

Chapter 13

International Students’ Learning Experience and Learning Outcomes in China through Summer Programs

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions are facing unprecedented opportunities and challenges due to the rapid development of global contexts. With the momentum of higher education internationalization, leading universities in China began to launch international summer programs. These summer programs offer multiple benefits to university stakeholders, especially students. This chapter reviews the context and characteristics for international programs in leading Chinese universities. The significant role these programs play in designing an innovative learning platform were argued by reviewing and analyzing the trends among sample programs on aspects of curriculum design and implementation. The authors provide an in-depth understanding of students’ learning outcomes during these programs by conducting a qualitative study utilizing sample summer programs. Last but not least, the opportunities and challenges concerning the organization and implementation of programs were analyzed and possible recommendations were proposed for future study abroad improvements.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, the Chinese Ministry of Education has increasingly stressed the need for higher education reforms in China since a huge gap exists between the skills of graduates and those demanded by the economy (OECD, 2013). Much of the emphasis has been placed upon educational practitioners to introduce more elements of creativity and innovation into the curriculum structure,

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design, and implementation in the higher educational system (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2010). Against this background, international summer programs (ISPs) have been developed in some leading research-intensive universities in China in order to meet the growing demand for educational innovations. As a matter of fact, the leading research-intensive universities have strongly endorsed the concept of internationalization and have undertaken special efforts to educate “global citizens” as one of the main purposes for higher education. With the momentum of internationalization in higher education, ISPs have become one of the main platforms for educational innovation. Some of the main innovative strategies include the following: diversifying of the student population, enriching students’ extracurricular experiences, and developing multiple facets of professional skills.

With flexibility in time and diversity in the curriculum and learning activities, ISPs have become a new platform that attract students from all over the world for scholarly communication. Recent international student mobility data suggests that while the four Anglophone destinations for international students remain the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, the percentage of international students in these countries has decreased from 47.8% in 2004 to 40.3% in 2012 (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2014). A number of other countries are attracting students as potential study destinations. In particular, over the past decade or so, the number of international students has increased over seven times, from 44,711 in 1999 to 356,499 in 2013 within China (CAFSA, 2013). Among these international students, around 60% are engaged in short-term studies instead of long-term degree pursuits (CAFSA, 2013). Many of these students are engaged in short-term international summer programs due to the flexibility and innovative nature of these programs. This chapter highlights the emerging role of ISPs as a way to create intensified international learning experiences, to involve renowned faculty members, and to attract a diverse student population, both domestically and from abroad.

In this chapter, the authors provide a snapshot of the diversified curriculum, the extracurricular learning activities, and other aspects of teaching and learning innovations related to ISPs in a Chinese context. Specifically, the authors examine the major characteristics of international summer programs in Mainland China. Moreover, the learning experiences and learning outcomes of participants involved in ISPs are examined qualitatively to provide an understanding of the outcomes of these programs, especially for international participants. Finally, the opportunities and possible challenges of the ISPs will be discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Against the context of globalization, the theme of internationalization has gained increased momentum among higher education institutions. Altbach (2007) points out that globalization is the societal, political, or economic force underlying the internationalization process of higher education. Accompanied with the trend of globalization is an increased dependence on knowledge products and well-trained professionals for economic growth. Internationalization refers to policies and measures taken by governments, higher educational institutions or individuals to respond to the global context. Driven by the process of globalization, higher education has been facing challenges within the social/cultural, political, academic, and economic areas. With an increasing emphasis on the knowledge economy, both developed and developing countries are competing globally for the brightest students and scholars through various international educational initiatives. For example, at the national level, the European Union (EU) launched the Erasmus program in order to promote academic internationalization and to facilitate the talent mobility within

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