Introduction to JCIHE Special Issue: Part B

International and Comparative Impact of COVID-19 on Institutions of Education

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Dear Readers -

The Summer Special Issue for *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education (JCIHE)* is proud to offer *Part B 14(5B): International and Comparative Impact of COVID-19 on Institutions of Education.* The call for the Special Issue yielded a significantly high number of quality submissions. As such, the Special Issue editors in consultation with the JCIHE Board choose to create two parts to the Special Issue. This issue, *Summer Special Issue Part B 14(5B): International and Comparative Impact of COVID-19 on Institutions of Education,* explores immediate and longer-term effects of COVID-19 and its variants on higher education using a comparative and global perspective. The authors in this issue represent four countries: China, Japan, United States, and Vietnam. The articles examine comparative and international higher education issues in Austria, Brazil, China, Canada, Chile, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Taiwan, United States, and Vietnam. Each of these articles describe institutional policy changes, leadership sensemaking and student experiences as a direct programmatic response to COVID-19. In so doing, the authors reimagine ways in which higher education can be stronger and be more responsive to their communities in a post-COVID world. There are three main themes represented in the articles in this issue: Institutional policy implementation and leadership sensemaking, Institutional Policy and Reforms, and international student experiences.

Institutional Policy Implementation and Leadership Sensemaking

During COVID-19 and moving forward, different HEIs and their leadership around the world instituted policies to support international students and to guide the institution forward. In these plans, are examples of how leadership address crisis. Sarah M. Schiffecker, Jon McNaughtan, Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez, Hugo Garcia, and Xinyang Lia compare how University Presidents in eight counties perceive the needs of international students during COVID-19. Yuriko Sato, Krishna Bista, and Yukari Matsuzuka compare the experiences of international students in Japan and international students in the United States during COVID-19 and find specific differences in these experiences and in responses from the universities.

Institutional Policy & Reforms

Institutional policy and reforms instituted during COVID-19 illustrates institutions in and respond to crisis. Bich Thi Ngoc Tran & Lorien S. Jordan analyze the effectiveness of Vietnamese government's educational policies aimed at controlling virus spread with respect to Vietnam's inequalities of access to higher education, quality of curriculum and instruction, and institutional autonomy. Nadia Mann & Sue Mennicke examine the Franklin and Marshall College (US) residential program, F&M in Shanghai designed for first-year Chinese students and how institutional policy served their students during COVID-19. Ling G. LeBeau & Fajun Zhang detail the creation of a college learning environment for Chinese students who were enrolled in other countries during the pandemic. Elizabeth Neria-Piña details institutional changes made by international affairs office in a Mexican university during COVID-19. Jon McNaughtan, Hugo A. Garcia, Sarah M. Schiffecker, Grant R. Jackson, Kent Norris, Dustin Eicke, Andrew S. Herridge, & Xinyang Li compare how flagship universities in the United States use institutional websites to share information about changing institutional practices during COVID-19.

International Student Experiences

Finally, one article in this issue details international student experiences. Jianhui Zhang and Manca Sustarsic share how emotion-focused strategies helped Chinese doctoral students in a large research university in the US deal with stressors from COVID-19.

JCIHE 14(3B) articles include:

Sarah M. Schiffecker (*Texas Tech University, USA),* **Jon McNaughtan** (*Texas Tech University, USA),* **Santiago Castiello-Gutiérrez** (*University of Arizona, USA),* **Hugo Garcia** *(Texas Tech University, USA)* **and Xinyang Lia** (*Texas Tech University, USA).* **Leading the many, Considering the few - University Presidents' Perspectives on International Students During COVID-19**
This article examines how higher education leaders envision successful leadership particularly when it comes to international student populations in times of crisis. The comparative study examines leadership in Austria, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Germany, Mexico, Taiwan, and United States. Guided by the Intercultural Leadership framework, university presidents from eight different countries were informed in their perceptions of international students and how they acted to support this vulnerable population.

Bich Thi Ngoc Tran (*University of Arkansas, USA*), **and Lorien S. Jordan** *University of Arkansas, U.S.A.* **Vietnam's Success in COVID-19 Pandemic: What Are Consequences to Its Higher Education?**
This article evaluates the disruptions caused by COVID-19 in Vietnamese education. A focus is made on analyzing the Vietnamese government's educational policies aimed at controlling virus spread with respect to Vietnam's inequalities of access to higher education, quality of curriculum and instruction, and institutional autonomy. Finally, through this analysis, the policies are examined for their advantages and disadvantages in policy implementation.

Yuriko Sato *Tokyo Institute of Technology,* **Krishna Bista** *Morgan State University,* **and Yukari Matsuzuka** *Hitotsubashi University, Japan.* **COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on International Students in Japan and the United States: Comparative Study From National and Institutional Context**
This article compares the impact of COVID-19 on international students in Japan and the United States. Focus is on the influence of government policies and the university responses on international students' experiences and choices. Students shared differences in how they gathered information, financial difficulty, confusion regarding visas, perceived prejudice/discrimination, experiences with online classes and counseling services.

Nadia Mann (*Franklin and Marshall College, USA*) & **Sue Mennicke** (*Franklin and Marshall College, USA*). **Improving the First-Year Experience of Chinese International Students through Responsive Pedagogy: Insights from F&M in Shanghai**
This article explores F&M in Shanghai, a hybrid residential-remote program created for Franklin and Marshall College (US) first-year Chinese students in Fall 2020. This residential program was designed to craft a constructive environment for first-year Chinese students by intentionally considering and meeting their specific needs. Assessment of practices of F&M in Shanghai show that the institution utilizes creative, well-designed pedagogy, thoughtful programming, and a multipronged approach to student support.

Elizabeth Neria-Piña (*Oklahoma State University, USA*). **Internationalization of Higher Education in Universities in the Global South during COVID-19: A case study of a Mexican University**
This article explores how COVID-19 harmed internationalization activities in universities in the Global South with a focus on a Mexican university. In the Mexican university, the response of the International Affairs Office and the future of internationalization differ from counterparts in the Global North. Implications include the potential for collaboration among stakeholders and the use of technology to deal with uncertain times.

Jianhui Zhang *University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, United States* **& Manca Sustarsic** *University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, United States.* **Coping and Adjustment during COVID-19: Experiences of Chinese International Doctoral Students in the United States**
This article unpacks Chinese doctoral students' experiences and how they coped during COVID-19 one large research university in the U.S. There were many stressors that impacted these

doctoral students that included learning obstacles, health concerns, funding uncertainties, and limited social interactions. Yet, participants used emotion-focused strategies to cope with the daily life stressors, the tense political climate and hate speech targeting Chinese people in the U.S.

Jon McNaughtan *(Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX),* **Hugo A. Garcia** *(Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX),* **Sarah M. Schiffecker** *(Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX),* **Grant R. Jackson** *(Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX),* **Kent Norris** *(Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX),* **Dustin Eicke (***Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX), A***ndrew S. Herridge** *(The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg MS),* **and Xinyang Li** *(Texas Tech University, Lubbock TX).* **Surfing for Answers: Understanding how Universities in the United States Utilized Websites in Response to COVID-19**

This article examines websites of public flagship universities in the United States during the pandemic from January 2020 to April 2020. Quantitative thematic analysis coded institutional websites and public communications to capture the information that institutions provided on campus websites (e.g., institutional decisions, timing of those decisions, public communications, and informational website structure). Information included information about moving to online instruction, implementing work-from-home policies, and canceling face-to-face events. Transformative International Partnership during Global Challenges: A case study of a public research university in China during the pandemic

Ling G. LeBeau (*Syracuse University, USA*) and **Fajun Zhang** (*Southwest University, China*). **Transformative International Partnership during Global Challenges: A case study of a public research university in China during the pandemic**

This article examines impactful international partnerships that had to change and act quickly to avoid international enrollment crash. One outcome was the creation of an unconventional international cooperation that a public research university in China initiated to provide a college learning environment for Chinese students who were enrolled in other countries during the pandemic.

Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education Contributors

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Editor-in-Chief,
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Table of Contents

Part II: Special Issue on the International and Comparative Impact of COVID-19 on Institutions of Education

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INTRODUCTION

Close to three years on, after severely disrupting every sphere of our lives, the world is still grappling with the burden of the evolving COVID-19 Variant of Concern (VoC) and subvariants. Globally, the education sector has seen tremendous changes since the onset of the coronavirus. Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared another global health emergency as Monkeypox transmissions have been documented to be on the rise (WHO, 2022). While its rate of transmissibility is not as severe as COVID-19, it is yet another signal of the potential disruptions arising from viral zoonotic transmissions. Already, officials in San Francisco have declared that Monkeypox cases are rising and call for resources to be mobilized to prevent the spread (Office of the Mayor, 2022).

With new viral transmissions on the horizon and ongoing COVID-19 challenges, this special issue documents the global setbacks faced in the field of international higher education. Disruptions to student learning and well-being, a sudden halt to internationalization activities, decline in undergraduate enrollment and staff shortages are just a few of the challenges that education institutions have faced since 2020 (Kuhfeld et al., 2022; Mbous et al, 2022; Mok et al., 2021). Economists project that the costs of these setbacks in the long run could mean that COVID-era cohort students could earn US$49,000 to $61,000 less in their lifetime and may cost the economy up to US$188 billion each year as they enter the workforce (Dorn et al., 2021). Moreover, this also means that inequities in racial earnings will persist (Zerbino, 2021).

During this time of severe global health disparities, world governments and health professionals have also had to mitigate the harmful spread of COVID-19 related misinformation via existing and new social media platforms (Otto, 2021). In recent times, harmful misinformation and historically unchecked systemic biases against racial minorities have also

caused a worrisome rise in hate crimes. The US justice department reports that in 2020, hate crimes data show that race played the greatest motivation for (61.8 percent) crimes in single-bias incidents (US Department of Justice, 2020).

As we take stock of the psychological, economic, financial, and social damage (Pak et al., 2021) done over these pandemic years on the education sector we must also recognize the compounded impact of the worsening conflicts around the world. The Russia-Ukraine conflict and political instability in Italy, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Ethiopia and other countries have also contributed to rising costs, changes in how and where we travel and sustained supply chain woes. To make matters worse, economists predict an inevitable inflation driven recession which could mean market volatility, job loss, and greater inequality in the near future (Miller, 2022). As institutions around the world continue to prepare students for a post-pandemic workforce, this special issue aims at providing a robust understanding of these issues, the ways they impact our future and provide potential strategies collected from around the world to navigate these testing times.

Currently, medical science experts warn that the latest BA. 5 VoC and BA. 4 subvariant are highly transmissible and fear higher rates of infection and reinfection. To reduce the spread, they emphasize that comparative data from around the world show that vaccine regimens are key to protecting and saving lives (Arbel, et al., 2022; Gupta et al., 2021). Since the development of vaccines, the urgent call for disease mitigation with vaccine equity has been a top priority for the World Health Organization (2022). However, the fast spreading BA.5 VoC further highlights the inequities in vaccine delivery particularly given that new mutations are found in countries with lower rates of inoculation (Callaway, 2021; Welch, 2021). World education institutions continue to play a pivotal role in our collective ability to develop medical innovation, processes, and

procedures in the hopes of easing the burden of COVID-19. In this special issue, researchers from around the world discuss the setbacks they face, offer strategies to mitigate COVID-19 challenges and provide insights for a meaningful path forward.

In part two of JCIHE's special issue on the impact COVID-19 on world education systems, I am proud to present a diverse group of authors who examine data from China, United States, Japan, Vietnam, Mexico, Taiwan, Chile, Austria, Germany, Brazil and Canada. First, Schiffecker et al. offer findings from their comparative study to highlight ways university leaders were informed in their perception of international students during COVID-19. Zhang and Sustarsic's study sheds light into the compounded challenges of the pandemic and how the rise in hate crimes affected Chinese international doctoral students in the US. McNaughten et al., use institutional websites to study decisions that universities made to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis. Sato et al., use comparative survey data to report on how student mobility differences occur in international students from Japan and the US as they are influenced by government policies. Neria-Piña offers a case study from Mexico that provides insights into university strategies such as virtual mobility initiatives that were used for internationalization during COVID-19. Tran and Jordan examine COVID-era government policies from Vietnam and discuss its impact on their higher education system. Mann and Mennicke discuss a successful remote education delivery using a case study of a hybrid residential-remote program designed for first year Chinese students. Finally, LeBeau and Zhang highlight an unconventional international cooperation initiated by an institution in China aimed to provide Chinese students enrolled in other countries continued education during the pandemic. Collectively, these global studies offer a nuanced understanding of immediate and long-term challenges brought on by COVID-19 on the field of

international higher education. They also seek to arm us with knowledge on ways to mitigate future pandemics.

I am humbled to report that this closing second part makes this the largest special issue in the journal's history. It is the collective effort of many editors, faculty scholars/researchers and reviewers that made this special issue come to fruition. I first want to thank Dr. Lindsay DeMartino for serving as Guest Special Editor and for providing clear editorial decisions whenever possible. I could not have managed this special issue without the consistent leadership of the JCIHE Editor in Chief, Dr. Rosalind Raby. Dr. Raby's mentorship and guidance throughout this publication not only strengthened my editorial skills but also provided a masterclass on effectively managing multiple moving parts that ultimately resulted in the production of this important issue. I sincerely thank all members of Dr. Raby's editorial team including Dr. Prashanti Chenamsetti Dr. Yovana S. Veerasamy and Marisa Lally for their tireless efforts and attention to detail. It was my honor to work alongside such a dedicated editorial team!

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Empirical Article

Leading the many, Considering the few - University Presidents' Perspectives on International Students During COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has changed the landscape of higher education. The purpose of this study is to enhance understanding of how higher education leaders are engaging emerging questions about successful leadership, particularly when it comes to international student populations in times of crisis. Guided by the Intercultural Leadership framework, this comparative case study illuminates how university presidents from eight different countries were informed in their perceptions of international students and how they acted to support this vulnerable population. The results of this analysis highlight practical implications for higher education leaders to utilize when navigating global crises while protecting international student populations.

Keywords: *COVID-19, crisis leadership, international students, presidential perspectives, university leadership,*

INTRODUCTION

Successful leadership in higher education is much discussed, yet hard to achieve. The challenges and difficulties presented to educational leaders are only amplified in situations of crisis

(Kuknor & Bhattacharya, 2021; McNaughtan & McNaughtan, 2019). Many studies have attempted to capture those hardships of leading a higher education institution (HEI) through difficult times and crises of various sorts and identified best practices for leaders to employ (Gigliotti, 2019; Fortunato et al., 2018; Smith & Hughey, 2006). For example, Brennan and Stern (2017) point out that "crisis leadership requires not only making decisions but also communicating them in ways that help to maintain a leader's (and organizations) legitimacy and credibility" (p. 121). Similarly, McNaughtan and colleagues (2019) argue that leaders should be guided by their institutional mission statements and values when facing challenges to maintain integrity.

Despite the growing body of research focused on educational leadership in HEIs in times of crisis, few focus on the role of top leaders in supporting students and even fewer discuss how presidents engage their most vulnerable student populations (Hotchkins et al., 2021). Utilizing the COVID-19 global pandemic as a common experience to reflect on, the purpose of this study was to enhance understanding of how presidents across the world garner information about, and support one of the more vulnerable populations in HEIs: international students. Results from this study provide insights to presidents on how to best guide their institution through difficult times while considering the needs of students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate the study within the existing research literature corpus, the following section will introduce several topic areas relevant to the analysis on how university presidents worldwide lead their institutions and more specifically their international student communities during crises. The overarching areas discussed are campus internationalization and the role university presidents play in developing it, as well as international students' roles and challenges on U.S. campuses.

Campus Internationalization - Different Approaches, One Goal?

Internationalization is not a concern only for U.S. universities, but for HEIs around the globe (García & Villarreal, 2014). While there is a substantial research corpus exploring the internationalization efforts of U.S. institutions (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007; Teichler, 2017), an equally robust scholarly base is wanting for a more international scope. As early as in 2003, the UNESCO Global Education Digest mentioned internationalization as an integral focus of universities worldwide. The guidelines presented in this report were intentionally formulated to be applicable to a wide range of HEIs worldwide, making internationalization a global educational goal. Knight (2007) emphasized that in order to ensure progress and prosperity in the 21st century, adding an international dimension to higher education needs to be a priority for HEIs in all countries. A globalized world with equally globalized labor markets sets new expectations and demands for HEIs to equip their students with the necessary skills and knowledge to survive and thrive under these conditions (Yeaton et al., 2017). Excelling globally and successfully participating in the global market has become a crucial aspiration and goal of higher education institutions (Rumbley et al., 2012).

In Europe, as early as in the 11th century, students took it upon themselves to travel and live-in different countries to study at prestigious institutions (Haskins & Lewis, 1957). The first medieval universities in Europe that emerged in the late 11th and early 12th century had travel and mobility inscribed in their cores, since it was not only the students but in fact, the universities themselves that traveled from location to location, keeping education quite literally dynamic (Thelin, 2019). Europe in general and Germany in particular developed into the center of

academic rigor and scientific achievements and attracted scholars from all over the world (Willetts, 2017). Though geographically bound to certain campus locations, modern universities have always been international institutions with a constant influx of international students crossing state borders in pursuit of extraordinary and high-quality education (Garcia & Villarreal, 2014).

While internationalization seems to be an essential aspect of global higher education, the individual national contexts in which those efforts to internationalize are being made differ significantly. In both Europe (e.g., Great Britain) , and North America, for example, "there are increasingly powerful political, economic, and academic challenges to the internationalization process" (Altbach & DeWit, 2018, p. 4) and non-Western countries have shown an increased interest in internationalizing their HEIs. The so-called 'Trump Effect' on U.S. international higher education (Altbach & de Wit, 2017) and Brexit (Marginson, 2017) severely impacted internationalization efforts, particularly in Western higher education. In addition, the COVID-19 global pandemic "involved worldwide lockdowns, cessation of normal activities and massive state sponsored and state-controlled mitigation" (Woods et. al, 2020, p. 5) made a globalized world that used to feel so open and intertwined all of a sudden, very isolated and distant. In summary, the combination of increased nationalism and global challenges has hindered internationalizationism in yet to be fully comprehended ways.

