

Chapter 9

How Do International Students Study for Their University Degree Programme Using Technologically-Assisted Tools and Platforms?

A Study About the Education Voyage During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Due to the current education trend, many students, including traditional-age, non-traditional, returning, evening, and adult students, move from traditional on-campus study to distance learning and online education. The current COVID-19 pandemic offers opportunities for these colleges and universities to expand their channel to international students who cannot come on-campus due to the recommendation of social distancing and the self-quarantine policy. However, it is important to capture the students' comments and opinions, particularly international students who are looking for the living experience in an overseas country. With the tools of qualitative inductive survey and interview sessions, the researcher collected 63 valid data from the Chinese international students. This study provided the blueprint for school leadership, department heads, policymakers, faculty members, and students who are interested in reforming the current curriculum and instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is a popular tool for students who cannot attend traditional face-to-face lessons on

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campus. Traditionally, distance learning education was designed for non-traditional, returning, evening and adult students (NTREAs) who usually have full-time working responsibilities and study part-time (Dos Santos, 2020b, 2020c). Although traditional-age students who graduated from secondary school directly are welcome to apply for distance learning programmes, teenagers tend to apply for on-campus programmes and courses as most consider themselves full-time students, particularly international students who cannot work part-time without the permission of immigration departments (Lambert et al., 2019).

In the past couple of decades, many studies (Farmer et al., 2016; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Lightbown & Spada, 2020; Tyson, 2016) investigated teaching and learning developments, teachers' behaviours, school management and curriculum design to meet the needs of governmental policies and students' expectations. However, due to immigration policies and policies from related government departments, international students usually need to study by attending traditional face-to-face lessons on campus to apply for a student VISA (Sherry et al., 2010; Teichler, 2015).

A previous study (Shea & Bidjerano, 2014) suggested that distance learning programs should focus on the completion rate to measure students' feedback. From the school leadership perspective, how can schools and colleges ensure high student retention rates and completion rates to promote academic excellence? In another study (Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005), the concern was raised that due to the absence of peer-to-peer and teacher-to-student interactions and engagements in distance learning, there might be a reduction in students' achievements and outcomes of the courses and programs. As many courses require interaction and communication for group work and exchanges, distance learning courses could reduce the potential of these courses for these purposes. However, another study (Siemens, 2005) indicated that distance learning and technologically-assisted teaching and learning tools could increase learners' interest and motivation. A recent study (Dos Santos, 2019a) also indicated that contemporary students, regardless of their major and age, are ready for blended, and distance learning lessons and courses as technology and social media already pervade their daily practices (Krishnamurthy, 2020). For example, a recent study (Harrison et al., 2018) collected qualitative data from the Master of Public Health distance-learning students who lived outside of the European Union. Mixed feeling and stories were captured from both positive and negative directions, such as the flexibilities to cultural conflicts. However, many indicated that the distance-learning option offered them the opportunities to learn and gain their master's degree in their home country with full-time working responsibilities.

However, distance learning-based lessons and courses are not suitable for all learners (Dos Santos, 2020f), particularly the subject matter of foreign languages (Peeters, 2018), vocational skills (McCutcheon et al., 2018), internships (Sykes & Roy, 2017) and teenagers (Harvey et al., 2014). Although teenagers and young adults are ready for different types of technologically-assisted teaching and learning tools and approaches, these groups of learners do have the expectations of making friends, building connections, increasing communication skills and experiencing university life (Dos Santos, 2019b), particularly international students who may study abroad in a foreign country (Brux & Fry, 2010).

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Understanding students' learning experience will develop successful recruitment, learning motivation and students' satisfaction, particularly for traditional-age students who experienced distance learning education during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Dos Santos, 2020d). In the early 2020s, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the South Korean government restricted border crossing and increased immigration control

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