Empirical Article

Transformative International Partnership during Global Challenges: A case study of a public research university in China during the pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Developing and implementing impactful international partnerships was the top priority for higher education institutions prior to the pandemic breakout. The pandemic forced higher education to change and act quickly to avoid international enrollment crash and spurred some unprecedented international collaborations. This case study examines an unconventional international cooperation that a public research university in China initiated for providing a college learning environment for Chinese students enrolled in other countries during the global challenge. This study responds to the call for how to build sustainable internationalization. The research findings contribute to the development of a new paradigm of internationalization and creative internationalization for the future of new normal.

Keywords*: International partnership, internationalization, sustainability, transformative*

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented hit of COVID -19 has caused catastrophic disruption to higher education institutions' financial capacity worldwide. According to the National Association of International Educators (NAFSA) survey (May 2020), the U.S. higher education institutions have lost nearly $1 billion due to programs and activities associated with international education, for example, canceled study abroad programs, funds to support international students and scholars. It is estimated that at least $3 billion more was lost in fall 2020 in the U.S. due to the expected decline of international student enrollment and continued withholding of study abroad programs because of the pandemic. Many experts in the field of internationalization predict that the financial loss due to the COVID-19 may end the internationalization as a tradable commodity, and a new paradigm of internationalization will prevail (de Wit, 2020). During these trying times, de Wit and Knight (2018) reminds us, "What are the core principles and values underpinning internationalization of higher education that 10 or 20 years from now will make us look back and be proud of…?" (cited in de Wit, 2020)

Prior to the pandemic, one of the critical movements of higher education internationalization was to develop and implement effective and impactful international partnerships. Government, higher education institutions, and organizations called for increased collaborations (Gatewood, 2020; Gatewood & Sutton, n.a.). Conventionally, international partnerships help universities diversify educational programs and increase research portfolios. The global pandemic spurs some unprecedented international collaborations. The breakout of pandemic forces higher education to change and act quickly even if we were not prepared. Under some circumstances, the higher education institutions broke established protocols and processes and thought outside of the box to continue to educate students. The immediate and long term challenges of the pandemic to international higher education were evident, such as lower international student enrollment, near zero study abroad programs. Adaptability is one of the top traits that international higher education adopts during challenging times. It compels higher education to explore ways to be more innovative and creative (de Wit, 2020).

The American Council on Education (ACE) (2021) recently surveyed to understand the impact of COVID-19 on internationalization and found that the U.S. and U.K. both saw a decline in total student enrollment in fall 2020 compared to fall 2019. Declines were deeper in the U.S. than the U.K., with more than 70 percent of the U.S. survey responders vs. 56 percent of the U.K. responders. Of the 70 percent of the U.S. respondents, 11 percent saw a decrease of higher than 30 percent. The survey results reflect that in planning for the post-pandemic area, both the U.S. and U.K. leaders list recruiting international students as the top internationalization priority, with 95 per cent of the U.K. respondents and 51 percent of the U.S. respondents. Student enrollment number for the spring 2021 and afterwards and long-term financial viability are pressing concerns for both countries. As de Wit and NAFSA (2020) state the student enrollment crisis proves to the world that higher education internationalization has been deepened to an extent that the international student enrollment could bring enormous impact to the economy of developed countries. This is also another evidence that internationalization serves as a tradeable commodity and brings revenue resources to higher education institutions in developed countries.

To avoid an enrollment crash, starting in the late spring of 2020, major countries, such as the U.S., Canada, Australia, and U.K., that admit large numbers of Chinese students were creating ways to retain newly enrolled Chinese students, as stated in news reports and social media. The COVID-19 travel restrictions prevented international students from study abroad programs, especially those from China due to the U.S. embassy and consulates' lock down. Their options were either studying fully online or taking a leave of absence for fall 2021. Nevertheless, the majority of students preferred in person study because the experience of an authentic campus is crucial, especially for first year students. Finding a solution to the urgent learning needs became a great concern to universities outside of China as well as to the Chinese society. A public research university in China, Southwest University (SWU), thought outside of the box and took an initiative in May 2021 to collaborate with a few universities in Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S.A to provide in person teaching and college campus for Chinese students who were matriculated to overseas universities but were not able to travel outside of China due to the global pandemic.

