Problems and Countermeasures of Online Teaching for International Students in China

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Abstract: Online teaching has enabled international students in China to basically continue their daily learning activities during the ongoing pandemic. Yet after reviewing problems existing in online teaching, it is found that online teaching quality is not as satisfactory as it used to be. The paper thus puts forward suggestions for improving the quality of online teaching.

1. Introduction

In recent years, international education in China has made remarkable achievements. The number of international students has increased significantly. However, in the past two years, the control measures enforced by a lot of countries including China in response to the Coronavirus pandemic are still exacerbating the difficulty of cross-border flow of teachers and students. When the pandemic broke out years ago, universities in China have carried out large-scale online teaching practice. Yet the online teaching mode for international students is still at its experimental stage. Since the global pandemic cannot be completely eliminated in the short term, the quality of online teaching is an important support to reflect and enhance the added value for international students receiving higher education in China.

2. Problems Existing in Online Teaching for International Students

2.1 Limitations of Network Facilities and the Problem of Jet Lag

Although domestic universities that implement international teaching have built or transformed online teaching platforms after outbreak of the pandemic, most platforms only have quite simple functions, and occasionally the system may freeze or crash. A variety of live-streaming platforms are often chosen by teachers based on consideration of functions required and individual course needs. In addition, most of these platforms only have Chinese versions, giving rise to the need for students still outside China to install multiple APPs. The number of teaching platforms and the lack of internationalization then increases the complexity of online learning[1]. What is more, if international students have to attend online class for a long time with jet lag, it will also be a huge physiological and psychological challenge for them.

2.2 Challenges in Online Teaching and Learning Preparation

2.2.1 Inadequate Online Teaching Design

At present, a lot of online teaching modes are adopted for international students, such as remote modes in which all Chinese and international students attending class online, such as: recording video, live-streaming, and a combination of both two, along with a mixed mode where those students who cannot return to China participate in the on-campus classroom remotely online. The teaching quality assurance involved in online teaching are still great challenges for universities in China[2]. Due to factors such as jet lag and network infrastructure, teachers are facing more complicated tasks in designing online courses. They need to adjust the previous syllabus, schedule, teaching methods, etc. to satisfy requirements of online teaching quality.

As for teaching outcome, some international students majoring in language and culture have lost

the opportunity to directly perceive and experience Chinese society and culture. Also, for some highly practical disciplines such as clinical medicine, online teaching is found to be difficult to bring about satisfactory outcome especially in practical skills training[3].

2.2.2 Students Lacking of Autonomous Learning Ability

Online teaching has put forward higher requirements for international students who are stranded in their homelands due to the pandemic. When studying online at home, students face the computer or mobile phone screen alone, coupled with the network factor, some activities such as group discussion and presentation, role play or workshop, etc. can hardly be carried out as effectively as in the offline classroom. Some students are unable to keep up with the schedule, or fail to submit coursework on time. The difference in students' autonomous learning ability leads to the gap in learning outcome, which may further stimulate the anxiety of some students.

2.3 Problems in Online Teaching Management and Campus Support

2.3.1 Online Attendance and Other Issues

Universities in China have strengthened the refined management of teaching process of international students. As required, most teachers are using clock-in settings of teaching platforms or live-streaming APP for online attendance and study time assessment, etc. In this regard, some international students may feel that the learning atmosphere is not free enough, and the daily attendance check is short of flexibility[4].

2.3.2 Campus Support

Thanks to psychic distance, academic pressure and distinct personality, international students respond differently to the pandemic and online teaching, which may bring some mental health problems. And some administrators in charge of international student affairs may have increased work pressure due to language barrier and obstacles in cross-cultural communication, which, in dealing with student complaints, can occasionally be perceived as showing no empathy to them. This will dampen the enthusiasm of international students for online learning and their identification with the universities to varying degrees.

3. Countermeasures to Improve Online Teaching Quality

3.1 Increase the Effectiveness of Online Teaching Platforms

When choosing live-streaming App, teachers should ensure unified platforms for the same group of international students, and appropriately adjust the schedule to facilitate students to participate in online classes by fully considering jet lag and their network conditions. Short videos can be shot to demonstrate how to use these Chinese APPs. Or, a multiple-language translation of instructions can be given if needed. Also, Universities are strongly encouraged to cooperate with external APP providers to build a unified and more efficient online teaching platform for international students to provide better services.

3.2 Strengthen Online Teaching Preparation of Both Teachers and Students

3.2.1 Adjust Online Teaching Design

More choices of teaching modes should be allowed considering the sophisticated conditions of international students. In order to stimulate the motivation of students to study online, teachers may place more focus on problem-based and task-based teaching design. Course content can be sectioned into couples of modules. Short videos being shot for each module will be placed onto online teaching platform, which enables international students, especially those with difficulty in attending live-streaming lectures for self-learning and reviewing. At the same time, teachers are recommended to take advantage of free resources from some newly developed domestic online teaching platforms facing international students to conduct flipped classroom or SPOC teaching.

To cope with courses with strong practicality such as clinical medicine, teachers can integrate

different platforms, social media, virtual simulation and smart devices to create a teaching mode that simulates offline scenarios for international students. For example, the Educoder platform jointly launched by many domestic universities is providing strong support for programming tasks to satisfy course requirement[5].

3.2.2 Cultivate Students' Autonomous Learning Ability

First of all, teachers need to stimulate the motivation of students to learn autonomously through appropriate teaching design. Students should be given more freedom and time to practice, discuss and think so as to get autonomous learning skills, such as time management, information retrieval, inquiry-based learning, etc.. Secondly, it is also necessary to use the learning behavior data, homework, and other means established by the teaching platform to help teachers direct students and improve their autonomous learning ability. In addition, regrouping international students from different countries to form an online learning community and completing learning activities in the form of workshop can promote student communication and relieve loneliness and anxiety.

3.3 Improve Online Teaching Support Services and Innovate Online Management

Differences in culture, network facilities, etc. amongst international students should be fully considered, thus adopting relatively flexible teaching management. It is vital to continuously upgrade a unified online management platform for international students, conducting management of students' online learning activities, graduation, employment and other affairs. At the same time, teaching administration should get more training in cross-cultural communication skills.

Artificial intelligence and social media can be used to organize international students to carry out a variety of online cultural activities, such as singing Chinese songs, photography, painting, martial arts demonstrations, and participation in online anti-pandemic volunteer services. In this way, students outside China can still experience Chinese culture and campus life. Universities should set up online counseling centers for international students, and give mental health training for foreign student counselors, so as to help relieve the negative emotions of international students when needed.

4. Conclusion

Through the improvement of network facilities, more efforts and preparation from teachers and students, and the innovative management and teaching support, it is expected to improve students' online learning experience, and consolidate the value of China as a destination country for studying abroad.

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