Opportunities of Service Learning for International College Students in COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

As the development of globalization, international students became more and more important part in higher education all over the world. This paper mainly reviewed the challenges and difficulties for international college students in general during the pandemic; and discussed how service learning could confront these challenges for international college students as educational innovation. Overall, service learning could help international college students to rebuild their social networks, carry revise culture shocks, have deeper connections with their original roots, while international students could bring their local experience or research outcomes to the online class; transfer these challenges into opportunities under and after the pandemic.

Keywords

Service Learning; International students; Higher education.

1. Introduction

Before the global pandemic, there were existing considerations and arguments on the globalization of higher education [1]. The concerns are mainly focus on the social inequality in societies. For students from families with higher social socioeconomic status, they tend to be have more benefits from the globalization. Meanwhile, students from lower families with higher social socioeconomic status, would have more disadvantages as the development of globalization. The crisis of COVID-19 effects higher education in general. However, because of the effects in international travel control, the international students suffer more than the domestic students. They need to adapt themselves not only in the way of learning, but also other challenges that domestic students did not confront, such as the legal residential issues [1]. This paper will focus on three questions. What are the challenges and difficulties for international college students in general during the pandemic? As an educational innovation, does service learning could confront the challenges for international college students? In addition, how to transfer these challenges into opportunities under and after the pandemic?

2. Effects of International College Students During The Pandemic

International students’ psychological well-being has been explore by Amoah and Mok [2], their research found that round 72% international students reported worried about current situations, and around 48% international students had feelings that they were in risk. Some of them still stayed overseas and could not go back home because of the travel control. These situation is the main reason that cause them had loneliness. On the other side, most of the international students believed that their learning experiences had been disrupted by the pandemic. And most of the students had the willingness to return to their universities to finish their academic study plans [2].
2.1. Students Stay in the Study Countries
Amoah and Mok reported that the international students are confronting two different situations; living in their home countries, or living in the countries where their universities are located [2]. For students stay in the study countries, they are far away from their families and familiar environments. Although they do not stay with their families in the past, the pandemic brought uncertainties to this situation. They and their families might worry about each other since the development of COVID-19 is different in various countries. In addition, Asians students might confront more crucial situation in certain countries. The global crisis causes racial discrimination towards to Asian students. It might lead international students, especially Asia students more difficult to live in their host countries. At the same time, they have to worry about immigrate policies. For an instance, American government once require all the international students live United States if universities only offer online learning courses. However, they might also have difficulties to back home due to the travel control policy in their own home countries or too expensive international airplane tickets [2].

2.2. Students Stay in Home Countries
For students who live in their home countries, they also have worries when they have chances to stay with families in their home countries. Mok reported that the majority of college students who study aboard without scholarship; students and their families might have considerations towards to online learning by paying expensive tuition [1]. At the same time, students might confront different time zone problems to have midnight classes. More important, most of them worry the possibilities of going back to universities and finishing their degrees [1].

3. Service Learning
There are lots of definitions on service learning, one of them is defined by Yorio and Ye [3]. They believed service learning is “a learning experience where students actively participate in service experiences that meet a real community need; the service enhances what is taught in the classroom and is integrated into the students’ academic curricula; and the program provides structured time for a student to think, talk or write about what the student did and saw during the actual service activity” [3].

3.1. Service Learning in Higher Education
As one of important educational innovation, service learning plays significant role in liberal arts education. Like other new educational innovations, it transfers teacher’s role into facilitators and coaches. The main difference between service learning and other educational innovations is the civic orientation. Based on this civic orientation, students could achieve social responsibility, personal interaction skills and creating real social connections with society [4]. To be more specific, it is unique by the following two dimensions. First, The learning objectives link to the service outcomes and students learn the particular subjects by real activities in the real environments. It means the interests of target communities need to be considered, and students need to shift from their own perspectives to stakeholder’s perspective in designing and processing projects. Second, the students might have to cooperate with various people and institutions outside of campus [5]. It is an opportunity for them to gain career experience.

Service learning is one of the important branches in higher education in United States. As the representative of service learning in higher education, Campus Compact already have more than 1,100 members till 2015. It covers more than a quarter of higher education institutions over the entire country [4]. Compare to United States, Asia higher education institutions apply service learning more like a pedagogy, not as specific courses [6]. In some countries, service learning in higher education has been connected to certain relational activities. For an instance, service learning is processed...
with local Christian orientation [6]. In most places, service learning mainly related to local education policies. For an example, service learning in Hong Kong is strongly related to whole-person education, which is one of government education focus [7]. In Taiwan and Japan, service learning in higher education differs from universities and institutions. Such as Japan, The International Christian University has a center called service learning, it provides domestic and oversea service learning opportunities for students. The National Taiwan University considers service learning as one of the requirements in their college curriculum. Students in this university need to finish certain related courses before graduation [7].

3.2. Service Learning of Higher Education During The Pandemic

The most challenge of service learning is the uncertain of travel control, especially for the service learning programs related to oversea traveling [8]. A lot of domestic programs based on cooperation also suspended based on the crisis. At the same time, the current needs more collaboration and civic responsibilities than before, to against the pandemic and the following influences in the future. It leads researchers to think, when students could not travel or even get out of the city, how to implement service learning?