Back in Spring 2020, after the pandemic was relatively controlled in China, SWU reached out to partner universities in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, proposing programs to offer authentic campus college education to Chinese students who cannot leave the country. SWU's approach aligns with its internationalization goal of expanding the field of cooperation with overseas partner universities and deepening the cooperation and friendship. SWU established a learning center in Spring 2020, named World Renowned University Overseas (Chongqing) Learning Center (OLC), and soon reached cooperation agreements within a short timeframe with the University of Western Australia, the University of Technology Sydney, the University of Auckland, and a private research university in the U.S. The U.S. university's name remains confidential. This unique partnership not only provides a unique opportunity for students to continue with college education, but a creative way to build emergent institutional partnership and help partner institutions avoid an enrollment crash.

This study examines this unconventional international cooperation model of SWU to understand how an example of a new paradigm of internationalization emerged and how a conventional international partnership approach could be transformed during the global challenge to make an impact on student learning. A descriptive single case study was conducted to examine this transformative international partnership approach by interviewing program administrators. This study responds to the call for how to build sustainable internationalization. The research findings of this study will contribute to the development of a new paradigm of internationalization and creative internationalization for the future of new normal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rationale and Definition of International Partnership

Partnership is a process rather than a product or outcome. In the context of higher education, international partnership is a relationship in which all partner institutions actively engage with each other to benefit mutually from the process of integrating global perspectives into teaching and learning (Gatewood & Sutton, n.a.; Sutton, 2010). Essentially, international partnership is a process of intellectual engagement across borders. Eddy (2010) articulates that social capital is the catalyst of initiating a partnership and the organizational capital provides resources to support partnership. There are various intrinsic and extrinsic motivations leading to a partnership development. Intrinsic motivators include leveraging resources and sharing common interests, while extrinsic factors may come from the state agencies and accreditation that call for global collaboration and ranking (Duffield, Olson, & Kerzman, 2012). Higher education institutions increasingly explore across national borders to develop sustainable and mutually beneficial partnerships to broaden students' global perspective, recruit international students, train professionals, and address global issues collaboratively (IIE, 2015; Eddy, 2010). A productive international partnership could take advantage of diverse perspectives and approaches among partner institutions to collaboratively solve complex issues and provide collective solutions, as well as leverage resources in all higher education dimensions: teaching, learning, research, and service. Partnerships are a permanent feature of today's higher education landscape (Miller, 2020), and international partnerships specifically enable institutions to achieve comprehensive internationalization goals by building joint degree programs, developing programs overseas, and many other creative initiatives. The ACE (n.a.) categorizes three goals of international partnerships, which align with higher education institutions' responsibilities: academic and reputation; research and funding; institutional development and service. Relationship building, communication, trust, understanding and sharing goals among partners are the ingredients for a successful partnership.

Since the goals of international partnerships have expanded to the full spectrum of higher education, activities or programs developed under the auspices of partnership agreement have also been evolving. Based on the existing literature and best practices shared by institutions, these are seven common activities: 1) Student and faculty mobility (reciprocal and unidirectional); 2) Cooperative development and institutional capacity-building projects; 3) Collaborative research and training; 4)

Cooperative and collaborative degrees; 5) Collaborative teaching (face-to-face or online); 6) Collaborative academic operations; 7) Projects involving organizations, businesses, and communities near one or more partners (ACE, n.a.). Another different categorization is from Hoseth and Thampapillai (2020), who summarize current partnership activities into three categories: 1) Resource-based partnerships; 2) Support-based partnerships; and 3) Complementary partnerships. According to the categorization from Hoseth and Thampapillai (2020), student and faculty bilateral exchange for equal reciprocity fits in the category of resource-based partnerships. Those nonreciprocal collaborations are, for example, one institution obtaining access to another institution's in-country program support, branch campus, or overseas center. They are considered support-based. Complementary partnerships do not stand alone as a distinct type but are integrated into both resource-based and support-based, for example, transnational joint degree or dual degree programs. The complementary partnerships are now more prevalent and beneficial to both cooperative parties. For the variety of partnership activities, how do institutions start and finally implement them?