The President's Role in Campus Internationalization

The 2017 American Council on Education (ACE) report on college presidents in the United States mentions campus diversity and inclusion as one of the top priorities of HEI presidents, stating that more "than half of the presidents in the sample reported that racial climate on campus was more of a priority than it had been three years ago" (p. 46). Despite the increasing importance of improving the campus climate, few presidents focus on supporting international students and there is a dearth of research on presidential responsibilities towards the international community or the internationalization of the campus in general (Sullivan, 2011). With the presidents' role as the moral leaders of their institutions (Brown, 2006), their perceptions of all campus groups carry significant weight for all HEI practices, routines, and strategies. A global crisis like COVID-19 disproportionately affects international students due to travel restrictions, visa issues, and other amplified challenges. Especially in situations like this, the spotlight on educational leadership is rightly criticized, and focus is given on how to best support students.

Considering the Few - International Students

Logistically, international students face regulatory barriers to studying in foreign countries and significant emotional and social challenges (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Tas, 2013; Wu et al., 2015). Hurdles exist for all international student destinations, however, countries considered 'top hosts' like the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom share some characteristics of driving a harder course on student visas, while international students in countries that are typically 'senders' tend to go easier on the regulations for the few international students they host (Sin et al., 2021). For example, the U.S. visa system confronts international students with many hurdles, including an abundance of fees, complicated rules, and strict rules and consequences regulating the international students' stay in the United States (Urias & Camp Yeakey, 2009). This reflects the apprehensive stance on bringing in an international student population and redirecting international students to other nations for tertiary education (García &

Villarreal, 2014). While restrictions to certain areas like for example work permits for international students exist in non-top host countries like Germany as well, the overall visa system tends to be less restrictive and alienating than in the United States (Woodfield, 2009). However, international students, in general, are often under-supported (Lee & Rice, 2007) and a crisis like the COVID-19 global pandemic amplifies already existing organizational support deficiencies (Tozini & Castiello-Gutiérrez, in press). International students represent a "vulnerable student population" (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 33), amplified in crisis situations. With international students as part of the campus community facing a unique set of challenges (Andrade, 2017; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Heck & Mu, 2016; Pottie-Sherman, 2018; Wu et al., 2015), a global crisis brings about a whole new additional set of difficulties (Chen et al., 2020; Demuyakor, 2020; Dennis, 2020; Hope, 2020; Jang & Choi, 2020; King et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020).

While much research focusing on educational leadership during crisis exists (Fortunato et al., 2018; Gigliotti, 2019; Smith & Hughey, 2006), there is a dearth of studies looking specifically at how university leaders in different national contexts perceive vulnerable populations and even less on how leaders engage their international campus communities in crisis situations. Therefore, this study aims to illuminate how university presidents from eight different countries are informed in their perceptions of the international students on their campuses during the COVID-19 crisis. Two research questions guide this study:

RQ1: How do university presidents in different contexts perceive their role in supporting international students during a crisis?

RQ2: What are presidents' perceptions on how to best gather information when making decisions about supporting international students during crises in their respective national contexts?

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Intercultural Leadership Competency (Seiler, 2007). Intercultural competence is a highly contested and equally faceted term with a plethora of definitions. "Conceptualizations of intercultural communication competence are highly diverse in their disciplines, terminologies, and scholarly and practical objectives" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 5), which is why fields like higher education need to closely consider and specify their understanding of what it means to possess intercultural competencies, for example in areas of higher educational leadership. Generally, intercultural leadership competency has been linked to an awareness of the leader (Goleman et al., 2002), an ability to deal with complexity (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002), a proclivity to take on inspirational, motivational and empowering roles while displaying an open mind and respect for all stakeholders (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Moro Bueno & Tubbs, 2004). Seiler's (2007) framework was selected because it allows us to compare and contrast the different leadership experiences of the presidents included in the study, and because it provides insight into the diverse student populations served by these presidents. In short, we posit that successful leadership has to respond to the increased globalization and subsequent interculturalization (Irving, 2010). As early as 2004, sources like the Research and Development (RAND) report stated that increasing globalization will lead to increased intercultural complexities within organizations. Organizational leadership in their position on the forefront of representation and guidance becomes a focal point for intercultural competencies (McNaughtan et al, 2019).

This framework is also best suited for this study because it focuses on intercultural leadership competency as a complex construct rather than merely considering an intercultural environment as a determining factor (Bolten, 2005), Seiler (2007) provides "a holistic description of the influencing variables on leadership behavior" (p. 3), combining five influential factors to intercultural leadership behavior: a) individual competence, b) team, c) organization, d) general context and e) specific situation. Individual competence is defined by Seiler (2007) as "a certain level of meta-cognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral intercultural competence" (p. 5). In this study, we use this factor to describe the presidents' individual characteristics, experiences and perspectives that contribute to their intercultural leadership. The team (or group) factor "focuses on the importance of the team that a leader is integrated in" (p. 6), which translates in this study to any references of collaborative efforts to successfully lead international students. Organization is defined by Seiler (2007) as "internalization strategy, the infrastructure and the selection and development of employees" (p. 6), allowing for an integration of the individual universities and their strategic planning of internationalization into the framework. The general context as "the historical and current context in which the mission is embedded" is higher education for this study, whereas the specific situation consists of anything relating to the COVID-19 pandemic and the institutional response. In order to operationalize Seiler's (2007) framework for intercultural leadership, this study identifies the five factors a) individual competence, b) team, c) organization, d) general context and e) specific situation within the international presidents' narratives in order to better understand how university leaders lead their international campus communities in times of crisis.

RESEARCH METHOD

The global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic created opportunities for international comparative studies on many fronts. In order to successfully employ the theoretical framework for intercultural leadership to answer this study's research questions, a qualitative multiple case study design (Yin, 2014) with university presidents from multiple countries and continents was chosen.

Participants

The study participants were selected through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2014) with the broader goal of dissecting global HEI leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sampling process consisted of several steps that lead to the ultimate final sample of 14 university presidents. The first step in sampling was to identify and select nationally known and top ranked HEIs from around the world. Second, the diversity of the sample in terms of countries and potential gender imbalances within higher education leadership (Timmons, 2020) was a key concern as we reviewed all potential institutions for selection. As a third step, we identified the highest ranking individual within the HEI with the assumption that the highest authority level grants the highest level of impact on decision making processes during a crisis. While both job titles and leadership responsibilities vary among higher education leaders, we use the term 'university presidents' as a universal replacement for different titles such as Chancellor or Rector.

This initial sampling process produced a list of 85 universities located in 15 different countries. With the internationally comparative intention of this study in mind, email invitations were initially sent out to 50 HEIs and their respective leaders from each of the 15 countries in order to achieve greater international variance of the sample. Those 50 email invitations included the approximate duration of the online interview which was set between 30-45 minutes as well as a list with research questions guiding the interview. We received 14 declines, 19 failed responses

and 17 responses agreeing to participate in the study. However, three of those 17 HEIs indicated that the interview partner would be a senior leadership member but not the university president. Since this study focuses specifically on university presidents and not higher education leaders in other ranks, we dropped those three HEIs from the sample. Table 1 presents the main characteristics of the final sample consisting of 14 university presidents from 8 different countries.

Table 1: Participants

#	Pseudonym	Sex	Country	Institution Type
1	President G	Male	Taiwan	Public
2	President J	Female	Taiwan	Public
3	President K	Male	Germany	Public
4	President L	Male	Germany	Public
5	President M	Female	Germany	Public
6	President N	Male	Austria	Public
7	President O	Female	Austria	Public
8	President E	Male	Chile	Public
9	President F	Male	Brazil	Public
10	President H	Male	Mexico	Private
11	President A	Male	US	Public
12	President B	Male	US	Public
13	President C	Female	US	Private
14	President D	Female	Canada	Public

Given the potential for significant variance across the context of the countries' governance structures and COVID response, we do not seek to provide blanket comparative statements, but we will acknowledge the different context to provide insight into how decisions were made. The research team for this project had the capability to interview presidents in English, German, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish. Following guidance provided to reduce barriers to interviewing elites in higher education by McClure and McNaughtan (2021) interviews were conducted on Zoom or Microsoft Teams, questions were provided well in advance, and each interview was conducted in a semi-structured approach to allow the president to guide the discussion more freely.

Data Analysis

The methodological approach for this study was a comparative case study to allow for "flexibility to incorporate multiple perspectives, data collection tools, and interpretive strategies" (Blanco Ramirez, 2016, p. 19). Through the comparative aspect of the case study employed, it is possible to develop "an in-depth analysis of a case" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 14) on multiple national levels. This allows for comparative conclusions that would not be possible by looking at merely one single case (Lieberson, 2000). A content analysis of the themes brought up by the presidents during the interviews focused on who and what informed the university leaders' perceptions of their international students' wants and needs during a global crisis like COVID-19. The theoretical framework of Intercultural Leadership (Seiler, 2007) provided the guiding base for the analysis and helped structure the codes and themes. The five themes 1) individual competence, 2) team, 3) organization, 4) general context, and 5) specific situation identified in the framework were used to answer the research questions and guided the coding process. Since the study is specifically looking at leadership during crisis, theme 4) general context and theme 5) specific situation were combined into one theme context/situation.

RESULTS

Throughout the collected data, four main themes crystallized around the core theme of presidential crisis leadership relating to international students as a minoritized campus group: Individual Competency, Team Focus, Organizational Support, and Context and Situation. To achieve "a holistic description of the influencing variables on leadership behavior" (Seiler, 2007, p. 3), those four themes must be considered in answering this study's research questions.

RQ1: How do university presidents in different contexts perceive their role in supporting international students during crisis?

Individual Competence

When asked about their role in leading their institutions through crisis while at the same time considering the needs of minoritized campus populations like international students, the university presidents often referred to their individual and personal experiences with international education, studying abroad and the idea of an internationalized campus. This aligns with the presidents' role as the moral leaders of their institutions (Brown, 2006), which includes leveraging their own experiences. European President N mentioned his own involvement with the internationalization of higher education through work experience as he "did have an offer to work as a dean at an American university". President L, also the leader of a European university, vividly remembers the experience of being a student and emphasizes his empathy for the challenges international students are facing during COVID-19. He also mentioned that it was this experience that inspired his involvement in internationalization:

> We have increasingly more programs that can be taken in English which is quite popular for international students. A few years ago, I myself have created an English molecular biology program which has increased by 80% over the past few years. I can say, we are proud to be an international university with about 25% international students.

President M shared that her leadership was informed from being an international student and therefore personally engages in the support and care for international students. She stated:

I have some of my own sources. I used to be an international student and see myself as an international person so I can use those resources. My son is an international student right now. At the moment he is in Sweden. In the spring he was still in Boston. So personal and professional is mixing here a little bit (...). I personally started a project to collect money to be able to help international students so they can bridge this difficult time where they cannot make any money (President M).

Personal and professional life mixing, especially during situations of crises, turned out to be an important aspect of the individual intercultural leadership competency university presidents employed.

Organization

The university as an inherently international organization (Knight, 2007; Thelin, 2019) played and important part in the presidents' intercultural leadership. Many presidents mentioned the overall global and diverse perspective of their institutions as a defining characteristic that became particularly important during crises. President H for example stated:

We try to develop a global and diverse perspective. And as part of that, of course, we promote student mobility abroad. Because of the pandemic, all of a sudden, the multiple ways in which we were sending students was affected. And not only that, we have as one of our goals or metrics that graduating classes need to develop that global and diverse perspective, if they can, through face-to-face experiences. If not, then through alternative means (President H).

This international perspective extends throughout all parts of the university, including students, faculty and staff. President N stated that "Our institution is very involved in internationalization and we see ourselves as very international" and that "the internationalization on the level of the employees has increased significantly" while the the university takes "in professors and research personnel from all over the world, but we also want our students to go out into the world" (President N). Within this international scope of the university as a global actor, university presidents presented themselves as global actors representing their institutions, drawing on institutional values when faced with a crisis.

Context/Situation

As expected, the specific context and situation of the global COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on the ways in which the university presidents perceived their role when it comes to considering and leading the few. With the impact of the pandemic transcending national borders (Woods et al., 2020), the particular challenges and emerging wants and needs of the international student population were not only recognized by the presidents, but specifically addressed. President E mentioned his concern for a lack of connectedness of the international students with their university and expresses his wish for more opportunities for direct lines of communication and contact:

Also, being able to give students the attention they require. By attention I mean a concern for them, what they need, if they need to talk. That is a subject that has been much more difficult because there are students who simply do not connect with the university, or hide the camera at a certain moment, or do not have a camera…you don't even know if they are there or if they are not there. And that

has been strange for the academic activities, and it has been strange, too, to not have a more direct contact with the students. I think that we could improve that even more (President E).

Even with the number of obligations and responsibilities during crisis exponentially increasing, university presidents remained aware of the struggles particularly vulnerable student populations like the international student community are facing. Establishing an institutional culture of care during challenging times was pointed out as a leadership priority by president C who stated that "we knew it was going to be very challenging for them to come, but we wanted them to be able to continue their education. And so the biggest role was making sure we support and nurture that community. Your voice is being heard. We care about you". Especially during an extreme situation like during COVID-19, knowing that your organization, your leadership, cares about you is an important factor for campus populations. This is particularly crucial for international students as "vulnerable student population" (Sherry et al., 2010).

RQ2: What are the perceptions of presidents on how to best gather information when making decisions about supporting international students during crises with their geopolitical context?

Individual Competence

While the presidents mentioned the role they saw themselves play when it came to leading and supporting international students through a crisis, they also pointed out that their involvement and sources of information were often not of the direct kind, but rather lay in the structural framing of the institution. President N for example stated, "when it comes to individual students, I am not very involved but when it comes to framing the conditions that is my job (President N)". They do feel personally involved and responsible, but also acknowledge that sometimes they may not be doing enough to engage with the concerns of the international student populations, which aligns with the existent literature on a lack of direct presidential involvement in matters of internationalization (Sullivan, 2011). President B talked about the difficulties that come with a general leadership position of the university president.

I don't do enough in that regard, I would say. I do get a lot of emails from international students. The international students, in my opinion, many times, come from a culture in which they're very differential to leadership. And so, sometimes, I do get a lot of direct requests from them because they think the president can do anything (President B).

With only so many hours in a day and the presidential responsibilities piling up during crises, the importance of a functioning, well-collaborating team increases significantly, which was another theme in this study.

Team

The director's office was mentioned as an important team resource university presidents employed in order to manage the many leadership tasks. President N points out that issues of international student mobility are particularly complex, as they are tied to various legal and political considerations. He states that "In the director's office we have to think closely about what steps to take concerning the regulations put forward by the government. We have to think about

immediate measures how we can manage all that but also what the future will look like" (President N). The deans make up another important team resource employed by university presidents. Communication and collaboration with the deans are crucial as they often represent links to political, economic or other entities outside the university. President B highlighted his relationship with the dean of the graduate school as an example of how he leverages those teams available to him to both get information and use it:

> I get a lot of input from (...), the dean of the graduate school. We communicate a lot. And then I get correspondence from (...). But I probably communicate with (...) when I want advice on issues that relate to policies. And sometimes, we would reach out to our congressional leadership in DC to help us or communicate to APLU or NASA. I would get advice from (...) to be better informed before I would speak to them (President B).

Knowing what is going on in their institutions and having a general overview of the wants and needs of specific student populations was identified as dependent on efficient and effective teamwork. President F pointed out that staying up to date with information and internal processes during crises is an important part of successful crisis leadership: "And this kind of information quickly that comes to my office with the velocity of light. Any problem, I immediately already know. So nowadays, with the social media, especially with the social media, I immediately I'm aware of what's going on" (President F). Similar to the importance of leadership teams were the role of the organizational structures within the universities that facilitate the flow of information on international students.

Organization

An important source employed by the university presidents to obtain information on the international student populations are the various offices within the university structure, particularly the international offices. President L states that

> We have an office that deals with our international affairs and they work on many different sectors. They also run a welcome center for incoming international students and also for international faculty. So, we have a good oversight over all of our international community and all the exchange programs we run and participate in (President L).

Having oversight of the exchange programs and foreign affairs appeared to be a concern for the presidents, which is why they relied on their international offices to provide them with information on various aspects of the international student life. While usually not directly involved in international student affairs, the presidents showed awareness of those complexities and the organizational structures supporting them. President E talks about those complexities and states:

> And foreign students were given all the training that was necessary to complete semester. And from there…things went down, obviously, in importance and actually... And I think it's going to be difficult to recover, because it isn't just the pandemic, but it also has to do with other things, visas, travel restrictions, travel availability… But hopefully we will be able to return soon to these programs, foreign students are very important, and so are our students who go abroad (President E).

Finally, the unavoidable context of the global COVID-19 pandemic played an overarching role in the presidents' intercultural leadership.

Context/Situation

Permeating all areas of presidential leadership, the context of and specific situation caused by the COVID-19 outbreak heavily influenced the ways in which university presidents obtained and employed information on their international student populations. It is in this factor of the intercultural competency that all others come together and show how intertwined the aspects of successfully leading HEIs and marginalized student populations like the international student community through crisis truly are. President D makes sure to state that the information he and his administration use comes directly from the students and flows into the institutional practices: "So I think in the surveys we did, we really listened for our international students and paid attention to them and tried to make sure they had a voice" (President D).

The comparative lens of this study allowed for an in-depth analysis of the ways in which university presidents in various different national and cultural contexts showed intercultural leadership competency when leading their international student populations during crises. The findings reflect this comparative scope and aim and show that the university presidents, while faced with different challenges in their respective national and institutional contexts, showed intercultural leadership competency in the ways they led and continue to lead. Rather than one specific factor, it is the combination of multiple factors that result in successful intercultural leadership. University presidents relied on their individual competence, built through experiences and their personal norms and values. While the presidents' intercultural leadership included this individual component, it also showed a strong emphasis on teamwork and collaboration for dealing with issues that pertain to the international campus communities. Assigning tasks to a competent administrative team and collaborating on crisis interventions emerged as an essential aspect of intercultural leadership during a crisis. Besides the support from leadership teams, presidents also considered their respective organizations in their intercultural leadership. Offices within the organizational structure like international offices and the overall mission of their organizations factors into the way presidents lead their international student populations during crisis. The context and situation of the pandemic appeared to be spanning over the presidential intercultural leadership, permeating all aspects of the perceived presidential roles and information-seeking actions.