4. The Opportunities of International Students in Service Learning

As a part of the globalization, international students themselves also have unique advantages than domestic students. Each student could represent his or her own culture and home place. Applying international students’ unique advantages, could transfer certain challenges into new opportunities. What’ more, it also could help international students on their personal development in different domains. Students still could implement the same service learning locally around their current resident place, then discuss and share the different cultures, contexts, stakeholders’ interests and outcomes all over different places. In other words, from global to local, from local to global.

4.1. Applying Subjective Knowledge Locally with Civic Orientation

This pandemic provide opportunities for students to have a deeper understanding of their own social responsibilities, no matter they are in their home countries or staying in their host countries. Meanwhile, local communities all over the world need more help than before. It is the an opportunity for students to combine their subjective knowledge with civic orientation. For an instance, an agricultural university in China encourage students to apply their farming skills locally when students are at home during the pandemic. Students can divided into two groups, one is the students who live in the cities, the other one is for students who live in countrysides. For students who live in the urban cities, they can plant simple and suitable vegetables or flowers in balconies and also guide their neighbors to farm or garden without getting outside of their communities. For students who live the countryside, they could help local farms on farming in the villages by this opportunity. This is an example of combing the subjective learning knowledge to residential communities. It also could be extended other subjects and students from different countries.

There are also opportunities for international students who major in teaching over the world. First, students who aim to be teachers in the future, they could offer online or face to face (if situation is allowed) torturing or teaching for the students in their communities as a part of their service learning. In the past, they might be assigned into particular schools for internship or volunteering by their departments in institutions. However, it is also meaningful for them to implement knowledge to help their current residual communities; especially for the children whose parents work in hospitals and lack of guidance. Students might not have the opportunities to access.
overseas learning or intern programs, but they still could have the chances to know how learning is occurring in different concerns of the world by other students’ sharing. When all the students including international students bring their tutoring or teaching experience from local communities to the online class, their local experiences from all over the world could transfer into globalization in class.

In this pandemic crisis, there are also many elder people or disable people live all by themselves without families and friends. Students who study in social work, elder care or related fields could assist local communities to help these people during this pandemic. In addition, different countries might have extreme different policy contexts and culture backgrounds towards to elder people and people who are disable. Regions which has a long history and tradition in collective culture such as East Asian countries, helping these people in neighborhood might be considered as natural and necessary. On the other hand, other places which is based on individualism might have different situations or arguments. These diversities are exactly the opportunities and advantages that international students could contribute into online classes. During the pandemic, whether students are staying in their home countries where they might have reverse culture shock, or staying in the study countries where already became their new residences and second hometown, it is significant for students to understand the social responsibilities as young people in the real world. In addition, applying their subjective knowledge in their communities also can help their well-being by helping others and having authentic experiences in online classes.

4.2. Research Opportunities Related to Local Communities in Service Learning

One of the important service learning type is focus on the improvement of students’ research skills. Before pandemic, students in service learning used to researching the same target people, institutions or public in the same places. If they want to have different international experiences, students would go aboard as groups. However, the past learning type is becoming impossible during the pandemic.

To adopt the current situation, students still can implement service learning research projects through changing the design. In the past, students used to work as groups that finish one comprehensive research project. With the same research project, instructors could simplify the research project to make sure each student could implement independently. Students still can work as groups in literature review and methodology. However, they need to focus on the target group under their current residencies. It means the outcomes still could be quite different with the same research design, target group in different cultural and geographical contexts. Even if the outcomes are the same or not significant different, it is still worth to discover the reasons. Is it universal that not differ from cultures and geography? Or how it differs from cultures and geography. International study might not need to go aboard together, international students are rich resources when they are from various concerns of the real world on online classes.

5. The Opportunities of International Students in Service Learning

5.1. Cooperation of Oversea Resources

A lot of universities work together to make sure their students still could get enrich and satisfied study experience in their home countries. For examples, there are more than thirty Chinese universities work with universities in UK and US, provides campus for international students from these two countries who are Chinese citizens. This kind of cooperation is also crucial in service learning. Service learning requires lots of coordination and preparation before the project. Although students are from local, they are still young individuals. If their universities have certain types of official cooperation with their domestic institutions, social
groups or even governmental offices, it will be the strongest support for international students in service learning. And it will also comfort them for the additional resources besides online learning.

5.2. **Online Guidance in Service Learning**

Guidance and coaching play the core roles in service learning projects. It requires lots of interactions between international students, instructor and coaches. In authentic environments, people might have more smooth face to face communications. However, the communications might be more difficult during the online guidance due to language barriers, different time zones, unfamiliar with each other. Thus, providing smooth and enough guidance online is also one of the factors that universities need to take considerations.

6. **Conclusion**

How to provide better educational experience for them during the pandemic? It requires institutions to have considerations, to think and take actions. International students are the young people in the real world. They should not only study online without any authentic connections societies, but also take certain social responsibilities during the pandemic.

As an educational innovation, service learning might be bridges to combine international college students’ social responsibilities and the improvements of their learning in higher education, especially when they are not able to study on campus for a long time. When international students study outside of the home countries for a long time, they start to have disconnections with their own cultures and communities. It is also an opportunity to use service learning to help them to rebuild their social networks, carry revise culture shocks, have deeper connections with their original roots. And when students International students bring their local experience or research outcomes to the online class, it is from local to global.

**References**