Trends of International Partnership

Prior to analyzing SWU's partnership development process, we need to reflect on the current trends of international partnership development in higher education institutions. ACE's survey *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses*, conducted every five years, has seen steady and greatly increased international partnership activities in its 2012 and 2017 survey consecutively. The survey results of the 2012 survey show that 90 percent of U.S. doctoral institutions have substantially expanded the number of partnerships and increased quality at the same time. Fifty eight percent of master's institutions and 43 percent of baccalaureate institutions also have increased partnership participation. Among those institutions with increased partnership, 40 percent indicated they have implemented campus-wide international partnership policies. The 2017 survey data reaffirms the fact of international collaborations being increased. For example, nearly half of the responding institutions have begun to develop or expand the number of partnerships in the past three years. Compared to the 2012 survey, the 2017 survey shows that many institutions were engaging with other types of entities other than traditional academic institutions abroad and the common partners. The other entities include but are not limited to city governments, K-12 schools, foundations, and others. The 2017 survey analyzes the geographic focus of international partnership among the responding institutions. Asia is the top spot with China, South Korea, India, and Vietnam as the focuses. Brazil and Mexico are the popular countries for collaboration in Latin America. As ACE (2017) suggests that the top countries identified for partnership expansion coincide with the targeted international student recruitment markets. This means student enrollment may become the drive for some partnership collaborations. The Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA)'s 2014, 2017, and 2020 surveys of senior international officers (SIOs) demonstrate the same trends. All three surveys reflect that the top one primary SIO responsibility is to develop international institutional relations and linkages/partnerships. The trends of increased partnership development are most likely because of calls from various governments and funding agencies in the world aiming for innovation, transnational learning, and exchanges (Gatewood, 2020).

One typical example of reflecting the call from governments and innovation is the partnership between the U.S. and Mexico. The two countries have a long history of academic ties through many innovative partnerships, for example, 100,000 Strong in the Americas initiative in the U.S. and Mexico's Proyecta 100,000 (ACE, 2017). The collaborative areas and agencies involved align with the trends of international partnership development. ACE (2017) also identifies a few key conclusions regarding the current landscape of the U.S.-Mexico partnership that are illuminating to the future of partnership development: 1) accessibility of partnership engagement to various types of institutions; 2) diversity of faculty in teaching and research collaboration; sustainability; and 3) advocacy. Nevertheless, challenges with this cross-border partnership remain with issues in logistics, economy, and politics.

Innovation is becoming a buzzword in current higher education. What is an innovative international partnership like? Sutton (2010) calls for rethinking the role of international partnership in campus internationalization. She identifies the fundamental change of international partnership

development from transactional to transformational. According to Sutton (2010), many institutions were starting to move from traditional modes of student and faculty exchange towards full-bodied partnerships. Transformational partnerships are relationship-oriented and focus on shared goals, mutual benefits, multi-dimensional collaboration, strategic development, and sustainability. They help partner institutions to combine resources and expand capacity for collaborative teaching, learning, and services. Although the author does not use the word innovation, the transformational approach she advocates for reflects the characteristics of innovation (i.e., new ideas to solve problems based on existing knowledge and practice).

Conceptual Framework

There are two primary partnership development frameworks that will be referenced and utilized as conceptual foundation in this case study. This first one is the five-phrase process for a relationship development for the field of marketing by Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh (1987). Although this process framework originated in the field of marketing, it is applied to higher education institutions as well as to developing institutional partnerships because it is broad and serves overarching goals of international partnership development. According to Dwyer et al. (1987), relationships evolve five general phases (see Figure 1): 1) awareness; 2) exploration; 3) expansion; 4) commitment; 5) dissolution. Each phase represents a major transition in how the parties in the relationship development relate to each other. Part A and party B start recognition of each other's feasibility as an exchange partner but have not initiated any interaction during phase 1 (awareness). Starting phase 2 (exploration), part A and B communicate and attract each other, build relationships, and exchange expectations. During phase 3 (expansion), both parties increase interdependence to each other to obtain mutual benefits and develop further trust and joint satisfaction. Ultimately, both exchange parties make a commitment and pledge to the partnership and are explicitly satisfied with the mutual benefits. Three key factors that lead to the commitment are the inputs to the relationship, the relationship's durability and consistency. For relationships that have gone through the four phrases, they may enter phase 5 (dissolution), which leads to termination or disengagement, which reflects the time-specific nature of partnership. As Dwyer et al. (1987) state, not every partnership enters all the stages above, which means certain phase(s) may be missing from the process.

Figure 1: Five-phase process for relationship development. Adapted from "Developing Buyer-Seller Relationships", by F. R. Dwyer, P. H. Schurr, & S. Oh, 1987, *Journal of Marketing*, *51*-2, pp. 11-27.