DISCUSSION

As the literature shows, in our modern times of globalization and global mobility, postsecondary institutions need to both add and emphasize this international organizational component (Knight, 2007). The ways in which the university presidents interviewed in this study displayed intercultural leadership competency (Seiler, 2007) highlighted that the HEI leaders were cognizant of the fact that in order to excel globally, their institutions including all stakeholders need to embrace the internationality of their efforts (Rumbley et al., 2012).

Given that the COVID-19 pandemic "involved worldwide lockdowns, cessation of normal activities and massive state sponsored and state-controlled mitigation" (Woods et. al, 2020, p. 5), the presidents' intercultural leadership competency became even more crucial in leading their respective HEIs throughout this crisis. The presidents, as leaders concerned with diversity and inclusion (ACE report, 2017), while simultaneously being moral leaders of their institutions (Brown, 2006), appeared to experience a particular need to employ the factors of Individual

Competence, Team, Organization and Situation/Context in their ability to consider international campus populations as a "vulnerable student population" (Sherry et al., 2010) in their crisis leadership.

Overall, intercultural leadership competency as defined by Seiler (2007) emerged as of the university presidents as leaders (Individual Competence), the leadership teams around them (Teams), the respective universities' stance on internationalization, the institutional framework and mission (Organization) and finally COVID-19 as a global pandemic impacting HEIs and their place as leaders in their local communities (Context and Situation). The presidents who participated in this study all operated in different national and cultural contexts, yet their intercultural leadership competency transcended those contexts and showed consistency in the presidential efforts to successfully lead their institutions and campus populations through crisis. This study highlighted that during times of crises, successful leadership employs the tenants of intercultural leadership. With the dynamic character of crises, leaders need to incorporate the same dynamic processes in the ways they lead their multicultural organizations. "Therefore, the variables that define successful leadership are not only in the individual itself but also in its environment" (Seiler, 2007, p. 4). While other leadership competencies or measurements fail to address the intercultural component organizations in a globalized world possess, "an intercultural environment adds an additional level of complexity that requires additional competencies and a different approach to certain aspects of leadership than a mono-cultural environment" (p. 5).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The study's results produce policy implications informing how higher education leaders can navigate global crises while best serving their international student populations. Having identified the factors of intercultural competency, those factors need to be specifically emphasized in leadership training and ongoing professional development for university presidents. The factor Individual Competence can be used as selection criteria for future higher education leadership while factors like Team and Context/Situation make useful points of reference in leadership training.

Knowing where university presidents turn to obtain information about a specific group of the campus population and how that information influences their perceptions of the needs that this particular group has, can help optimize future practices not only in situations of crisis but within the operational context of higher education institutions in general. Seeing how the world is increasingly becoming more globalized, insights into how educational leaders handle global challenges in different socio-cultural and socio-economic environments make a significant contribution to the field of comparative and international higher education. Employing the framework of Intercultural Leadership (Seiler, 2007) helps frame those recommendations in a way that can be applied to university leadership across the globe and provides a guidance for university presidents on how to take advantage of aspects reflected in the themes of individual competence, team, organization, and general context/specific situation. President H summed up the ways in which higher educational leadership needs to show intercultural competency and also the ways in which higher education as a whole needs to constantly change and adapt to the challenges ahead:

> Higher education is not going to be the same. Not entirely the same. No, we're going to have to change. So I think that the mindset, looking for future development, looking for changes and innovation across higher education institutions is essential, okay? (...) because of the pandemic, we all need to be more mindful and more strategic about partnerships. That's the way to go. Number two, we need to make

sure we broaden our understanding and the portfolio of internationalization from student mobility that is face-to-face to one that involves virtual mobility. Three, we also need to be more inclusive and accordingly, do something for all of those who typically can't leave the campus for health, economic or other reasons, and we should explore and exploit the notion of internationalization at home (President H).

Empirically tracing university presidents' intercultural competency in times of crisis is a salient starting point for more extended research on presidential practice and communication. For example, future studies should look at students' perceptions of presidential communication and leadership supporting them. Limiting insights only on the presidents' perspective creates an imbalance of power and information, which can be leveled out by including student voices and opinions. Additionally, a larger and even more nationally diverse sample could significantly increase the rigor of future studies. Another area for research to fill existent gaps is the examination and analysis of presidential training and an aim to understand who and what prepares university presidents to lead and how this preparation can be optimized and tailored specifically to the needs of minoritized campus populations.

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Empirical Article

Vietnam's Policies In COVID-19 Pandemic: What Are Consequences to Its Higher Education?

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of schools created disruptions in Vietnamese education, which has not been evaluated to date. This paper reviews the effect of COVID-19 policies on teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam. We first contextualize higher education in Vietnam before the COVID-19 pandemic. We then analyze the Vietnamese government's policies to curb the virus spread. In doing so, we highlight on Vietnam's inequalities of access to higher education, quality of curriculum and instruction, and institutional autonomy. Our analysis focuses on how Vietnam's COVID-19 policies simultaneously responded to the pandemic and moderate prior educational issues. This review contrasts the advantages and disadvantages of the policies and highlights the challenges Vietnamese universities face in policy implementation. We conclude this paper by discussing the implications of changes made during the pandemic to comment on higher education in Vietnam post-COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam successfully contained the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) for over a year, whereas of mid-February 2021, almost one year into the global pandemic, Vietnam has kept its COVID-19 cases under 2,500 with 35 deaths (Black, 2020; Hartley et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2020; Van Nguyen et al., 2020; Vietnam's Ministry of Health, n.d). However, The COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of schools created disruptions in Vietnamese education, which has not been evaluated to date. This lack of research on the impacts of the pandemic on higher education poses

challenges to understanding how students and teachers coped during several disruptions of schooling and what can be done to support them post-pandemic.

This paper analyzes the effects of COVID-19 policies on teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam. First, we contextualize higher education in Vietnam before the COVID-19 pandemic. We then present an analysis of the Vietnamese government's pandemic-related policies, including closing borders, relief packages, a zero-tolerance policy aimed at controlling virus spread, and educational policies focusing on the Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT promulgating the Regulation on University Education and Resolution No. 30/2021/QH15 on urgent solutions for covid-19 prevention and control to implement Resolution No. 30/2021/QH15. Given prior research on Vietnam's inequalities of access to higher education (Trinh & Korinek, 2017; Vu et al., 2013), quality of curriculum and instruction (Hien, 2010; Phan et al., 2016; McCornac, 2014; Tran, 2013), and institutional autonomy (Hayden & Lam, 2007), our analysis focuses on how government policies can simultaneously respond to the pandemic and moderate prior educational issues. This review contrasts the advantages and disadvantages of the policies and highlights the challenges Vietnamese universities face in policy implementation. We conclude this paper by discussing the implications of changes made during the pandemic to comment on higher education in Vietnam post-COVID-19. Our study first highlights significant COVID-19 related policies in higher education in Vietnam, contrasting such policies with pre-pandemic higher education and will provide the field with an understanding of the potential consequences of COVID-19 policies on Vietnam's higher education during and post the pandemic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many factors contributed to the country's early success, including the government's prompt and proactive precautions and legislation (117/2020/ND-CP) in areas such as transportation, immigration, information dissemination, and health care (Hartley et al., 2021; Le et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2020). The Vietnamese government was exceptionally responsive in the education sector. In January 2020, the government made rapid decisions to close all schools and move to online learning at all levels until April 2020 (Tran et al., 2020; Le et al., 2021, Pham & Ho, 2020). In 2020 and 2021, Vietnam maintained a low record of COVID-19 transmission and deaths compared to countries like the United States and the United Kingdom. These countries witnessed extremely high rates of COVID-19 and morbidity, linked to weak governance, such as the absence of a centralized federal response in the United States (Altman, 2020) and overcentralized management of the pandemic in the United Kingdom (Ham, 2021). Following the outbreaks in Hai Duong and Quang Ninh Province in late January and early February 2021, the government immediately isolated the affected areas, extending the Lunar New Year holiday for students and preparing all schools to move to an online platform if needed.

Despite entering 2022 in good shape, between February and April 2022, Vietnam experienced its worst wave of COVID-19, averaging almost 270,000 cases per week (Center for Systems Science and Engineering, 2022). As of May 2022, Vietnam had 10,656,649 cases and 43,044 COVID-19 deaths (Center for Systems Science and Engineering, 2022). The rapid increase in cases in 2022 mirrored that in other countries with low infection rates, as seen in South Korea, Hong Kong, and New Zealand. These increases are attributed to initially low vaccine uptake rates, countries' opening up for tourism and business, and new COVID-19 variants, which spread quickly. In response, Vietnam now has one of the highest vaccination rates globally (Irfan, 2022). After peaking in March, numbers have returned to the low levels experienced pre-surge (Vietnam's Ministry of Health, n.d.).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of schools created disruptions in Vietnamese education, which has not been evaluated to date. However, emergent literature focused on the impact of school disruption and higher education's response to governmental policies can be found (Dinh & Nguyen, 2020; Pham & Ho, 2020). Dinh & Nguyen (2020) surveyed 186 undergraduate-level social work students at a national university to study the university's adaptions to address disruptions in learning the teaching. They found that students faced multiple technical problems while shifting to online learning. Students also report low satisfaction with online teaching. Pham & Ho (2020) described the possibilities and challenges of online learning in Vietnam's higher education system, acknowledging that there may not be sufficient policies and resources to integrate online learning fully. However, they concluded that 'the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about an opportunity to introduce e-learning comprehensively into Vietnamese higher education' (Pham & Ho, 2020, p.1329), outlining pathways for its incorporation in post-COVID-19 Vietnam.

METHODOLOGY

Against the background of the current picture and existing issues of higher education in Vietnam facing a new challenge, the pandemic, we attempted to answer two questions. First, what are significant COVID-19 related policies in higher education in Vietnam? And second, what are the potential consequences of COVID-19 policies on Vietnam's higher education during and post the pandemic?

Given the questions and limited research on the impacts of policies on higher education, integrative review is the most appropriate methodology to use in this paper. Integrative review is "a distinctive form of research that generates new knowledge about a topic by reviewing, critiquing, and synthesizing representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (Torraco, 2016, p. 62). The purpose of using integrative review as a methodology to study such a newly emerging topic is to "combine perspectives and insights" to "create initial or preliminary conceptualizations and theoretical model" (Snyder, 2019, p. 336). There are two reasons why we selected this methodology. First, our research questions center around speculating consequences based on past and current events. Second, there is indeed limited knowledge about the impacts of policies on higher education in Vietnam during and post the pandemic. The integrative review approach allows us to generate our perspectives on the impacts of the Vietnamese government's COVID-19 related policies, particularly educational policies, on higher education: the consequences of such policies given the pre-COVID-19 picture of higher education in Vietnam.

To answer the above research questions, we conducted a three-step comparative review of Vietnamese education pre-pandemic compared to education policies implemented during the pandemic. The first stage of this design included a thorough review of the pre-pandemic state of higher education in Vietnam. This phase was implemented through a thorough review of history, development, organization, management, funding mechanism, and issues in higher education in Vietnam by domestic and international scholars. Our goal was to create an overarching picture of the challenges and successes that Vietnam's higher education system experienced, with a specific lens toward organization, management, and quality. We used various resources, including Google Scholar, our university library search engine, and a review of all references from identified literature.

The second stage of this design included a policy review. We identified relevant Vietnamese governmental COVID-19 policies. The policies we selected were general, such as

transportation, border control, and economy, and specific to education, such as online teaching, COVID-19 prevention at schools, and support for schools and students. We chose these policies because we wanted to provide a contrast between education-related and non-education-related policies and build a foundation for our speculation in the next final stage. We searched for policies using both English and Vietnamese. We utilized search tools on Google, Google Scholars, Webs of Science, and the search engine provided by the University of Arkansas Library. There are three broad categories: (1) government's responses to the pandemic, (2) news articles on higher education and education policies during the pandemic, and (3) scholarly articles on the impact of the pandemic on education and higher education.

In the final stage of our review, we contrasted the policies against Vietnam's state of education pre-pandemic to develop potential implications for Vietnam's post-pandemic educational governance. This step allows us to anticipate the effects of the government's policies on higher education in Vietnam. We reviewed 103 documents, including 55 peer-reviewed articles, 18 news articles, nine book chapters and reports on history, organization, and issues of education and higher education in Vietnam, eight websites and blog posts, and 13 legal documents on Vietnam's COVID-19 policies. The review was done solely by the first author with a language advantage. See the supplement for a complete list of reviewed documents (https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.20044730.v1).

FINDINGS

Organization and Management of Higher Education in Vietnam

Vietnam's current higher education organization and management can be classified as centralized. However, at the same time, it also has features of a localized system. In short, we categorize the system as a hybrid. First, the system is "strongly centralized" (Hayden & Lam, 2007, p. 75). The State's power is demonstrated through various regulations on the responsibilities of individual universities and colleges. There are five ministries involved in the administration and supervision of higher education institutes in Vietnam, namely the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Science and Technology (Hayden & Lam, 2007). Among the five ministries, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) by far has the most extensive supervision of universities and colleges in Vietnam. MoET allocates funding for the majority of public universities and colleges, appoints chancellors/rectors, and regulates enrollment quotas, admission, and curricula.

However, there has been a growing attempt to decentralize the system in recent years. The amendment to Higher Education Law in 2018 and the Regulations on Organizing and Performing of the University of 2014 state that the university councils "should have more authority, including the authority to evaluate the rector's performance" (Salmi & Pham, 2019, p. 104). By law, university councils theoretically have the power to approve the "institutional charter, the strategic development plan, and the organizational structures" and supervise "the implementation of the strategic plan" (Salmi & Pham, 2019, p. 108). However, in practice, the power is concentrated on the chancellor appointed by the central government through the MoET (Hayden & Lam, 2007). All higher institutions must report to the MoET, and many depend on the MoET for funding and curriculum approvals.

Private higher education institutes have more autonomy compared to their public counterparts. However, that autonomy is virtually limited to finance. By law, their institutional

governance and leadership are regulated by the State. The State also regulates its curricula, content, assessment requirements, and degree conditions (Salmi & Pham, 2019). However, many private institutes do not fully take advantage of their autonomy but merely "mimic the public higher education institutes" (Salmi & Pham, 2019, p. 109).

In conclusion, higher education in Vietnam is under the direct control of the State through funding mechanisms, leadership appointments, and curriculum approvals. In comparison, countries in Europe and North America project a level of autonomy from governmental influence. However, in these countries, most control is enacted through federal and state spending mechanisms dependent on political will and managerialism (Whittington, 2022). Conversely, in Vietnam, there is a movement towards more institutional independence. This movement is growing yet still facing structural limitations by laws. The central government, represented by the MoET, has considerable power over the appointment of the chancellor. However, the chancellor has the power to direct the institutes' planning. Therefore, the chancellor's ability to govern, stay in power, and make decisions depends on their relationship with the higher management in the central government. Therefore, this system in higher education in Vietnam is a hybrid system.

Quality of Education

Vietnamese government emphasizes education as the key to economic development and improving living standards. Annual school opening day, September 5, is a big event. However, this event is most relevant in the PreK-12 system. Higher education is considered differently. For example, Vietnam invests relatively more in education by international standards, "but lightly on higher education" (Salmi & Pham, 2019, p. 106). With the lack of funding and social enthusiasm, it is no surprise that Vietnam lags behind Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines regarding the Human Capital Development Index (World Bank, 2019). For example, new graduates in automobile maintenance companies lack updated knowledge about the latest technologies, practical knowledge, working behaviors, foreign language skills, disciplines, and professionalism (McCornac, 2014).

Low labor force quality stems from Vietnam's lack of high-quality human resources at the higher education level. Vietnam's education system needs to address the question of human capital, such as teaching and administrative staff (McCornac, 2014). Indeed, many domestically trained Ph.D. holders in Vietnam are only at the bachelor level at international institutions (McCornac, 2014). Nguyen et al. (2019) look "into quality management of Vietnamese higher education programs through analyzing results of accreditation to fill part of this research gap" (p. 508). They found that "only a very small number of programs have satisfied requirements to be recognized as meeting quality standards regulated by MoET" after examining 19 universities (p. 513). They found that "many programs lacked essential conditions and resources for survival and growth. Around a half of these programs did not satisfy important requirements related to the operation of a higher education program, such as curriculum development, methods for student assessment, professional development for academic staff and support staff, libraries, teaching and learning facilities, and the continuous review and evaluation of the teaching and learning processes and student assessment. Even programs achieving most of the accreditation criteria still need strategic plans for quality enhancement" (p. 513).

Vietnam must invest in fostering, recruiting, and retaining talents and simultaneously improving administration and curriculum to address this fundamental quality issue. There have been national programs to recruit talents for post-graduation education. These talented students receive full funding to study for master's and doctoral degrees from international universities and

are obliged to serve the country two full years after completing their programs. However, such programs are costly, and only a small group of students was selected. It is also not uncommon for these award recipients to serve their two-year commitment and migrate to another country, citing the need to accommodate a research environment or better life opportunities (Nguyen, 2020).

Internationalizing higher education is another way universities in Vietnam utilize to improve the quality and credibility of education (Nguyen et al., 2016). Internationalization of higher education in Vietnam includes staff, faculty, and student exchange programs, international teaching and research collaborations, upgrading the standard to international standards and transferring knowledge through adapting curricula. The approach, however, is costly for many students in Vietnam. Such internationalized programs have higher tuition fees and are more selective in admission requirements, often correlated with socioeconomic status (Jibeen & Khan, 2015; Trinh & Conner, 2019).

