, conducting more empirical studies is compulsory for promoting more effective practices and predicting potential challenges for the implementation of internationalization at home.

Acknowledgements

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