The second framework is the seven-step strategic planning process identified by ACE (n.a) which guides institutions to formulate a plan to create and manage collaborative international partnerships in higher education institutions. The seven-step planning process (see Figure 2) serves as a road map to inform institutions' decision making. This approach is classic and more linear, compared to the Five-phase process for relationship development, described above. It starts from reviewing institutional strategy, conducting needs analysis, to developing a plan and procedures to closing the loop with a future development plan. This framework offers further contextual partnership development information in higher education. This strategic planning process is certainly productive and efficient under normal circumstances. Under emergent or unexpected circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this seven-step process may be interrupted and adapted.

Figure 2: Seven-step strategic planning process. Adapted from "*Internationalization in Action – International Partnerships, Part Two: Strategic Planning*", by Academic Council of Education, n.a.

With overarching goals in the relationship development process and contextual partnership information in higher education, these two frameworks serve as the conceptual tool to guide the research and respond to the research question: How did Southwest University establish transformative partnerships during the global pandemic? The research question for this study is: How did Southwest University establish the transformative partnership during the global pandemic? It will be answered under each framework, and a modified framework will be proposed.

RESEARCH METHOD

A descriptive single case study is conducted in this research. Case study evaluation was applied because "case study research is the conventional way for doing process or implementation evaluations" (Yin, 2014, p.222). According to Yin (2014), a case study evaluation is an effective way to study the process or implementation of an initiative, especially when the initiative is complicated. In this case study evaluation, three program administrators/research participants were interviewed with semi-structured questions to understand their roles and views of the international partnership process being studied and examine their complexity. For example, 1) what was SWU's original goal of establishing this partnership? 2) How did you evaluate the context, identify needs, and plan for the partnership? The researcher also utilized meeting notes and archived documents through the partnership developing process as resources. The implementation process was assessed by the researcher and findings were utilized from the collected data to recommend my perspectives for future international partnership development.

The research question is: How did Southwest University establish the transformative partnership during the global pandemic? The two sub questions are: a) What is SWU's goal for international partnership during the COVID-19 pandemic? b) How did SWU plan and implement the three key dimensions for the partnership during the COVID-19 pandemic: 1) Administration; 2) Academic Coordination; 3) Student Services.

A purposeful sampling strategy was used to select Southwest University because the selective sampling provides rich information that can help researchers explore issues in-depth. The reason why SWU is selected as an information-rich case is that it served as a leading institution in China during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020 that developed partnerships with multiple universities in Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. to accommodate hundreds of Chinese students' need for timely college education. In summer 2020, the researcher was in a unique position at a U.S. institution helping facilitate relationship building and ultimately partnership between SWU and the U.S. institution. These factors contributed to the decision to select SWU as the case study research site. The researcher was fully aware that their professional role in this partnership development might create bias during this evaluation process. Data was collected for this research through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The research questions proposed were used to guide the development of interview protocol. The researcher interviewed three key program administrators in this partnership project: 1) Director of International Affairs; 2) Academic Coordinator; 3) Student Affairs Coordinator. A formal email invitation, letter of consent, and interview protocol were sent to the three research participants before scheduling an interview. Given the three participants are not native English speakers, the interview protocol could help them be familiar with the questions in advance. The interview protocols for the three program administrators are structured the same, with leading questions focusing on the major stages of the partnership process, followed up with sub-questions. Zoom was used to conduct the interviews because the three participants live in China. Zoom also offers the auto transcript function to capture conversations. Nvivo, the qualitative analysis software, was used to analyze interview transcripts. The researcher created various nodes in Nvivo to capture interview themes. For example, the five phases of a relationship development (i.e., awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment, and dissolution) The research question served as a guide to search for the creation of themes. SWU's partnership process was examined based on the frameworks of five phases of Dwyer et al. (1987) and seven steps of ACE (n.a.). Phase(s) or step(s) were identified that aligned or did not align with the two frameworks.

RESULTS

The research findings respond to the research question: How did Southwest University establish the transformative partnership during the global pandemic, by analyzing SWU's international partnership process with the frameworks of five-phase process of Dwyer et al. (1987) and seven-step process of ACE (n.a.). The interview analysis shows that SWU's partnership process overall is congruent with the five-phase process for a relationship development, except the last phase (i.e., dissolution) remaining unknown.