In short, during the pre-pandemic years, Vietnam needed to address the issue of quality and resources to create a skilled labor workforce that could facilitate the country's economic development. This mission was constrained by a limited budget for higher education, unattractive recruitment and retainment policies for talents, high cost of attending international programs. Barriers also include universities' limited autonomy on leadership, strategies, and curricula. Additionally, issues of inequity which will be discussed in the following section, also play a significant role in the low-quality labor force of Vietnam.

What Are the Issues of Inequality in Higher Education in Vietnam?

Apart from the concern about governance, management, and quality of education, there are other issues in Vietnam's higher education. Such issues include unequal access to resources, school choice, and educational infrastructures. First, although there has been a rapid increase in opportunities to attend college and universities in the past two decades, these opportunities are not equitably distributed. Hayden and Pham (2015) found that well-off urban students and those from the ethnic majority group appear to benefit more from expanding higher education. Such differences stem from the fact that resources are not equally distributed in the K-16 educational system (Holsinger, 2009). Urban schools receive more funding and support from the government. Urban well-off students also have access to more resources than rural students, such as private tutoring, international language centers, and technologies.

On the other hand, rural students do not have access to services their well-off urban peers receive. As a result, they tend to have lower performance in the national exam in colleges and universities. It is worth noting that 63% of Vietnam's population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2018). At the root of the educational system, rural students already have a lower starting point (Pham & Tran, 2015). It is no surprise that when the door is open to attend college and universities, many of these rural students struggle to get into good universities, adopt the fast pace of urban life, and ultimately be successful.

This urban and rural distinction is further complicated by ethnicity. As Hayden and Pham (2015) noted, the students of ethnic majority groups appear to benefit more from the expanded opportunities for attending college and universities. Many studies have resonated with this finding (Trinh & Korinek, 2017; Doan & Stevens, 2011; Salmi & Pham, 2019; Vu, 2020). The majority of students of ethnic minorities live in rural, remote, and mountainous areas of Vietnam, where access to education is limited and challenging. Having a property setting for studying is already a challenge in many places, not to mention how to get to schools. Some students have to walk a long distance or embark on dangerous trips every day to go to school. In remote and mountainous

schools, they do not even have the facilities for teaching, such as books, computers, electricity, or the internet. This ethnic gap exacerbates the quality of education these students receive in K-12 and, consequently, college (if they ever go to college).

Finally, there is a hierarchy in the higher education system in Vietnam. A small group of designated 'key' universities is usually located in big cities. This group of universities is seen as more prestigious than others. There is another group of provincial universities located in the capital of each province. These universities are considered less prestigious than the key universities. The last group is private universities which have their internal hierarchy. Private international universities have higher regard than domestic private universities (Dang & Pham, 2017; Vo & Phan, 2019). However, more and more domestic universities promote internationalization for better education quality and reputation. Depending on which group, a higher education institute will receive respective treatments on funding and resources. Top key universities receive significant funding from the State because they are classified as strategic to the country's development. Provincial universities receive less attention and less funding. However, the key universities do not educate all the labor force in Vietnam. It is often competitive to get into one of those universities. Many students are left with second-tier universities and colleges, including most private and provincial universities. This inequality of funding and resources contributes to the low quality of higher education in Vietnam.

An Overview of General Policies

By March 2021, Vietnam was seen as one of the successful cases in containing the spreading of the novel COVID-19 virus among its population. Many scholars have praised the country's prompt, proactive, and decisive responses to the pandemic (Tran et al., 2020; Le et al., 2021; Hartley et al., 2021). Vietnam's responses to the pandemic through various measures, including border closure and entry ban, quarantine and lockdown, non-essential business, school/workplace, public transport closure, improving the capacity of health care systems, information campaigns, economic support, and other responses (Tran et al., 2020). Before the WHO announced COVID-19 as a pandemic, in late January 2021, the Vietnamese government issued a temporary travel ban on all travelers from Wuhan, China. It later expanded the travel ban to other hotspots such as Deagu, South Korea. As the pandemic progressed, the Vietnamese government banned all international commercial flights into the country. It also tightened illegal land crossing incidents.

Vietnam only allowed its citizens and experts to enter the country on specially arranged flights approved by the government or by land via legal entries. Everyone, however, had to quarantine at a government-approved facility for 14 days. The country also announced several lockdowns in hotspot cities and a national lockdown as more cases of COVID-19 emerged from within communities, mostly in big cities like Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, and Da Nang. The transmission rate did not seem to stop as the noble virus mutated. Where the lockdowns happened, only essential businesses were allowed. Local police and the civil defense force took responsibility for delivering food, guarding entries to neighborhoods, and testing community members. As of March 2022, Vietnam officially opened its borders to all travelers. Vaccinations are encouraged in the population, and public health procedures include 5K (in Vietnamese): Khau Trang (facemask) - Khu Khuan (disinfection) - Khoang Cach (social distance) - Khong Tu Tap (no gathering) – and Khai Bao Y Te (health declaration) (Kim Anh, 2020).

Significant Education Policies in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Along with general policies on transportation and economy, from the very beginning of the pandemic, the MoET released Dispatch No. 239/BGDĐT-GDTC on disease prevention for winter-spring 2020 on January 22, 2020. Nine days later, Dispatch No. 260/BGDĐT-GDTC on organizing the on-site teaching at education institutions specifically mentioned the COVID-19 virus for the first time on January 31, 2020. In February of 2020, there were four other Dispatches on COVID-19 related preventions and cautions for schools in PreK-16 (265/BGDĐT-GDTC, 269/BGDĐT-GDTC, 460/BGDĐT-GDTC, and 550/BGDĐT-GDTC). Locales have the authority to decide K-12 school shutdowns. Many cities and provinces moved to teach to online platforms. Higher education institutions also have autonomy in closing schools subject to the Ministry of Education and Training's guidelines. As of March 2021, however, there were no official online teaching and learning regulations regarding the pandemic. Universities and Colleges were left with virtually no instruction on conducting online learning and teaching and accountability measures.

For most of 2020 and 2021, the government focused on preventing and restraining the virus in schools and communities. It was not until August 2021 that the Ministry of Education and Training issued Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT promulgating the Regulation on University Education, which stated the regulations on online teaching and learning most comprehensively for the first time. In the same month, the MoET also released Dispatch No. 3734/BGDĐT-GDCTHSSV to support students at all levels impacted by the COVID-19 virus and plan for the new academic year. In this Dispatch, the Minister of MoET emphasized three points: flexibility in teaching and learning, adequate support for students, especially disadvantaged ones, and planning to go back to in-person learning and teaching.

In September 2021, when the Prime Minister issued Directive No. 24/CT-TTg regarding the issues of a safe and healthy environment for learning and teaching and quality of learning and teaching PreK-16 became the focus of educational policies during the pandemic. Regarding higher education, the Directive acknowledged that students at all levels and educators faced numerous challenges physically, mentally, and financially, including the lack of resources and facilities, the sudden changes and tremendous pressure coming from the unprecedented pandemic, and anxiety from lockdowns and school closings. The Directive also mentioned different ministry's responsibilities in tackling the challenges posed by the pandemic. The Ministry of Health was to provide guidance on preventing COVID-19 transmitting in schools and homes; the Ministry of Information and Communications was to consider lower cost of services for students and educators; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to support Vietnamese students who study abroad; the Ministry of Defense was to support students and educators, especially those in remote, mountainous, and bordering locations to adapt to online learning; the State Bank of Vietnam was to provide preferential policies for students, educators, and personnel working in the education sector.

The Focus on Online Learning and Teaching and Its Issues

Even though the Vietnamese government passed two budget packages for COVID-19 relief, higher education was not included in the packages. Here witnessed the sharp differences in resources among higher education institutions in Vietnam and how higher education was not prepared for this pandemic when institutions were shut down, and learning was moved online. First, there was disorientation in changing teaching and learning platform. Online education was never widely regarded as mainstream in higher education. Distance learning is the closest form to online learning in higher education. Students must be on-campus to take specific exams, even with

distance learning. When the pandemic hit and classrooms were moved to online platforms, the sudden move overwhelmed the administration.

Second, because online education was never focused on, higher education institutions lacked the resources to successfully adapt to the new normalcy. Faculty were not trained to do their job online (UNICEF ROSA et al., 2021). Many faculties were overwhelmed by the change. For example, checking attendance was a challenge using online platforms for some faculty (BBC News, 2021). Online classes became particularly challenging for subjects requiring practice and hands-on experience. Many universities did not have the facilities to support online teaching and learning, for example, camera, computers, sound systems, or even broadband internet.

Third, college and university students were also disoriented during the pandemic. As the government did not have any specific policy to support students, it was left to the universities and students to arrange their learning and teaching. From a classroom setting, teaching and learning moved to a home setting, where concerns regarding space, devices, and support arose. Since nearly all schools and non-essential businesses were shut down, many generations were forced to stay under the same roof simultaneously (UNICEF ROSA, et al., 2021). For example, there were concerns about arranging time and space for learning, seeking support from faculties and universities and doing group work (BBC News, 2021).

In short, by the end of March 2021, higher education institutions in Vietnam were left with virtually no instruction nor support to adapt to changes caused by the pandemic. Faculty and students were under extreme pressure to quickly adapt and perform their work with limited resources. This reality was exacerbated by existing inequalities in the system mentioned earlier, including inequalities in resources among universities and inequalities and lack of access among students, particularly those from low-income and rural families.

DISCUSSION

We conducted this comparative review to understand the potential implications of Vietnam's COVID-19 policy response on both current and future higher education. In response to this focus, we highlight three serious issues that governmental policies for higher education face: diversifying mode of education, human resources, and resource inequality. First of all, the pandemic struck in-person education in Vietnam severely. As the need to stop conducting in-person classes arose, there was evident disorientation in moving classes to online platforms. This disorientation is since online education was never a significant part of education in Vietnam, notably higher education. The change shocked the whole system and disrupted teaching and learning. Relatedly, because online education was never emphasized, universities lacked the resources to prepare for the change. They did not have well-trained lecturers or facilities to accommodate learning and teaching administratively and professionally as needed. Finally, significant inequalities were observed as higher education institutions adapted to the change. Among institutions, those with more funding and resources adapt quickly to the change. Those with limited resources struggle to support their faculty and teachers. Among students, those with resources, such as technologies and space, are less affected by the change than those who struggled financially to adapt. This tendency is not unique to Vietnam's higher education. It is a global phenomenon (Engzell, 2021; Hough, 2021; OECD, 2020).

Such issues in education and inequality highlighted by the pandemic further create consequences for the current higher education system. As the pandemic still dominates our daily conversations, many students struggle to have an education; many lecturers struggle to teach from their homes with limited resources (UNICEF ROSA et al., 2021). The effects of the pandemic on the

quality of education remain uncertain, for many of the changes happening are unprecedented. However, the pandemic has certainly created further barriers to education for students, especially those of low-income families. We can expect an extended gap in achievement due to educational disruption.

For institutions, the pandemic-related policies have sorted institutions into groups. Institutions with diversified teaching methods have resources to adapt to the pandemic and support teaching and learning, and those with limited capacity to adapt to the pandemic changes. These categories will significantly impact prospective students' opinions of the institutions, ultimately impacting the performance and direction of the instructions for the future. We can expect significant changes in how higher education functions in Vietnam due to the pandemic.

It took more than a year well into the pandemic for the Ministry of Education and Training to issue official instruction on online learning and teaching. Many universities and colleges had already taken action to support learning and teaching during this time. This suggests that instructional autonomy may help with unpredictable, unprecedented situations like this. After the pandemic, we may see a loose grip of power from the Ministry to the university level.

This is a lesson for the MoET as well as for the government. The early success of Vietnam on the health front does not translate into success in education. Health-related policies were not comparable to the limited policies on education, particularly in higher education, which was already facing numerous issues ranging from unequal resources to low-tech traditional instruction. The slow response in supporting academic policies also exacerbated the inequalities issues in higher education.

In short, the mismatch between health and education policies could potentially lead to a wider gap of inequalities between institutions, which may hinder the recovery of Vietnam after the pandemic. Such wider inequalities may result in a loss in education and a decrease in labor force quality. Vietnamese government and particularly the MoET should focus on interventions that support universities to recover from the pandemic with finance, social and human capital.

LIMITATIONS

As with any review, there are limitations. First, we focused our review on Vietnam specifically rather than conducting a comparative review of COVID-19 response policies across countries. However, multiple studies have shown that education is one of the greatest harmful social implications of the pandemic that will have lasting effects beyond health and mortality (Burgess & Sieversten, 2020). Given this reality, we intentionally focused our comparative review on Vietnam due to its early success in mitigating the effects of the virus, leading us to question how Vietnam responded to higher education policies. Limiting our analysis to Vietnam adds to the emergent literature on the patterns of consequence seen in other countries, including disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on students from low-income families, rural, and underrepresented groups. A secondary limitation is that we focused our comparison on the pre-pandemic state of higher education in Vietnam with COVID-19 era policies to speculate about the potential consequences of these policies. This intentional choice resulted from the dearth of contemporary scholarship on Vietnam, education, and COVID-19. Future studies comparing the effects of COVID-19 policies and current-day higher education will show the policies that influenced the state of higher education in Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

From our review, it is clear that the picture of higher education in Vietnam has been changing since the beginning of the pandemic and is expected to continually change as the pandemic still dominates daily conversations and government policies. The COVID-19 pandemic cohorts will definitely look different from other cohorts. The pandemic exposed many shortages in the current higher education system in Vietnam. At the same time, it has brought opportunities for change.

March 2022 marked the world's entry into the third year of the COVID-19 global pandemic, and it is becoming clear that a post-pandemic world may not occur as soon as many hoped. However, our era of new normalcy marked by uncertainty and disruption suggests that higher education institutions across the globe and especially in Vietnam, need to innovate to adapt to the challenges caused by the pandemic. School administrators, policymakers, and educators are the key to shaping the educational landscape; however, it is clear that they require strong governmental support to reach the full potential of Vietnam's higher education system. From our review, it became clear that there is an urgent need for governmental commitment to financially support institutions, faculty, students, and families, ensuring that the educational system can help tackle the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic. Secondly, the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic should encourage all levels of the education system to consider how to develop a sustainable change, which is prepared for the next big hit.

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Empirical Article

COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on International Students in Japan and the United States: Comparative Study From National and Institutional Context

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on international students in Japan and the United States based on a framework that shows the influence of government policies and university responses on international students' experiences and choices. Analysis of 494 survey responses indicates significant differences between international students in Japan and the US in information acquisition, financial difficulty, confusion regarding visas, and perceived prejudice/discrimination, which seem to be influenced by government policies and institutional support systems in the two countries. They also reported different experiences with online classes and counseling services. Participants from low or lower-middle-income countries tend to report more financial difficulty and impact on employment than those from upper-middle-income countries. More than half of the participants predicted decreased student flow from their home countries. More concerted efforts by the government and universities will be needed to address international students' specific needs and realize attractive and sustainable international education.

Keywords: consultation, COVID-19, employability, international students, Japan, mobility, part-time job, USA

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted a tremendous impact on international education, which has been leading to its structural transformation across the institutions of higher education. Since international education is based on exchanges between different countries and international students are one of the main actors of international education, this study aims to compare the pandemic's impact on international students in different destination/source countries. To facilitate international comparison and to understand the impact on international students in national and institutional context, we developed a framework to show the influence of government policies and university responses on international students' experiences, which will affect future student mobility. We compared the international students in two major student destination countries: the US and Japan. The former represents an English-speaking country, while the latter was picked up as a case of a non-English-speaking country. The experiences and perceptions of international students will be compared by their home country's income level as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have illustrated various impacts of the COVID-19 on international students and international education. Coffey et al. (2020) depicted the marginalized situation of female international students engaged in hospitality work to earn their living and study costs in Australia. Mok et al. (2021) showed the decreased interest in studying abroad and change of study destination countries of Chinese students. COVID-19 Survey Series of the Institute for International Education (IIE) (2020) reported the responses of the US universities to the situation caused by the pandemic and the prospect of international student applications. Aucejo et al. (2020) revealed significant negative impacts on student experiences, including delayed graduation, job loss, and declining earnings in the US. While some studies reported the widespread use of remote education as a measure to reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 on students' learning (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Ali, 2020), Serhan (2020) reported students' negative attitudes toward the use of Zoom in the US, including declining confidence in learning, lack of classroom engagement and interaction with classmates and instructors (p.338-338), as well as instructors' lack of readiness and students' technical difficulties for the use of the new platform (p.340). Regarding the studies on international students in Japan, Nagoya University (2020) compared the experiences of local and international students during the pandemic and showed the latter faced more financial difficulty than the former. Teng and Lin (2021) depicted the anxieties of Chinese international students in Japan, mainly caused by financial difficulty due to the decrease in part-time jobs and the fear of infection.

Although a significant number of studies have been conducted worldwide on the impact of the pandemic, few studies have compared the experiences and perceptions of international students between different destination countries and/or source countries. International comparison is necessary to grasp the pandemic's impact on international education, which is based on international exchanges between various countries and institutions. We can also find few studies that explicitly discuss the influence of university responses (institutional/meso-level factors) and government policies (macro-level factors) on international student experiences and choices (micro-level outcomes) during the pandemic. Such studies are necessary to understand the national and institutional context of pandemic's impact on international education and the strategies to cope with it.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

In an earlier study, Castles and Miller (2009) asserted that migratory movement could be seen as the result of interacting macro-, meso-, and micro-structures (p.28). Later, Haas and Hadjar (2020) categorized the theoretical frameworks of 27 previous studies on student trajectory by its predictors (influencing factors) at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. Li et al. (2021), inspired by the analysis of Haas and Hadjar, elucidated the factors that influenced the mobility choices of Chinese students in a US-China transnational education program from the macro-level (e.g., labor market and university admission policies) and meso-level (e.g., program structures) contexts. Deuel (2020) examined the internationalization of higher education at macro-, meso- and micro-levels to better understand the operation of complex power relationships and international student subjectivity.

Sato (2016, 2021) proposed the life planning model in her analysis of factors that influence student choices when choosing a study destination, workplace, and place of settlement. This model is an application of rational choice theory that assumes individuals make rational choices to maximize their self-interest (Scott, 2000) and the choices are subject to social outcomes at the macro-level (Friedman & Hechter, 1988). In the life planning model, international students are supposed to make rational choices, and their choices would be influenced not only by micro-/individual factors such as financial constraints, language ability, family expectation, desire for better employment, but also macro-level factors (policies, and economic and cultural factors of their home country and destination country), and institutional (meso-level) factors. There are limited cross-country studies on international students that compare the effects of macro- and/or meso-level factors despite its advantage in revealing their national/local characteristics. In this paper, we apply this model to analyze the pandemic's impact on international students' lives and future choices.

Figure 1

Framework to See the Influence of Macro/Meso Level Factors on International Students'

Experiences and Choices

		Destination countries		Source countries	
		English-speaking	Non-English-speaking	Low or lower-middle- income	Upper-middle-income
Macro level	Social situation				
	Government policy				
Meso level	Universities/schools				
Micro level	International students				

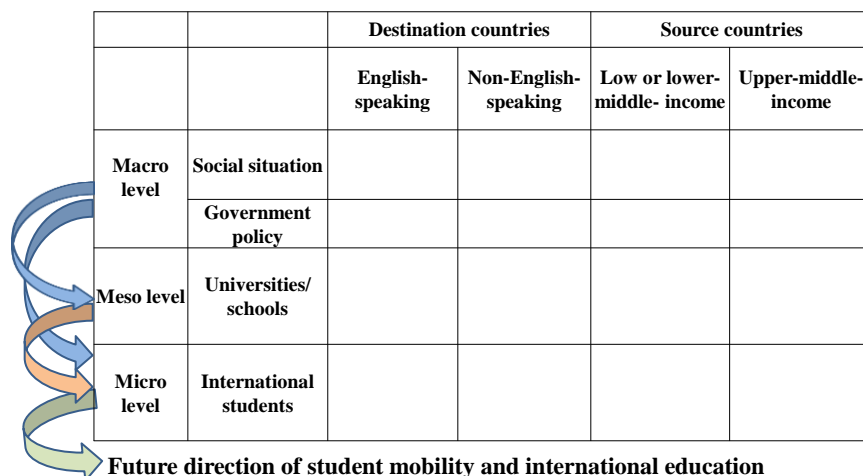Future direction of student mobility and international education

Figure 1 shows the research framework that we construct to analyze the influence of government policies and social situation (macro-level factors) and university/school responses (institutional/meso-level factors) on the experiences and choices of international students (individual/micro-level outcomes). We assume that the experiences of international students will affect the choices of next-generation international students, which will formulate the future direction of student mobility and international education.

The columns of destination countries and source countries are made to examine the pandemic's impact on international education not only in destination countries but also in students' home countries. In this study, destination countries are categorized by their official language (English or non-English), and source countries are divided by their income level based on the classification of the World Bank (2021).

English speaking or non-English speaking countries are compared since English-speaking countries have had a comparative advantage in attracting international students over non-English speaking countries (OECD, 2018, p.223). They face different issues in accepting and supporting international students. As the target of this research, the US and Japan were selected as a case of an English-speaking country and that of a non-English-speaking country, respectively. The US was selected since it accepts the largest number of international students in the world, and Japan was selected since it is among the major non-English speaking destination countries (OECD, 2021, p.222).

International students' home country income level was compared between those from low or lower-middle-income countries and upper-middle income countries based on the World Bank's classification in the fiscal year (FY) 2021 (World Bank, 2021) since the majority of international students are from developing countries (OECD, 2021, p.212). We had an assumption that the pandemic had a greater negative impact on international students and their financial capacity to continue their studies overseas.

RESEARCH METHOD

We used a cross-sectional survey with an online questionnaire and two interviews. We also used secondary data to examine the responses of the governments and universities to international students' needs during the pandemic in Japan and the US. The questionnaire was constructed based on the research framework introduced in the previous section, using rational choice theory and life planning model. Questions were made to ask about individual factors and institutional and social factors that affected their situation.

The cognitive model was used in the design of the questionnaire (Sudman, et al., 1996). The questionnaire was started with a simple question (their whereabouts in the year 2020), then proceeded to ask about their experiences and perceptions during the pandemic, and finally asked their opinions about desirable support and prediction of student mobility from their home country. The order of questions was examined to avoid the context effect and item-order effect (Schwarz, 1999). The BRUSO model (Peterson, 2000), namely, the principles of "brief," "relevant," "unambiguous," "specific," and "objective," were applied in formulating the questions.

We used a 5-point Likert scale to ask about the applicability of the statement or the level of satisfaction to facilitate the comparison of responses between different groups (Likert, 1932). Open-ended questions were also used to capture their opinions and suggestions to allow "unanticipated statements and stories to emerge" (Charmaz, 2006). The online questionnaire was used to draw more diverse participants (Gosling, et al., 2004).

An online questionnaire survey was distributed to the international students on the International Foreign Student Association (IFSA) mailing list and via the networks of the authors' universities in Japan from January to March 2021. On the IFSA mailing list, about 1100 international students were registered to receive job-hunting and life support information. The questionnaire was written in Japanese and English.

In the US, the same online questionnaire in English was distributed to 600 international students from late January to February and from May to July 2021 through the authors' networks and a Chinese student network. Since these surveys were not conducted by random sampling, sampling bias was checked by comparing the major attributes of the samples and population (the result is shown in the next section).

Interviews of two international graduates engaged in the consultation of international students in Japan were conducted via Zoom in October 2020 and May 2021, respectively.

Participants

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants of the online questionnaire surveys, categorized by the income level of their home country/region, based on the World Bank's classification in FY 2021 (World Bank, 2021). Classification in FY 2021 was used considering the timing of the survey.

We received 376 valid responses from the international students who were enrolled in Japanese universities in the year 2020. This number accounts for 0.28% of the international students enrolled in Japanese universities in 2020 (JASSO, 2021a). Compared to the population, the percentages of graduate students and STEM students are higher than the population (the percentage of graduate students is 75.2 in the sample and 39.9 in the population; that of STEM students is 37.5 in the sample and 22.9 in the population). Therefore, these biases will be considered in interpreting the result.

Similarly, 118 valid responses from international students enrolled in American universities were collected, which account for 0.016% of the total international students enrolled in American universities in 2019/2020 (IIE, 2021). Compared to the population, the percentage of Chinese students is much higher (the percentage of Chinese students is 73.7 in the sample, 35.0 in the population).

Table 1

Major Demographic Characteristics of Participants by Income Level of Home Country/Region (Japan N =376, the US N=118)

Income level of home country /regrion	Japan			USA		
	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	High-income	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	High-income
Number	66	248	62	22	89	7
Home country	Vietnam 27, Mongolia 15, Nepal 8, India 4, Bangladesh 3, Cambodia 3, Philippines 3, Cameroon 1, Uzbekistan 1, Uganda 1	China 185, Indonesia 58, Malaysia 3, Thailand 2	Australia 3, Canada 2, Greece 2, Hong Kong 1, Italy 1, Singapore 1, South Korea 6, Taiwan 5, UK 1, US 40	Nigeria 14, India 3, Nepal 1, Cameroon 1, Ethiopia 1, Ghana 1, Haiti 1	China 87, Iran 1, Jamaica 1	Saudi Arabia 3, Bahamas 2, Japan 1, Kuwait 1
Gender	Female 36, Male 30	Female 136, Male 106, Prefer not to say 6	Female 27, Male 32, Prefer not to say 3	Female 10, Male 12	Female 74, Male 13, Prefer not to say 2	Female 3, Male 4
Enrolled program	Undergrad 30 Master 29 Doctor 7	Undergrad 52 Master 160 Doctor 36	Undergrad 11 Master 38 Doctor 13	Undergrad 9, Master 6 Doctor 7	Undergrad 45, Master 32, Doctor 12	Undergrad 2, Master 3, Doctor 2
Major	Humanities & social sciences 37, STEM 23, Other 6	Humanities & social sciences 120, STEM 87, Other 41	Humanities & social sciences 23, STEM 31, Other 8	Humanities & social sciences 7, STEM 14, Other 8	Humanities & social sciences 47, STEM 38, Other 4	Humanities & social sciences 3, STEM 3, Other 1

Note. Data are the number of respondents. Income level of students' home countries/region is based on World Bank's classification in FY2021.

RESULTS

This section presents the analytical results, comparing students' destinations (Japan and the USA), their home country's income levels, and other demographic characteristics.

Experience of International Students During the Pandemic

Table 2 shows the student experiences during the pandemic in 2020. As the result of t-tests, there were significant differences at the 1% level between Japan and the US in information acquisition, financial difficulty, and confusion by visa policy, and a significant difference at the 5% level for prejudice/discrimination. As for loneliness/depression and satisfaction with online classes, no significant difference was reported between the two groups.

Students reported more difficulty in the acquisition of information related to the COVID-19 in Japan, which can be explained by a higher level of language barriers experienced by international students. In an open-ended response, a student reported, "Since the English language is not preferable in most services in Japanese society, individuals will face difficulty in communication and information (acquisition)." Since the participants in Japan include more STEM and more graduate students than the population, who are often enrolled in English-taught programs, the result may have reflected their tendency more strongly.

Table 2

Experiences of International Students During the Pandemic

	Japan		USA		*p*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
1) I could obtain necessary information related with COVID-19 in my study destination	3.83	1.03	4.20	0.96 **	
2) I felt loneliness or depression during the pandemic	3.38	1.25	3.32	1.41	
3) I faced prejudice/discrimination as an international student	2.46	1.23	2.78	1.35 *	
4) I experienced financial difficulty	3.43	1.29	2.91	1.48 **	
5) I was confused by the change of visa policy	2.93	1.46	3.66	1.22 **	
6) How was your satisfaction with online or remote classes?	3.35	1.01	3.28	1.15	

Note 1. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Note 2. ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Note 3. Likert scale from "1. does not apply at all" to "5. apply very much" was used for 1)〜5) and Likert scale from "1. I am very dissatisfied" to "5. I am very satisficed" was used for 6).

Regarding loneliness or depression, 20.1% of participants in Japan replied "very applicable," and 35.7% said "applicable," while the figures were 24.8% and 35.7% in the US. The result reveals their isolated situation away from their families and close friends in their home countries.

As for the encounter with prejudice or discrimination, 12.0% of US participants reported "very applicable," and 23.9% said "applicable," while the figures were 5.9% and 17.4% in Japan. Since the US group included more Chinese students than the population, a higher incidence of discrimination may have reflected their experiences, who had a difficult time with the accusation that the pandemic originated in their home country.

23.9% of students in Japan reported financial difficulty as "very applicable," and 31.9% said "applicable," while the figure was 18.8% and 25.6% in the US. When asked the reason for financial difficulty, 51.9% of participants in Japan listed "loss or decrease of part-time jobs," while the figure was 29.7% in the US. It indicates that the higher reliance on part-time jobs as the primary income source led to more financial difficulty in Japan. When the responses of those from low or lower-middle-income countries were compared to those from upper-middle-income countries, the former reported more financial difficulty than the latter with a significant difference at the 1% level in both Japan and the US. This result implies that their home country's income level is related to their financial situation.

Higher confusion regarding visas in the USA can be attributed to the student visa policy under the Trump administration, which tried to restrict student visa issuance to those who mainly take online courses (American Council on Education, 2020).

Although most of the participants reported satisfaction with online or remote classes in both countries, insufficient interaction between instructor and students and/or among students and unstable internet connection were listed as major issues when asked about the aspects of their satisfaction/dissatisfaction. In an open-ended response, an international student in the US said, "For bigger lectures [classes], there's really not much difference between remote and in-class teaching. On the other hand, lab courses, field research, and hands-on practice are the ones better

taught in person; otherwise, the quality of the course might be severely undermined." From a comparative aspect, international students in the US appeared to focus more on the functional merit and demerit of online offerings, while international students in Japan seemed concerned about the "personal" elements of learning culture. Although a few students in Japan mentioned the merits of online learning in terms of safety, flexibility, and savings in commuting time, the majority of them reported that they were unhappy because they were unable to meet their teachers and classmates in person. For instance, one international student mentioned her experience of taking an online class in her open-ended response, "… at his [online] course, because we did not meet him (the instructor) in person, we do not know each other. And that's the gap that can't be filled." In this study, many participants in Japan reported having technical issues with ICT/course portals than the participants from the US. Some students in Japan noticed occasional or frequent losses in internet access and professors' lack of proficiency in online teaching. These technical issues may be related to a lack of online course offerings of the instructors or limited training at the institutions prior to the pandemic.

Most Serious Problem, Most Needed Support

      Table 3 shows the most serious problems reported by the participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, which were categorized from the open-ended responses. In Japan, 23.5% of students listed "financial difficulty" and 22.6% listed "restriction on move/behavior," while 23.7% in the US listed "impact on education/research" and 19.5% listed "mental health" and "restriction on move/behavior" respectively as their most serious problems. The result coincides with the result in Table 2 that the students in Japan felt more financial difficulties than their counterparts in the US.

Table 3

Most Serious Problems Reported by International Students During the Pandemic

Income level of home country	Japan			USA		
	all	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	all	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income
Impanct on employment/career	9.2%	18.6%	8.5%	5.1%	4.5%	5.6%
Financial difficulty	23.5%	35.6%	17.9%	12.7%	22.7%	7.9%
Mental health	11.5%	6.8%	13.7%	19.5%	22.7%	20.2%
Decreased interaction & actual experienc	5.7%	3.4%	6.0%	4.2%	0.0%	5.6%
Impact on education/research	13.2%	8.5%	14.1%	23.7%	13.6%	25.8%
Restriction on move/behavior	22.6%	20.3%	26.1%	19.5%	13.6%	22.5%
Risk of infection, insufficient measures	5.7%	3.4%	6.0%	8.5%	4.5%	9.0%
How to keep health	2.3%	0.0%	3.0%	2.5%	4.5%	2.2%
Dissatisfaction with university	1.1%	0.0%	0.9%	2.5%	9.1%	1.1%
Other	5.2%	3.4%	3.8%	1.7%	4.5%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Number of responces	349	59	234	117	22	89

Note. Data except for the last row show the percentage of responses in total responses in each group.

The percentage of the students who listed "financial difficulty" was higher in low/lower-middle-income countries, while the percentages of those who listed "impact on education/research," "restriction on move/behavior," and "risk of infection" were higher in upper-middle-income counties in both Japan and the US. These results indicate that students from low/lower-middle-income countries felt more financial difficulty, while their counterparts from upper-middle-income countries were more concerned with education and research, restrictions on mobility, and risk of infection.

When asked about the necessary support for the international students in an open-ended question, 50.0% of those from low or lower-middle-income countries and 40.0% of those from upper-middle-income countries listed "financial support" in Japan, while the figure was 33.3% and 16.7% in the US.

Secondly desired supports in Japan were "(comprehensive) information provision" and "individual counseling:" 14.3% of those from low/lower-middle-income countries and 23.1% from upper-middle-income countries listed "information provision," and 14.3% of those from low/lower-middle-income countries and 16.9% from upper-middle-income countries listed "individual counseling."

In the US, 33.3% of those from low/lower-middle-income countries listed "public or organizational support." Their suggestions included the following ones: "Government and state should support international students during this crisis time," "I suggest international committees and organizations should address and improve their resources on how they can help international students during such a crisis." 66.7% of those from upper-middle-income countries listed individual counseling, including visa consultation, as the necessary support.

These results show the higher need for financial support in Japan, especially among students from low/lower-middle-income countries. In the US, students from low/lower-middle-income countries seek organizational support, while those from upper-middle-income countries seek more individual counseling.

Whom to Consult With During the Pandemic

Table 4 shows the person/organization with whom the international students consulted during the pandemic. In both Japan and the USA, "friends from the same country" were the most frequently consulted group, followed by "academic supervisor or staff of university" and "friends from other countries."

The percentages of those who consulted with "academic supervisor or staff of university" and "counselor or doctor of university" were much higher in the USA, while the percentages of those who consulted with "ethnic community," "support organization," and "no one to consult with" were higher in Japan, suggesting a need for additional counseling services for international students at Japanese universities.

Table 4

Person/Organization to Consult With During the Pandemic

	Japan		USA	
Academic supervisor or staff of university	113	30.1%	58	49.2%
Counselor or doctor of university	33	8.8%	17	14.4%
Friends from the same country with yours	227	60.4%	77	65.3%
Friends from other country than yours	77	20.5%	29	24.6%
Relatives living in study destinatoin	51	13.6%	22	18.6%
Ethnic community in study destination	35	9.3%	5	4.2%
Support organization in study destination	27	7.2%	5	4.2%
Other people/organization	21	5.6%	3	2.5%
No one to consult with in study destination	28	7.4%	4	3.4%
No need for consultation	35	9.3%	7	5.9%
Total respondents	376	100.0%	118	100.0%

Note. Multiple choice was allowed in this question.

Change of Future Plan

Table 5 shows participants' responses about their original plan after graduation and how it was affected by the pandemic among those from developing countries. Before the pandemic, 66.7% of those from low/lower-middle-income countries in Japan and 81.8% of those from the same group in the US had planned to find employment in their study destination. The students from low/lower-middle-income countries showed a seemingly stronger tendency to seek employment in their study destination than their peers from upper-middle-income countries both in Japan and the US. However, 45.5 % of those in Japan and 61.1% in the US reported that their original plan was affected due to the COVID-19.

As for students from upper-middle-income countries, although 59.3% in Japan and 44.9% in the US had planned to find employment in their study destination, more than half of them reported that their plan was affected by the COVID-19.

The percentage of those who had planned to return to their home countries was higher among the students from upper-middle-income countries than those from low/lower-middle-income countries in both Japan and the US. In Japan, their plan to return to their home country was less affected by the COVID-19 (38.0%) than their US counterparts (57.1%).