135

However, as Dwyer et al. (1987) indicate, not every partnership possesses all the phases (see Table 1). In this case study, even though the emergent collaboration partnership is time specific, there is no sign showing SWU will terminate or disengage with the partner universities. On the contrary, SWU may utilize this collaboration as a step stone to create further initiatives with them. As the Director said, "…this kind of program that ties the relationship between Southwest University and … will have more personnel mobility not only students but also faculty."

Table 1: Alignment of SWU's partnership process with the Five-phase process for relationship development

	Yes/No/Unknown	Evidence
Awareness	Yes	SWU and partner universities started recognition of each other as a partner during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Exploration	Yes	SWU and partner universities communicated with each other online and exchanged expectations to build relationships.
Expansion	Yes	SWU and partner universities increased interdependence to each other and developed further trust and joint satisfaction.
Commitment	Yes	SWU and partner universities made a commitment to develop the offshore program.
Dissolution	Unknown	Despite the conclusion of the time-specific offshore program, SWU and partner universities both showed interest in future collaborations.

Compared to the five-phase process, ACE's seven steps framework presents more lacking steps in this SWU's partnership development process (see Table 2). For example, the second and third steps lack due to the nature of emergency.

Table 2: Alignment of SWU's partnership process with the Seven-step strategic planning process

	Yes/No/Unknown	Evidence
Connect partnerships to institutional strategy	Yes	The partnership does fit the mission and goal of SWU, but it did not occur as the first step.
Assess the current state of internationalization	No	Due to the time-sensitive and emergent nature of this partnership, SWU did not have time to assess the current state of internationalization before making a partnership decision.
Take stock of existing collaborations	No	SWU and partners did not have any interaction before this partnership.
Analyze the environment	Yes	SWU has an established team working on internationalization projects even before the pandemic. The team analyzed the environment as soon as the partnership conversation started.
Formulate a plan	Yes	SWU's established team started to develop a plan.
Develop (or revise) procedures and policies	Yes	SWU's established team started to develop procedures and policies.
Assess, update, and improve	Yes	SWU's confidence in internationalization has increased through this emergent partnership. SWU is considering expanding its partnership programs to benefit more faculty and students.

In addition to the process analysis above, there are three themes that emerged through the interviews with personnel in administration, academic coordination, and student services: 1) Championship; 2) Agility and adaptability; and 3) Support from faculty.

Championship

The Director played a critical role in this partnership development. According to the Academic Coordinator, SWU and partners were both committed to the collaboration, fortunately before the Director was transferred to another department at SWU. Otherwise, this partnership would never happen due to the possible lack of a champion. In addition, the Director's experiences and vision of campus internationalization have helped earn credibility and trust from the top-level leaders of SWU. As indicated in the interview, the Director was not mandated to request approval from the top-level leaders before making commitment to the partnership. This case study shows the decisive role of a championship in terms of an international partnership development.

Agility and Adaptability

We learn from this unconventional cooperation that agility and adaptability are essential to internationalization of higher education in the ever-changing world, especially during the worldwide crisis. The linear partnership process as modeled in the ACE's seven steps framework will need to be adapted. This case study also demonstrates there are many ways to facilitate student learning if higher education administrators remain open-minded and willing to take proper risks. As Altbach and de Wit (2021) predict that the global patterns of student mobility and related numbers are likely to change after the pandemic.

Although the students in the program are all Chinese natives, they are enrolled in universities in three different countries: Australia, New Zealand, the U.S. The Student Affairs Coordinator calls the student group like a "mini unique United Nations". Despite differences among the students, such as different academic requirements from different countries, the Student Affairs Coordinator comments that "…focus on what have in common rather than our difference". According to the Academic Coordinator, although the Chinese students enrolled in the program were first year students, the majority of them graduated from American high schools. They have the expectation of an American style of teaching. For example, they demanded an American style course syllabus. Chinese professors generally do not prepare the course syllabus like American academics, and they had to work with students to address the issue. When the Academic Coordinator initially was searching SWU's courses to match the U.S. partner's academic requirements, she realized it was extremely challenging. SWU's courses are not coordinated with numbers for each level, for instance, 100-level courses for 1st year students, 200-level courses for 2nd year students, and so on. The Academic Coordinator had to evaluate all course syllabuses and identify appropriate courses. Grading is another big issue. At SWU, over 80 points (out of 100) is generally considered an outstanding grade, but in the U.S., it is just a B. The Chinese students complained about the low grades and the Academic Coordinator communicated with both SWU professors and the U.S. university administrators to finally find a balanced solution. Regardless of the many changes, SWU and partners were willing to listen to each other and adapt established protocols and help students learn. According to the OLC's student survey findings, 88 percent of students who participated in the survey believe that the teaching facilities and learning environment at OLC met or exceeded their expectation. 92 percent students were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the room and board at OLC. Among the students who frequently utilized the academic support resources, 90 percent of students believed the academic support were helpful or very helpful.