Table 5

Future Plan Before the Pandemic and its Impact

Income level of home country	Japan		USA	
	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income
Original plan before the pandemic				
1) To find employment in study destination	44 (66.7%)	147 (59.3%)	18 (81.8%)	40 (44.9%)
2) To return home country to find employment	10 (15.2%)	50 (20.2%)	2 (9.1%)	14 (15.7%)
3) To find employment in another country	2 (3.0%)	20 (8.1%)	0.0%	10 (11.2%)
4) Other plan	10 (15.2%)	31 (12.5%)	2 (9.1%)	25 (28.1%)
Total respondents	66 (100.0%)	248 (100.0%)	22 (100.0%)	89 (100.0%)
Percentage of those whose original plan was affected by the COVID-19				
Among those who chose 1)	45.5%	51.0%	61.1%	52.5%
Among those who chose 2)	60.0%	38.0%	50.0%	57.1%
Among those who chose 3)	100.0%	75.0%	n.a.	40.0%
Among those who chose 4)	50.0%	54.8%	50.0%	44.0%
Among total respondents	50.0%	50.8%	59.1%	49.4%

Through open-ended responses, participants shared additional testimonies on how their plans were affected by the pandemic. For instance, a Bangladeshi student in Japan wrote, "Due to pandemic situation, it will be very tough to find a job." A Chinese student also stated, "It becomes more difficult to find a job in Japan. But I cannot return to join internships in China because of quarantine." In the US, participants shared similar concerns regarding the decrease in employment opportunities and post-study training. A Chinese student wrote, "Before the COVID-19, I planned to get a job abroad, but now I only want to get my degree ASAP and go back to my own country." This statement may reflect the challenging experience of Chinese students during the pandemic and the availability of employment opportunities back in their home country.

Prediction of Student Flow From Their Home Countries

Table 6 shows participants' prediction of future international student flow from their home country to their current destination by their home country's income level. In Japan, 56.1% of those from low/lower-middle-income countries and 57.3% from upper-middle-income countries predicted that the number would decrease, whereas 54.5% of those from low/lower-middle-income countries and 62.9% of those from upper-middle-income countries predicted the number would decrease in the US.

Table 6

Prediction of International Student Flow From Home Country to Current Study Destination

	Japan		USA	
Income level of home country	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income	Low/lower-middle-income	Upper-middle-income
I think it will decrease	56.1%	57.3%	54.5%	62.9%
I do not think it will decrease	43.9%	42.7%	45.5%	37.1%
Number of respondents	66	248	22	89

As the reason for their negative prediction, a few students from a lower-middle-income country in Japan reported the diminishing prospect of employment opportunities. A student wrote, "I think it will take time to recover the economy and go back to normal. I have seen many Japanese people losing their jobs as well. So, I guess the Japanese government would prioritize Japanese nationality first in order to help them to get a job. After that, the Japanese government will care about international students." Another student raised the issue of decreased income of their parents and difficulty finding employment in Japan after the pandemic. Several students from upper-middle-income countries listed visa and travel restrictions as the main reason for the negative prospect. Some students from China pointed out that insufficient pandemic preventive measures in Japan will hinder the inflow of students from their home country.

In the US, an international student from a lower-middle-income country stated, "Because this pandemic has changed the way of living and learning, more students can still study abroad remotely than before," as a reason for the decline in student flow. Another student listed high tuition fees as the reason for the decrease in future international student enrollment. A higher percentage of negative predictions by students from upper-middle-income countries seems to be influenced by the fact that the majority of them are Chinese students who faced a deterioration of diplomatic relations between their home country and the US during the pandemic. However, some Chinese students admitted the merit of studying in the US as seen in the following statements: "The US still outperforms other countries in terms of higher education," "America remains a strong attraction for its high quality of education."

DISCUSSION

This study's findings unfold the severe impacts of the COVID-19 on international students' well-being, financial sustainability, career choices, and future inflow in the two countries. Now we would like to discuss how the students' experiences and perceptions are influenced by the government policies and response of universities based on the research framework shown in Figure 1.

In recent years, Japanese universities have increased English-taught degree programs under the government programs to internationalize their education (Nonaka & Phillips, 2019; Enkhtur, et.al, 2021). English-taught degree programs have been provided at 17.2% of the total universities at the graduate level in 2018 (MEXT, 2020, p.60). However, our study revealed that timely information provision in English may not have been sufficient for them in an emergency like the pandemic.

Under the Plan to Accept 300,000 International Students, Japanese language schools have aggressively recruited students from relatively lower-income countries in Southeast, South, and Central Asia. Their recruitment emphasized that the upper limit on part-time jobs (28 hours per

week) for international students in Japan is longer than other major destination countries. As a result, the majority of students from these regions earn their living and tuition fees in Japan through part-time jobs. They tend to attain lower Japanese language proficiency levels than the students from China, South Korea, and Taiwan (Chinese character using countries/region) because of excessive part-time jobs and their disadvantage in learning Chinese characters used in written Japanese (Sato, et al., 2020). This has also increased the language barrier for international students in information acquisition during the pandemic.

The Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) reported that 70.4% of privately-funded international students engaged in part-time jobs and 67.9% of them work to sustain their living. It also shows that 40.2% of these students worked at restaurants, and 33% worked at shops (JASSO, 2021b). Since these businesses were among the most severely hit by the COVID-19, many international students lost their jobs or worked much less than before and faced financial difficulties in continuing their studies in Japan. This may be the reason why the participants of this study reported significantly higher rates of financial difficulty in Japan than those in the US, where off-campus part-time jobs are prohibited in principle. Considering the lower percentage of those who used counseling services in Japan compared to their counterparts in the US, counseling support can be listed as another weakness of international higher education in Japan.

Participants in the US reported higher confusion regarding visas and perceived discrimination and prejudice against international students. This could be because of the then Trump administration's restrictive immigration policies, including a move to restrict student visas to those who mainly take online courses. A Chinese student in this study mentioned that President Trump's words, such as "China virus," incurred hostile feelings against Chinese people. Another Chinese student said, "I think the discrimination issue is hard for us to deal with. Sometimes it's also hard for us to find support, especially for Asian students." An African student also listed discrimination against international students as a reason for her negative prediction of student flow to the US. "America first" policy of the Trump Administration may have lowered the priority of international students in the US.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions in the US have offered resources including flexible learning schedules, pandemic result fund/stipend, COVID-19 testing kits/protection gears, and learning devices for both domestic and international students (Durrani, 2020; Smalley, 2021). Universities in Japan also offer resources for flexible learning systems and schedules. In terms of financial and employment-related support, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) led policies and programs that offered services and resources to help them continue studying in Japan (MEXT 2021). However, we did not observe clear evidence that individual Japanese universities fully or at least visibly offer such services and supports geared specifically toward international students. Although the services and supports might have been taking place institutionally on the campuses, the invisibility of activities must be the reason why many international students in our survey reported that they needed more comprehensive information provision and support.

The results also showed that participants from low or lower-middle-income countries reported a higher degree of financial difficulty than those from upper-middle-income countries in Japan and the US. Getting enough money to continue their study was the most imminent issue for them. In Japan, those from low or lower-middle-income countries were also concerned about their employment/career prospects. This could be because fewer employment opportunities are available for them back in their home countries and also because the expectation to find employment in Japan has increased since the Japanese government has promoted the employment

of international students under the Plan to Accept 300,000 International Students as a means to recruit highly skilled workers (Sato, 2019). The Japanese government's "Revitalization Strategy 2016" set a goal to raise international students' employment rate in Japan from 30% to 50% (PMJC, 2016, p.160). A Nepalese graduate of a Japanese university, who has received consultations from his junior Nepalese students, pointed out that diminishing employment prospects was a serious issue since many Nepalese students invested much money and effort to get good employment in Japan.

More than half of the participants in Japan and the US predicted that the number of international students from their home country to their current study destination would decrease in the future. Besides travel and visa restrictions impacted by the COVID-19, online education and employment prospects were listed as important factors to affect future student flow. As Abdullah and Singh (2022) point out, a certain cohort of international students would opt to study online to reduce the costs of international education. The value of "real" or physical study abroad has been re-examined since the pandemic with the spread of online education that can be accessed from their home countries.

According to a survey by Hobsons (2015), the majority of international students chose to study abroad for the pursuit of better careers in destination countries (p.8). Career choices and employability are related to "soft skills" and "human networking," which are more likely to be acquired through face-to-face communication and in-person education. Indeed, participants of this study in Japan indicated a greater value in "meeting in person," "interactions in real life," and "social and cultural experience." Meeting these needs and expectations would be essential to enhance the value of "real" study abroad.

Participants in the US mentioned the need for public and organizational support for international students. The government and higher education institutions are expected to cooperate to address the above-mentioned specific needs of international students to strengthen the attractiveness of international education and future student inflow.

LIMITATIONS

This study covers only limited samples of a large and diverse international student population. Sampling biases were reported, so we had to be careful in interpreting the results. Since international student experiences are different institutionally based on their demographic factors and available resources locally, whether they are in the US or Japan, more detailed information needs to be examined to truly understand their experiences. We should also note that the unexpected COIVD-19 pandemic might have influenced students' views about their institutions, instructors, and host countries' policies.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite these limitations, this study still provides essential information on international students' experiences and choices during the pandemic. Participants reported social and academic issues and mental-wellbeing concerns, isolated from their familiar network and disadvantaged by their foreign nationality and local language skills. The international comparison revealed the characteristics of student experiences and influencing factors, including government policies and (deficiency of) university support, in Japan and the US. International students from low or lower-middle-income countries tend to report higher adverse effects of the COVID-19 on their life and employment.

In light of the results of this study, the government and universities need to cooperate in responding to the specific needs of international students, including financial support, visa and career counseling, opportunities for networking and interactions, and dissemination of timely information in the language understood by them in the crisis like the pandemic. Such measures will mitigate the negative effect on international students' life and career prospect, which is essential to sustain future student mobility.

We would like to continue this study by increasing the samples and diversifying the survey methods and information sources to further monitor the impact of the COVID-19 on international students and their education.

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Empirical Article

Improving the First-Year Experience of Chinese International Students through Responsive Pedagogy: Insights from F&M in Shanghai

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses lessons learned from the development and execution of F&M in Shanghai, a hybrid residential-remote program created for Franklin and Marshall College's first-year Chinese students in Fall 2020. The F&M Office of International Programs worked with the Institute for Study Abroad (IFSA) to develop the residential portion of the program, and coordinated the curriculum and remote engagement framework. F&M in Shanghai represented an opportunity to craft a constructive environment for first-year Chinese students by intentionally considering and meeting their specific needs. Utilizing creative, well-designed pedagogy, thoughtful programming, and a multipronged approach to student support, we were able to operate the program with great success. Assessments of F&M in Shanghai resulted in a great deal of data, and some results we observed run counter to received wisdom. This article discusses how these results suggest avenues for future research.

Keywords: belonging, Chinese students, faculty development, international students, remote education, student support

INTRODUCTION

Although the number of Chinese international students in the US decreased by nearly 15% in the 2020-2021 academic year, China remains the leading place of origin for international students in the US

(Institute of International Education, 2021). According to historical Open Doors Report data, China has been the top source of international students in the US since the 2009-2010 academic year, and the 2020-2021 Open Doors Report showed that Chinese students formed nearly 35% of the total international student population in the US (Institute of International Education, 2021).

A growing body of research has focused on the experiences of Chinese international students in the US and other English-dominant settings. Several studies have found that Chinese students in the US may be marginalized and stigmatized by faculty, staff, and domestic peers (e.g. Chen & Zhou, 2019; Hsieh, 2007; Lee, 2020; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Yan & Berliner, 2013; Yao, 2016; Yeo et al., 2019; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018). In particular, Chinese students in English-dominant countries are often perceived to have a linguistic deficit (e.g. Freeman & Li, 2019; Gallagher & Haan, 2018; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018). Such deficit views are applied not only to multilingual students' English-language proficiency but also to their overall intellectual potential and capacity for critical thought (Gallagher & Haan, 2018; Gallagher et al., 2020; Haan et al., 2017; Ryan & Viete, 2009). This mindset can also be shared by Chinese international students themselves, particularly those who come to perceive their linguistic skills as insufficient for their academic goals; these students may even experience an identity crisis as they doubt their academic capabilities, and can suffer severe mental health consequences (Dovchin, 2020; Halic et al., 2009; Freeman & Li, 2019; Zhang-Wu & Brisk, 2021). However, research has also shown that building strong relationships with faculty helps international and multilingual students to navigate these challenges, and that such relationships are a key factor in helping international students establish a sense of belonging at their institution (Chen & Zhou, 2019; Mamiseishvili, 2012).

Franklin & Marshall College and F&M in Shanghai

International student inclusion, academic success, and sense of belonging are important priorities at Franklin and Marshall College, a selective undergraduate liberal arts institution located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. As reported by the Institute of International Education (2021) in the 2021 Open Doors report, F&M's international population is the 5th largest in the US among baccalaureate institutions. A large proportion of F&M's international students hail from China; in Academic Year 2021-22, Chinese international students formed approximately 12% of the total F&M student body. As a consequence, countering and preventing stigmatization and marginalization of Chinese students, and providing these students with effective academic resources are particular concerns for F&M.

Initiatives towards these goals are often led by F&M's Office of International Programs (OIP), which houses International Student Services (ISS). ISS staff of course have responsibility for regulatory compliance for F-1 visa holders, but also play an active role in supporting international student success at F&M. When collaborating with offices in both academic and student affairs, ISS staff advocate on international students' behalf and educate campus members about both challenges faced and contributions made by international students in the campus community. Working alongside ISS in the OIP is an Assistant Dean dedicated to multilingual and international student academic success. In collaboration with F&M's Writing Center, the Assistant Dean provides specialized multilingual writing support to students; additionally, the Assistant Dean develops pedagogical resources and consults with F&M faculty members when they have questions or concerns related to the international/multilingual students in their classes. The Assistant Dean is thus able to promote an assets-based approach to pedagogy, which encourages faculty to move away from the deficit mindset and to embrace the creativity inherent in a multilingual student's approach to course content. The multifaceted ISS support structure and the Assistant Dean's deep

partnership with faculty allow the OIP to advocate for inclusion and equity for F&M international students in many arenas.

When F&M locked down campus in response to the pandemic in March 2020, staff in the OIP began planning our strategies for the fall semester. We anticipated that international travel restrictions and consular closures would prevent many—if not most—international students in the class of 2024 from traveling to the US to begin their F&M degrees, and we were concerned about the potential impact of remote learning to enrollment and retention of this group. As we considered how we could provide first-year international students with the foundations of an F&M experience despite their physical separation from campus, we identified several priorities related to student retention and persistence: access to resources necessary to academic success in a virtual environment; avenues for a sense of belonging in the F&M community; and opportunities to directly experience the F&M liberal arts tradition, which emphasizes the exploration of different disciplines and experiential learning. We ultimately developed four options for international students outside the US to begin their F&M education, one of which was F&M in Shanghai, a program specifically for Chinese students.

F&M in Shanghai was anchored in a hybrid residential-remote structure that offered F&M courses taught by F&M faculty. Direct, synchronous faculty engagement with the students was a cornerstone of our vision for the program since it would ensure a purposeful, sustained connection between the students in China and the F&M community in Lancaster. However, while the F&M in Shanghai students participated in courses virtually, they were simultaneously in physical community with each other. Our on-site program was administered by the Institute for Study Abroad (IFSA), who collaborated with us in designing a residential plan and co-curricular programming for F&M in Shanghai participants. This structure was chosen to promote our priorities for student learning and to facilitate a productive teaching environment for faculty despite the challenging circumstances of virtual instruction. As students were grouped together in one geographic location and had on-site support from IFSA staff, this structure reduced the difficulty for faculty to respond to their students' needs and eliminated the need to accommodate students in different time zones from their classmates.

The F&M in Shanghai program can be productively compared to Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) models. These models may also be described as "telecollaboration," "Online Intercultural Exchange" (OIE), or "Virtual Exchange" (VE) (O'Dowd, 2021). Rubin (2017) explains that the "essence" of COIL is meaningful internationalization, which promotes real interaction and teamwork between people of different cultures and not just superficial exposure to information about cultural differences (pp. 33-34) The fundamental purpose of COIL is to make such internationalization in education possible even without international mobility (Rubin, 2017). These principles were fully realized through the F&M in Shanghai program; however, the program's structure only partially matched the COIL/VE model. Both Rubin (2017) and O'Dowd (2021) emphasize that COIL and VE refer to collaboration between multiple institutions, typically with a pair of foreign language teachers from different countries developing a shared curriculum that would require substantial interaction between students in their respective classes. Though F&M and the IFSA collaborated in establishing residential aspects of the program, the curriculum itself of F&M in Shanghai was still fundamentally F&M coursework, the participants themselves were full members of the F&M community, and their coursework did not typically require sustained engagement with students residing in other countries. F&M in Shanghai thus does not offer a perspective on using COIL/VE programs to achieve meaningful internationalization via interaction between students in different

countries. However, it does suggest possibilities for promoting significant connection between faculty and international students.

F&M in Shanghai was designed specifically as a response to the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we do not intend to replicate it in future. Nevertheless, the experience of developing, running, and assessing the program offered valuable insight into faculty development of inclusive pedagogy practices as a tool to reduce stigmatization and marginalization of Chinese international students in the classroom. This paper provides an overview of the program, describes its outcomes, and ultimately points towards the ways we can apply what we learned to promote student success—for both Chinese and other international students— moving forward.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While the F&M in Shanghai program was built in response to an immediate need, and was not structured as an experiment, we approached the design of the program thoughtfully, and considered how we might use the opportunity to address specific issues that affect Chinese students' educational experiences in the US. Among these issues were the stereotyping and sinophobia that Chinese students often encounter inside and outside the classroom, and faculty misconceptions about the needs of multilingual students (e.g. Gallagher & Haan, 2018; Haan et al., 2017; Hsieh, 2007; Lee, 2020; Yeo et al., 2019; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018). We also considered how we could support faculty in developing skill sets in Culturally Responsive Instruction (CRI) and Linguistically Responsive Instruction (LRI) (e.g. Gallagher & Haan, 2018; Haan et al., 2017; He & Bagwell, 2022; Zhang-Wu & Brisk, 2021).

Chinese Students and US Higher Education

Chinese students in the US face a great deal of stigmatization from both faculty and domestic peers (e.g. Hsieh, 2007; Yeo et al., 2019). Both research studying Chinese students' perceptions of their domestic peers' behavior (Heng, 2017; Lee & Rice, 2007) and research on domestic students' self-described attitudes toward their Chinese peers (Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018) indicate that US students tend to characterize Chinese students as cold, unfriendly, antisocial, less capable, and uninterested in connecting with people who are different from them. Some domestic students in Zhu & Bresnahan (2018) also utilize sinophobic rhetoric when describing their feelings towards Chinese students, speaking of their peers as invaders and others, and echoing political stereotypes that all Chinese people are spies and criminals (p. 1626). This pernicious line of thought is also echoed in Lee (2020), an article exploring how the current anti-China political dogma of the US, which has intensified in recent decades, is also applied to Chinese international students. These experiences of marginalization and racialization have academic repercussions for Chinese students. Freeman & Li (2019) and Ryan & Viete (2009) discuss ways that domestic students may actively exclude Chinese and other international students from participating in group projects, and may ignore their multilingual peers' contributions in class discussions. Both Freeman & Li (2019) and Halic & et al. (2009) indicate that as Chinese students experience this marginalization in the classroom, they begin to question their identities as students, doubting their own academic skills and finding their sense of confidence and self-esteem shaken. This can lead to repercussions for students' mental health, sense of physical safety on campus, isolation from communities, and opinion of the US. Students may also face pressure to assimilate, even by changing the way they speak; research has shown that people with accents that are perceived as less "disturbing" to American students due to their phonetic proximity to American English tend to be viewed as more social and more intelligent (Ruble & Zhang, 2013).

All of the above poses a threat to Chinese students' sense of belonging to a campus community. However, Mamiseishvili (2012) and Chen & Zhou (2019) have found that Chinese students' sense of belonging and persistence can be influenced positively as they develop a close relationship with faculty and reestablish their academic sense of self. For this reason, it is critical for faculty to empathize with their Chinese students and respect them. If faculty build meaningful relationships with Chinese students, the students will be better able to persist through the challenges of the first-year transition to the US higher ed environment. If faculty demonstrate their respect for Chinese students in the classroom, they can also encourage domestic students with stigmatizing attitudes to revise their assumptions and include their peers.

Faculty Support for Multilingual Students

Linguistically responsive instruction, or LRI, is a pedagogical framework designed to support multilingual students in content-focused classes, and requires faculty to understand and intentionally accommodate the process of second language acquisition (SLA) (Gallagher and Haan, 2018). LRI in higher education is a relatively new area of study, but it has become an important focus in the fields of SLA and the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL); in fact, the 2021 Special Issue of TESOL Quarterly was devoted to exploring LRI. Recent publications have explored faculty attitudes about LRI and multilingual students (e.g. Gallagher & Haan, 2018; Gallagher et al., 2020; Haan et al., 2017), faculty development of LRI-related pedagogical knowledge (e.g. Zawacki & Cox, 2014; Tomaš & Shapiro, 2021; He & Bagwell, 2022); and international students' experiences with linguistically responsive practices (e.g. Zhang-Wu & Brisk, 2021).

Gallagher and Haan (2018) examined the perceptions of faculty across disciplinary areas about the multilingual students enrolled at their universities, as well as faculty attitudes about their own roles in helping multilingual students build and refine their communicative skills. The study found that faculty tended to hold negative views of multilingual students, framing them as deficient in linguistic skills even though these students spoke more than one language (p. 312). Though the faculty surveyed expressed concern for multilingual students, they also seemed to feel that someone else should be providing these students with additional support; in other words, they believed that it was not their responsibility to help students access their courses, and that changing their pedagogical approaches in order to do so would be burdensome, deprive domestic/native speaker students of opportunities to learn, and reduce the rigor of their courses (pp. 316-317). Haan et al. (2017) found similar beliefs among faculty when studying attitudes about international students.

Researchers have repeatedly found that many faculty hold similar beliefs about international and multilingual students; such findings date back more than three decades (e.g. Spack, 1988; Zamel, 1995). These beliefs have thus persisted and recurred even as the international and multilingual student population in the US has grown tremendously—the enrollment peak of 2018-2019 of more than a million total international students in the US was nearly triple the total of the international student population in 1988 (Institute of International Education, 2021). At the same time, multilingual writing specialists have increasingly adopted a diversity, equity, and inclusion and decolonialist lens, and more and more resources about international and multilingual students' needs have been developed and made widely available (e.g. Habib & Mallet, 2011; Zawacki & Cox, 2014; Zawacki et al., 2007).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to speculate about the possible factors underlying continued faculty misconceptions about international and multilingual students and resistance towards LRI. However, one simple explanation could be that faculty may feel they do not have the time nor the support resources

necessary to reconceptualize their courses to facilitate linguistic scaffolding; furthermore, the dynamics between international/multilingual students and domestic/native speaker students may impede faculty efforts to truly get to know international and multilingual students. This is precisely why we consider the opportunities we had to support faculty in adapting their courses for F&M in Shanghai to have been so valuable; as we will discuss below, the Fall 2020 semester was a serendipitous moment when faculty were both deeply invested in learning as much as possible about the needs of their international and multilingual students, and were required by circumstance to approach their teaching in new, creative ways.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE

The construction of the F&M in Shanghai curriculum over Spring and Summer 2020 was driven by practical considerations. First, we needed to offer a selection of courses to satisfy general education requirements, mirroring as much as possible the educational experience of F&M first-year students under normal circumstances. This selection had to include a sufficient number of "Connections" (First-Year Seminar) sections to enroll every participant since this F&M course is required in the first semester. We also hoped to offer a variety of courses frequently taken by first-year international students, including options from Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities. The F&M in Shanghai sections were not available to the rest of the F&M first-year population; this structure was chosen so that the students studying together in Shanghai would form a true cohort, and so that it would be logistically possible to schedule these courses to be offered synchronously at more or less reasonable times of day for both faculty in the US and students in China. Another goal was to limit the likelihood that some students would refrain from actively engaging in class out of a lack of confidence in their English skills and anticipated judgment from native speaker classmates.

As we began to discuss the program with partners around campus, a handful of faculty members volunteered to teach sections of their Fall courses for the Shanghai students. The other F&M in Shanghai courses were found through discussions with department chairs about their staffing and section capacity. At the end of this process, we had a group of dedicated, experienced faculty members from different disciplines, each with unique teaching styles and strengths, who were willing to undertake the work of adapting their engaging and challenging courses for live, virtual delivery to students on the other side of the world.

In June 2020, F&M announced that it would switch to a five-module calendar for the 2020-2021 academic year, in lieu of two 16-week semesters. This change from the semester to module calendar was proposed by F&M's Educational Programming Committee after researching the advantages and disadvantages of the compressed system and surveying faculty and students about their experiences with online classes. There were numerous reasons this approach was considered, but one important rationale behind the change to this system was the fact that many students and faculty had mentioned feeling overwhelmed and had difficulty focusing after the pivot to online classes in the Spring 2020 semester. While the College did not collect data to support or refute the success of the module system, they hoped participation in fewer courses at a time would offer an opportunity to create a more focused learning environment, the aim being to lessen the likelihood of students and faculty becoming overwhelmed. Moreover, the change to the module calendar essentially required all F&M faculty to substantially rework the design of their fall courses. For the purposes of the F&M in Shanghai program, the timing was fortuitous; the courses that would be offered to the participants had recently been finalized, we were eager

to begin working with the faculty to prepare for an unusual teaching experience, and we were excited by the opportunity to purposefully integrate linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogical practices into the F&M in Shanghai program.

Faculty Preparation

Once faculty were identified, the Assistant Dean for International and Multilingual Student Academic Success began meeting with them to answer questions and help them envision delivery of the curriculum in these unusual circumstances. The first few rounds of meetings were one-on-one, and focused on addressing each individual's specific concerns about issues like student technological access, or how to scaffold teaching objectives for an all-multilingual, all-Chinese group. These conversations provided a fantastic opportunity to reframe "deficit mindset" assumptions about Chinese students into "asset mindset" course planning.

The Assistant Dean then began to organize opportunities for the faculty to meet as a group and share ideas. The Shanghai faculty became a cohort unto themselves, and this preparation was vital for information sharing and for building interpersonal connections and trust. We connected F&M faculty with our IFSA partners, which enabled them to plan creative co-curricular programming that connected the work students would do in the (virtual) classroom with local activities and excursions in Shanghai. This also enabled faculty to develop some familiarity with the local environment where students would be living.

Collaboration with expert partners across campus was also key to the program's success. F&M is fortunate to have talented and creative instructional technologists and librarians, and these staff were central in making the virtual experience not only functional, but lively and engaging. Interactive activities that used the city of Shanghai as a learning environment were facilitated by IT staff with an expert sense for the intersection of pedagogy and technology. Thus, rather than chafing against the virtual environment, faculty were invited to experiment with it, and were well supported throughout the semester. Furthermore, F&M's Faculty Center is directed by an expert in faculty development and pedagogy. The Faculty Center director was especially helpful in working with faculty members to develop skills with Canvas, our Learning Management System. Additionally, the director hosted conversations with faculty about good practices for teaching in the virtual environment, encouraging faculty to think creatively about possibilities presented by the online experience rather than attempting to force the structure of an in-person class onto the virtual space. The Faculty Center director is a strong proponent for equity-driven practices in the classroom and has been a consistent champion of an assets-based approach to international students. The director was instrumental in reinforcing this approach with the Shanghai faculty.

Our summer preparation also focused on laying the groundwork for faculty and students to establish a strong rapport. The Assistant Dean was able to "introduce" students and faculty in advance through activities like a "Meet the Faculty" webinar, and by having students record brief videos about themselves for their faculty to watch. Another F&M partner, a Teaching Professor of Chinese who serves as a cultural and academic liaison for Chinese students and parents, generously recorded the pronunciation of all F&M in Shanghai participants' Chinese names. Furthermore, we invested time in preparing the student participants for the start of the semester, ensuring that every student was sufficiently familiar with Canvas, campus email, Zoom, and other technological tools. We developed opportunities for students to practice with these tools while ensuring they completed necessary administrative tasks before the start of the semester.

Faculty were asked to teach in an environment that posed fundamental questions and concerns. They ventured into new pedagogical territory from an unfamiliar virtual course environment. We would like to acknowledge here the goodwill and generous spirit that characterized the Shanghai faculty's disposition throughout the planning process. Their dedication to offering students the best possible educational experience and creative, engaging teaching were instrumental to the program's success.

Fostering Student Engagement

We hoped that F&M in Shanghai students would feel a sense of belonging and membership in the F&M academic and co-curricular community. However, we also knew that this was unlikely for many students without some kind of structural guidance, since connecting virtually with the campus community in Lancaster would require extra time and effort. We were particularly concerned that a lack of campus connection outside of class meetings would block access to many informal learning opportunities. Students would not have exposure to a diverse set of classmates in a residence hall, casual encounters with faculty in campus spaces, spontaneous opportunities to attend events, or the simple opportunity to walk around campus and familiarize themselves with the support resources available. Fortunately, the OIP regularly develops and revises resources to introduce new international students to the F&M community, so could adapt these strategies into a suitable structure for the circumstances.

Since F&M international students tend to be most motivated to engage with activities in the context of coursework, we decided to build our framework for facilitating engagement with the broader F&M community in the form of a mandatory, primarily asynchronous, course. The course ran through both modules of the fall term, and if students satisfactorily completed the requisite work, they received a "Pass" and a half-credit. The course, titled "Engaging in the Liberal Arts at F&M," had three main components. First, students had readings or other materials assigned each week; for most weeks, we alternated readings related to the liberal arts and learning with short, 20-minute interviews in which F&M faculty reflected on their own experiences in college. These recorded interviews were well received by students, in part because of the engaging topic, but also because they helped students "meet" their potential future instructors and learn about their disciplines and courses. Second, students submitted weekly reflections on their engagement with campus, detailing their academic successes and frustrations. These reflections allowed students to define how they were making progress and becoming familiar with campus resources, while also identifying areas where they would need to do more exploration. The third component of the course comprised longer reflection pieces which allowed students to think about broader goals. Since the semester was divided into two modules, students had the opportunity to learn from the experience of module 1 to establish goals for module 2. The reflections also served as a place to imagine life at F&M and claim agency towards their own F&M experience.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

We ended the Fall 2020 semester with the impression that the F&M in Shanghai program had been largely successful; as detailed below, we achieved a very satisfactory retention rate from fall to spring semester, the participants performed well academically, and informal faculty feedback on their experiences was very positive.

We must underscore again that the F&M in Shanghai program was not constructed as an experiment; we did not seek to test the effect of any particular variables on student experience, and we had no control group. We were, however, aware that we were building an innovative program, and that it would

be a wasted opportunity if we did not try to assess its effectiveness. We have been able to gather quantitative and qualitative data dealing with student outcomes and faculty perceptions of the experience. While we cannot claim that any particular factor led to specific results, we have identified promising avenues for future research.

Retention

The most fundamental goal of the F&M in Shanghai program was to retain and enroll our Chinese international students. Of the 63 students who completed the Fall 2020 semester in Shanghai, 61—or 97%—chose to enroll in the spring semester as well. Of those 61, 58 (95%) chose to enroll in remote F&M courses rather than attend a study abroad option. 3 chose to attend a study abroad program owned by F&M in the UK; while the courses offered through this program earned F&M credit, they were delivered in hybrid format by faculty in the UK, rather than by F&M faculty in remote format. The primary reason cited by students who chose to attend this program was that they were interested in studying in the UK.

The ISS arm of the OIP tracks patterns in our F-1 student population carefully, so we are able to compare our retention numbers for the F&M in Shanghai participants to our retention numbers for all international students over the last several years. Since the Shanghai students are now in their sophomore year, we examined the retention rate for this population from year one to year two, and compared it to our rates for the previous five years.

Table 1:
F-1 Retention Data

Entry F-1 Cohort	Entry Dates	# enrolled year 1	# continuing year 2	% Retained to year 2
2024	AY 20-21	107	100	93%
F&M in Shanghai	August 20	63	58	92%
2023	AY 19-20	141	130	92%
2022	AY 18-19	132	122	92%
2021	AY 17-18	94	88	94%
2020	AY 16-17	106	101	95%
2019	AY 15-16	93	88	95%
Average, AY15-16-AY20-21		*112.17*	*104.83*	*93%*

Note: Continuing = enrolled for year 2, on leave but later returned, or on leave with intent to return

The 92% retention rate for F&M in Shanghai students going into their sophomore year, and the 93% retention rate for the class of 2024 overall, sits squarely in the normal range of F-1 student retention (92-95%) for recent years. Given the challenging circumstances of these students' first year as F&M students—including the pandemic, the difficulty of taking classes across a 12(+) hour time difference, a compressed course schedule, and the physical distance from the F&M community in Lancaster—the fact that we maintained normal levels of retention over the last year can be considered a success.

Academic Performance

The F&M in Shanghai students' average grades for the Fall 2020 semester were slightly higher than the average first-semester GPA for international students in previous years; the average GPA for F&M in Shanghai students was also slightly higher than the average GPA for first-year domestic students in Fall

2020, in line with a trend we have seen in previous years. Even so, there are a number of challenges involved in considering whether the structure of the F&M in Shanghai program had a tangible impact on student grades. There are many factors beyond the program itself that could, and likely did, have some measure of effect on student outcomes, including the ongoing pandemic, compressed schedule, and the use of online and hybrid technologies for class delivery. It is also exceedingly difficult to find an adequate basis for comparison between the F&M in Shanghai students and any other group. Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 offered radically different educational experiences, especially because of their different calendar structures; first-year students in Fall 2020 who resided on campus or studied remotely in the US experienced distinct environmental stressors. Therefore, contrasting the grade performance of F&M in Shanghai students with these groups is of limited use. Finally, grades for all F&M students trended higher in Fall 2020 than Fall 2019; this pattern could have resulted from student performance, grade leniency due to extenuating circumstances, or teachers simply adopting different methods for grade tabulation in their restructured classes. Considering these limitations, we have elected not to incorporate grade-based data into this paper.

Faculty Reflections on the Shanghai Teaching Experience

While the quantitative data of student retention and grades offer only limited information about the outcomes of the program, comments from faculty on their experiences have yielded a great deal of intriguing qualitative information. At the end of the Fall 2020 semester, the Assistant Dean spoke with most of the F&M in Shanghai faculty one-on-one both to debrief about their experiences and to gather feedback and ideas that could be used to support faculty teaching remote students in the Spring 2021 semester. F&M in Shanghai faculty members' feedback at that time was extremely positive, and a strong theme in these conversations was the idea that this experience would have an impact on their future pedagogical practices. We thus resolved to revisit this topic at a later date in order to gauge what lessons from the experience had persisted.

Method and Limitations

During the Fall 2021 semester, we reached out to the faculty who taught F&M in Shanghai courses and invited them to participate in a semi-structured interview to reflect on their teaching experiencesin this unique program. Five faculty members were both available and willing to participate. We chose to hold the interview as a group conversation in keeping with the cohorted nature of the preparatory experience; we hoped that as the faculty compared their different perspectives on the questions we asked, they would be able to find interesting connections and insights.

The list of preliminary questions was provided to the interview participants prior to the scheduled conversation so that they would have time to reflect. At the start of the interview, we explained that we would try to cover all of the topics, but that we would not adhere strictly to the questions as written, both acknowledging the fact that responses were likely to address multiple topics and to allow for flexibility in the conversation. Examples of the questions we posed were:

- How did the actual experience [of teaching your class] compare to your expectations? Did anything about your students' behavior and outcomes in the course surprise you?
- What things did you learn from and about your F&M in Shanghai students in Fall 2020?
- Is there anything you gained from the F&M in Shanghai experience that will be useful to you in future courses or teaching experiences?