Support from Faculty

First, the Academic Coordinator for this partnership is an associate professor in the English Department at SWU. She was invited to serve as the Academic Coordinator beyond her regular teaching load and responsibilities. She accepted the emergent role as an academic coordinator without hesitation.

In the Academic Coordinator's words, she believes this type of internationalization initiative is "…beneficial not only for American students but also for Chinese professors and students… in the future … develop further cooperation… help each other grow." She claims that she has grown tremendously as a faculty through this partnership by learning how to handle different academic expectations and how to ensure the congruence of curriculum from universities involved. The Academic Coordinator also commented, SWU's faculty members involved in this partnership were collegial and willing to constantly adjust their teaching style and communication approach based on students' feedback and her class observation input.

Due to the nature of emergency of this partnership, when the Director was asked if it was challenging to find appropriate faculty who are willing to take the teaching load within such a short notice, he said it was challenging to find suitable faculty, but SWU was prepared. According to the Director, the Office of International Affairs started the faculty internationalization interest assessment a few years ago and has an established database that tracks faculty's international experiences and internationalization interests, such as, desire of leading students abroad, number of international students to accept to take their classes, and other items. The faculty who are engaged in this partnership are self-driven and fully support campus internationalization.

Given the complex nature of a partnership process and evolving uncertainties occurring during the pandemic world and most likely after the pandemic, a modified seven-step strategic planning process is proposed (see Figure 3). It presents a cyclical process of six steps of a partnership with "Formulate a Plan" as the center. This modification keeps all seven steps but provides a flexible framework for them to interact and make impact on each other.
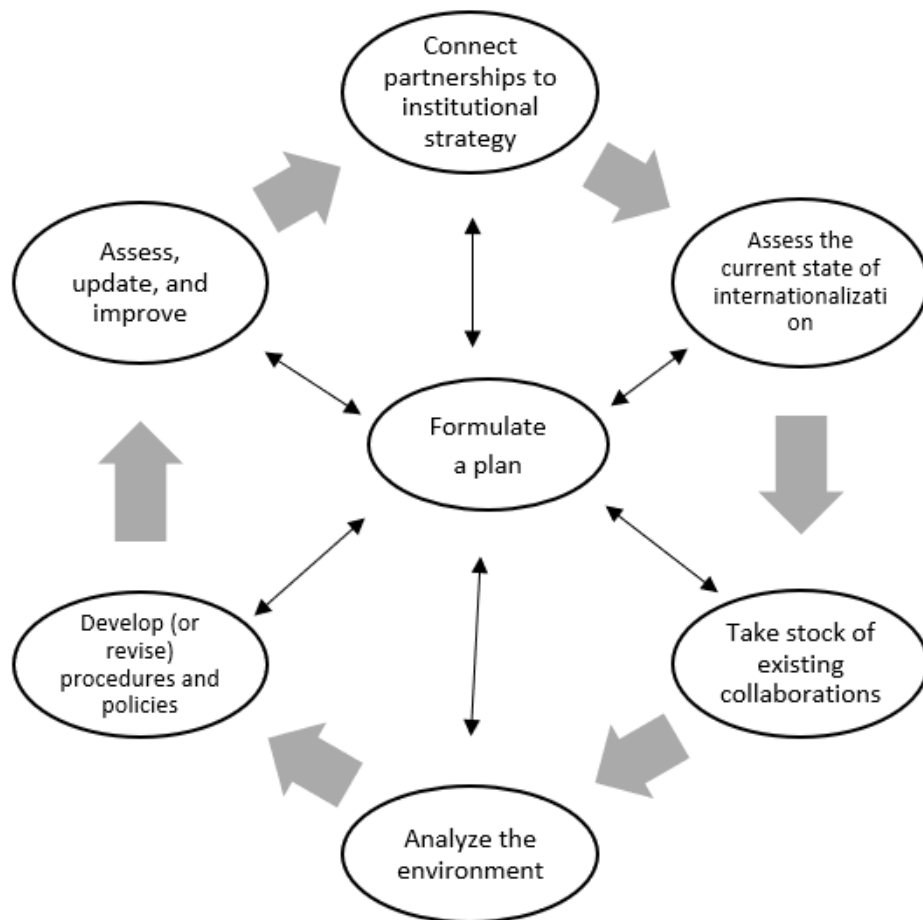
Figure 3: Modified Seven-step strategic planning process. Adapted from "*Internationalization in Action –*
International Partnerships, Part Two: Strategic Planning", by Academic Council of Education, n.a.

Limitations

        This study examines an unconventional international cooperation model during the pandemic and
presents how a conventional international partnership approach could be transformed and ultimately how
a new paradigm of internationalization may emerge. The research findings suggest a modified seven-step
strategic planning process for the future of the new normal. Nevertheless, this research only focuses on
the partnership development process and is a single case study. In addition, interviews were only
conducted with the program administrators, not students. Partner institutions outside of the U.S. were not
interviewed, either, for this case study. There were a few Chinese universities that provided campus
learning opportunities to similar groups of students during the pandemic time. If I had conducted multiple
case studies, the reflections I collected from interviewees would have been more in depth and new themes
may emerge. Although students' perspectives were informally shared via a brief survey and focus groups
by Southwest University, this research did not interview any student. A comprehensive interview on
students will help elaborate the findings. Last but not least, interviewing non-China partners and
understanding the other side of the partnership development journey will enrich the research and provide
a comparative lens of this transformative partnership.

IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

According to the Director, soon after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the world, the Chinese government urged public universities to be proactive at creating ways to provide learning opportunities to Chinese students who were enrolled in universities in other countries but were not able to travel. SWU took the lead developing this transformative partnership to accommodate students enrolled in three different countries. The Director mentioned, with the unceasing expansion of the epidemic virus in late 2020, the Ministry of Education of the Chinese government encouraged Chinese universities that have China-foreign cooperatively run institutions to follow SWU's OLC model and introduced new policy at the same time to allow those universities to expand student enrollment up to 20 per cent to accommodate as many Chinese students as possible.

This case study serves as evidence proving that the ultimate purpose of internationalization is a service to society, not financial gain. As de Wit (2020) reemphasizes, internationalization serves as an intentional process focused on quality, inclusion, and service to society, when reflecting on his critics in 2011 about the role of internationalization as a competitive tradable commodity. Even before the COVID-19, notions like "internationalization for society", "global learning for all", "internationalization at home", started to receive abundant attention. Then the pandemic happened, and higher education leaders were scrambling to accommodate students' learning needs. Now in Fall 2021, the majority of international students can travel to their study destination to take in person classes and activities. So, shall we push the "reset" button and return to the old normal? What is the direction of internationalization onward?

IEASA conference hosted in August 2021, themed "Internationalisation, Inclusion and Social Justice – Towards a fairer world", called for proposals to address a few questions which include: "Can internationalization approaches, models and practices be reconfigured to create greater benefit to society" (Chasi, July 2021). This theme echoes the notion "internationalization for society" mentioned above. Glover (2013) also cautions that the extrinsic motivations for internationalization, such as increased student enrollment for financial gain, will not sustain international partnerships. Only shared education and social outcomes could enhance the quality and durability of an international partnership. This case study demonstrates that the international partnership during the pandemic varied greatly and operated on a totally different landscape from a conventional one. Those traditional partnership activities perhaps are no longer dominant. The pandemic has brought up opportunities and makes us rethink the future focus of internationalization. As Eggins et al. (2021) state, our world is interconnected and interrelated and how we could shift the previously dominant focus of internationalization from revenue-driven and reputation-driven to a focus on the service to the society. Future research could focus on new models of international partnerships, not just among higher education institutions, but cross sectoral collaboration. For example, partnership among multiple countries, between universities and government and industries, partnerships on student employment, and many other areas. Now is a good time to rethink international partnership and develop innovative ways to contribute to teaching, learning, and services of higher education and ultimately the well-being of the global society.

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