The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. We then utilized a basic narrative thematic analysis approach to review the data. Many themes emerged from the participants' reflections, including the

difficulty of adjusting to the module calendar, the logistical advantages of collaborating with administrators "on the ground," and F&M in Shanghai students' high rates of utilization of office hours. For this paper, we have chosen to analyze themes specifically related to tools and strategies that could address the challenges that affect Chinese international students in the US.

While our conversation with faculty was fruitful, we are limited in our ability to reach definitive conclusions. Only 5 of 12 Shanghai faculty were available for these interviews, and we do not know if their experience is representative of the entire group. Additionally, since we did not plan the F&M in Shanghai program as an experiment, we did not design research questions at the initial planning stages, but rather designed the final interviews based on what we had observed over the course of the F&M in Shanghai semester. Finally, our analysis is undoubtedly influenced by personal bias. Our experience in constructing and implementing the program and our professional responsibilities at F&M shape our interpretation of which themes are most salient.

Discussion

Faculty comments in our interview made clear how much they learned about their Chinese students during the Fall 2020 semester, and how gracefully they adapted their practices in this environment to respond to students' needs as they emerged. All faculty members discussed the different types of scaffolding they provided to students related to academic culture and language. One instructor mentioned that she made certain to provide her students with transparent information about the target skills and knowledge goals of each writing assignment. This act of clarifying expectations ultimately allowed students to produce better work, since they could be more confident that their approach to the assignment was appropriate. In effect, because she provided them with scaffolding related to communicative purpose and structure, students were able to produce a more linguistically complex, idea-rich result. The instructor mentioned that she planned to continue the practice.

Another professor provided a similar type of scaffolding to her class, but with a different purpose. The professor explained that she changed the way she assigns homework, which she does not collect or grade. In previous semesters, she expected students to assume responsibility and to keep up with the recommended practice work independently. However, in Fall 2020, students mentioned that they were having difficulty keeping track of what they needed to do. The professor started using Canvas for a "to-do" list of work, and provided a digital space for students to upload their homework and reflect on their experience of completing the assignment. Even though the professor still does not grade or review the work, students reported that they found the approach helpful, and the professor has continued the practice. This scaffold encouraged students to develop organization and time management skills, as well as accountability and agency in learning. Many first-year international students struggle with these skills, especially if they attended highly structured high schools. Such scaffolding can therefore be extremely useful to students transitioning to the independent environment of a school like F&M.

Another important theme was the contrast between previous experiences of teaching international students in integrated classes and the experience of teaching a cohort class of students from the same country. This topic also arose repeatedly in our informal conversations with F&M in Shanghai faculty in Fall 2020; at that time, professors remarked on the close relationships they developed with their students, noting that they had learned far more about their Chinese students' lives than they had in previous semesters. In our group interview in Fall 2021, we asked the F&M in Shanghai faculty to reflect on this aspect of their experience and inquired whether these insights had impacted their teaching practices. In response, one

professor observed that in classes integrated with domestic students, Chinese students and students from other countries tend to be lumped together as "international students", erasing other facets of their identities. In his Shanghai class, however, he said:

> It was the differences within that particular group that became the new … tools for getting conversation … So instead of being the international students versus the other sort of groupings, it's now north China versus south China, from Beijing or from Shanghai, from seemingly wealthy, less wealthy, having been to the United States, having never been to the United States … I think that was a kind of opening up and getting to learn and understand what the international students are like.

Students are often asked to consider both their perspectives and those of students who are different from them in class discussions. However, this comment signals a problem: international students are often constrained by the unstated assumption that they share a perspective because they are not US citizens. This has repercussions for the international students themselves, as this assumption dismisses their individuality and reinforces harmful stereotypes, but also for their domestic peers and faculty. International students in the US, even those with a shared national origin, are very diverse, and the knowledge and perspectives they hold constitute a substantial, often underutilized, asset.

Other faculty members also celebrated participants' assets. One comment underscored the importance of reframing the misconception that international students are deficient because their educational backgrounds differ from many students in the US. Reflecting on an assignment she had taught in other semesters, the professor observed that her Chinese students displayed a more profound understanding of the theoretical framework than she had anticipated:

> One assignment was very different with this group than in the past, with past domestic students and mixed groups, because I asked them to write about a book that was important to them as a child. And they had the most sort of just thoughtful … Clearly they got the idea that a literary text is important, like they all had an important literary text that they could talk about and what they experienced and how they felt after they read it. And I don't see that as much with American students. You know, it's much more diverse there. And so that was sort of a great kind of cross-cultural thing, because I learned a lot about certain texts that are typically read in China that sort of convinced me, like, this is a really good assignment to bring together students' ideas about literacy and what it means to be literate and that they already bring assets just with their background, even if it isn't in the English language.

As an outcome of this experience, the professor observed how her Chinese students are experts in their own learning, capable of making valuable contributions to the class regardless of their comfort with the English language. The professor also indicates that she intends to continue using this assignment, and to leverage the opportunity to solicit and legitimize international students' knowledge in classes with domestic students. Such teaching practices have the potential to create a profound impact on international students' experiences and sense of belonging.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The F&M in Shanghai project can be related to scholarship in a number of different disciplines, with relevant themes including international education and international student services, second language acquisition and multilingualism, classroom power dynamics, student support services and academic

success, and community formation and belonging. One important theme is virtual international education and pedagogy. While F&M in Shanghai employed only some aspects of the COIL model, it is true that the exchanges between F&M in Shanghai students and faculty reflected principles of COIL: students and faculty engaged virtually in real time, using the physical environments in each location to enhance collaborative, active learning. As we demonstrate in this paper, students and faculty alike had a successful educational experience, despite the time zone difference and physical separation. The quantitative comments from F&M faculty in particular reflect the identified benefits of virtual exchange programs. O'Dowd (2021) reports that many studies of virtual exchange programs show that students "[develop] cultural knowledge during their exchanges," including both "information about the partner culture itself or information about the relationship between the participating countries," and "a growing awareness of cultural diversity and … of their partners' multiple identities and the need to avoid regarding cultures as monolithic" (pp. 217). Similarly, the opportunity to connect so intentionally with their Chinese students seems to have allowed F&M in Shanghai faculty to develop an increased understanding of these students' diverse backgrounds, identities, and needs. The case of F&M in Shanghai thus suggests that certain aspects of a COIL or Virtual Exchange model could provide a fruitful structure for faculty development related to linguistically responsive pedagogy and support for international and multilingual students.

While we have less information about other specific benefits that may be afforded to international students through classes delivered in a virtual format, we are continuing to explore possibilities for using the virtual space to enhance F&M's educational reach and internationalization profile. Though we do not intend to replicate F&M in Shanghai, we have retained insights from the experience for creating programming and resources for first-year international students prior to arrival in the US. In particular, the use of these virtual technologies and pedagogical tools makes it possible to provide incoming first-year international students with substantial resources and information about the academic culture of the College before they arrive on campus to begin their degree programs. We are very interested in hearing from others who are exploring virtual and hybrid models to improve first-year international student transition to campus communities.

The other key theme that may be related to the F&M in Shanghai project is research on the Chinese international student experience in the US. Literature focused specifically on Chinese students studying abroad has been plentiful in recent years; for example, there are a number of studies focusing on sociocultural, acculturative, and academic stressors and their impacts on Chinese students (e.g., Su et al., 2021; Yan, 2017; Yan & Berliner, 2009; Yan & Berliner, 2013), social interactions with domestic and international peers (e.g., Meng et al., 2018; Sato et al., 2020; Wang, 2017; Wilson et al. 2020; Yao, 2016), and choice of host country and purpose in studying abroad (e.g. Chao et al., 2017; Dai & Garcia, 2019; Gong & Huybers, 2015; Yu, 2021). Other literature has sought to provide a nuanced portrait of Chinese international students in order to examine and counter stereotypical representations of such students as perpetually struggling and to center the voices and stories of the students themselves (e.g. Heng, 2017; Heng, 2018; Heng, 2020; Ma, 2020; Suspitsyna & Shalka, 2019). Finally, within literature focusing on international and multilingual student experiences of racialization and linguistic discrimination, there is a substantial amount of qualitative research discussing the particular experiences of Chinese students. For example, Lee & Rice (2007), Yeo et al. (2019), Dovchin (2020), and Hseih (2007) all shed light on patterns of xenophobia and exclusion perpetuated by domestic students and other members of campus communities against Chinese students. Relatedly, Lee (2020) has examined how Sinophobic and neo-racist stereotypes

which portray China and Chinese people as inherently threatening to the US are transferred from the national/political context onto international Chinese students, while studies of US student attitudes towards Chinese and international students (e.g. Mejri, 2019; Ruble & Zhang, 2013; Zhu & Bresnahan, 2018) have revealed anglocentric beliefs and patterns of exclusionary behavior from domestic students towards their Chinese peers.

Chinese student success and well-being in US higher education is a well-researched topic; however, work remains to improve Chinese student transitions to the US academic environment in the first year, and to address the deficit orientation towards Chinese multilingual students that faculty and domestic peers so often hold. The F&M in Shanghai program offered us a unique opportunity to teach first-year Chinese students without immersing them in that toxic framework. We were then able to build on existing research and create pathways for faculty to creatively rethink assumptions and expectations of Chinese students, while allowing students to foreground the assets they bring to the classroom. F&M in Shanghai was not designed as an experiment, so we cannot make any conclusive claims about the relationship between the cohorted structure of the program and the positive outcomes for students and faculty. However, positive reflections on the experience from both faculty and students encourage us to continue with similar efforts on the F&M campus. We hope that our experience encourages others to explore these promising avenues for future research on international and multilingual student success.

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Empirical Article

Internationalization of Higher Education in Universities in the Global South during COVID-19:
A Case Study of a Mexican University

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ABSTRACT

The internationalization of higher education (IHE) is beneficial for students, universities, and society. Hence, higher education institutions (HEIs) carry out diverse strategies in this regard; mobility being the most important one. But the outbreak of COVID-19 has harmed internationalization activities, especially in universities in the Global South. The objective of this case study was to describe the strategies for internationalization that a Mexican university adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using qualitative analysis, findings reveal two main themes: the response of the International Affairs Office and the future of internationalization. Implications include the potential for collaboration among stakeholders and the use of technology to deal with uncertain times. Future research may inquire into students' perspectives and development of intercultural competencies through virtual mobility.

INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education (IHE) phenomenon has received more attention in recent years due to its benefits for students, institutions, and society. IHE is a response of higher education institutions (HEIs) to globalization needs and challenges (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013; Oranga et al., 2020). Buckner (2019) uncovered that internationalization is "one manifestation of a 'global cultural frame' that is affecting education in diverse ways" (p. 316), making higher education unfold in different manners. It emerged four decades ago as a phenomenon moved by political, economic, socio-cultural, and academic reasons (de Wit, 2020a; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Bustos-Aguirre, 2020) evolving and gaining impetus over the last 20 years (Knight, 2020). During the last few years, research on internationalization developed as one of the most important fields in higher education studies (Bedenlier et al., 2018). A vast number of studies on IHE are related to how it is carried out (Buckner, 2019; Knight, 2020; Seeber et al., 2020) showing that student mobility is the most requested activity (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013; Dias et al., 2021; de Wit, 2020b; de Wit & Altbach, 2020). However, the COVID-19 outbreak brought international travel and student mobility to an abrupt halt (Shu-Jing et al., 2020). Several universities in the Global South, for example, in Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, implemented online activities allowing students to participate in virtual mobility (Bustos-Aguirre & Cano, 2021; Perrotta, 2021; Woicolesco et al., 2022).

This paper describes the strategies for internationalization adopted by a Mexican university during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to inform the practice of IHE during the disruption of the pandemic.

Problem and Purpose Statements

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, HEIs were already dealing with strong challenges for IHE. For example, Mexican HEIs coped with competition for attracting talent, better brand positioning, focusing on international publishing, using English as a teaching and research language, creating collaboration models, enhancing ways to increase student and staff mobility, generating joint investment models, and managing the issue of interculturality as a transversal axis (Barrientos Amador & Cartín Quesada, 2020; de Wit, 2020a).

The effects of the COVID-19 outbreak have not stopped and will continue impacting the work that HEIs forged in previous decades regarding internationalization (Lemoine & Richardson, 2020); student mobility was undermined by the spread of the pandemic, particularly in universities in the Global South (Gimenez, 2020; Woicolesco et al., 2021). In the case of Mexico, the negative impacts in the medium and long term are not yet known (Malo Álvarez et al., 2020). For example, limitations on travel and the closure of embassies and consulates impacted students planning to study abroad; international students could not experience cultural immersion in the host countries. In addition, the reduction of financial resources for scholarships and support caused the postponement or cancellation of students intending to study abroad. Universities in Mexico grappled with the uncertain conditions brought by the pandemic outbreak, and the resulting restrictive measures hitting the performance of IHE (Bustos-Aguirre & Cano, 2021; Castiello-Gutiérrez & Camacho Lizárraga, 2021).

Given this situation, it is time for HEIs to make changes and reinvent their strategies and activities to continue with the internationalization work, allowing students, institutions, and society to reap the benefits of IHE. This qualitative study aims to understand how a Mexican university implemented strategies for internationalization during the COVID-19 pandemic. The comprehension of strategies would open the options to continue with IHE during contingency situations. The research questions driving this study were:

- What strategies for IHE are being used because of the COVID-19 outbreak?

- In what ways is IHE carried out during COVID-19 lockdown?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite IHE arising several decades ago, its concept remains fuzzy as are the processes for its implementation (Oranga et al., 2020). Knight (2008) described IHE as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (p. 21). In this sense, IHE is a means to improve the quality of teaching, research, and service to society (de Wit, 2020a; de Wit & Altbach, 2020) boosting the functions of higher education. By doing internationalization, HEIs primarily seek three benefits: to enhance reputation, increase student learning, and improve the quality of teaching (Buckner, 2019; de Wit, 2020b). It is worth recognizing that the greatest benefit of IHE is the transformation of graduates into global citizens rather than national citizens (Oranga et al., 2020). As a result, graduates could meet the intercultural competencies that the worldwide labor market demands (Atiku & Fields, 2020; Czarnecka & Szymura-Tyc, 2016). This is precisely why Mexico's HEIs perform internationalization to improve the quality of education (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013). By developing students' international awareness, they prepare graduates to work in the globalized labor market (Berry & Taylor, 2014; Lizárraga González, 2022). Even though IHE has a long history in Mexico, there is scarce research about Mexican HEIs performing internationalization (Berry & Taylor, 2014) and limited information about the progress made by such institutions in this regard (González Bello, 2016; López López, 2016). This study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

The Relevance of IHE

The benefits generated with IHE cover not only the academic realm but also the social and economic aspects (Nyame & Abedi-Boafo, 2020). For example, through mobility students develop skills that will influence their future job performance, thus impacting organizational outcomes (Shu-Jing et al., 2020). Nevertheless, perceptions still diffuse about the competencies and the values that internationalization promotes and its effect on the substantive functions of higher education (Oranga et al., 2020). This is due to the lack of validated indicators to measure such impact (Pedraza Nájar, 2016).

In Mexico, universities use internationalization to improve the substantive functions of education (Bustos-Aguirre & Cano, 2021). Several Mexican universities have identified mobility as key to enriching the curriculum and providing their students with opportunities to develop intercultural competencies. This is achieved through agreements with foreign HEIs to add programs and internships abroad to their national educational offering (Romero León & Lafont Castillo, 2022). Thus, by having such agreements, Mexican institutions seek to help their students develop international awareness through cultural immersion in host countries (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013; Berry & Taylor, 2014; Drabier et al., 2020). Likewise, when Mexican institutions receive students from abroad, domestic students, as well as professors, are exposed to cultural exchange, generating intercultural knowledge and development (Lizárraga González, 2022).

Mexican universities also use internationalization as a marketing strategy to enhance their branding and raise the institution's reputation for competitiveness in national and global markets (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013; Berry & Taylor, 2014). In doing so, institutions seek to attract talented students.

It is worth remembering that IHE development reached the point of creating a new industry (de Wit, 2020b) which was estimated in 2016 to be worth around US $300 billion from global student mobility (Choudaha, 2019). Such mobility generates revenues for all stakeholders in different societies globally (Oranga et al., 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2020). As a result, a climate of competition appeared among universities (Nyame & Abedi-Boafo, 2020) in the last decade, trying to attract five million talented

international students (de Wit, 2020b). The estimation for 2030—before the pandemic—was above 6.8 million international students (Choudaha, 2019). However, for Mexican HEIs, international students do not represent a source of income because outgoing mobility exceeds incoming mobility by 50% (ANUIES, 2017).

Implementing IHE

Multiple HEIs pay strong attention to the development of internationalization (González Bello, 2016) by including it into both their mission and vision (Raby, 2020), integrating it into strategic planning (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013), and investing resources in this regard (Altbach, 2010). Several universities in Mexico follow this trend (González Bello, 2016; López López, 2016). A survey reported that 45% of Mexican HEIs included internationalization in their mission, 89% in their institutional development plan, 70% have a specific section for internationalization within their institutional plan, and 40% have developed a strategic plan for IHE (Gacel-Ávila & Vázquez-Niño, 2022). However, the successful planning of internationalization must consider several external and internal factors, not just including internationalization as part of the institutional identity.

External factors are those molding the context and impacting any type of institution. These factors are social, cultural, economic, and political forces at local and global levels (Barrientos Amador & Cartín Quesada, 2020). Such external factors have a substantial impact on the way of planning internationalization, making education systems differ from country to country (González Bello, 2016). Mexico, as part of Latin America, faces many challenges such as poverty, crime, social inequality, an unstable economy, and fragile democracy (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013). On the other hand, internal factors are those governing forces specific to an institution like policy formulation, implementation of strategies, and leadership (Oranga et al., 2020). These elements will enhance or hinder the implementation of internationalization in each institution.

The process of implementing internationalization is complex because it involves multiple dimensions (i.e., institutional autonomy, academic freedom, branding reputation, and ranking of programs) as well as stakeholders at various levels (Camacho Lizárraga, 2017; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Oranga et al., 2020). Therefore, several HEIs have an office dedicated to managing such a process (Raby, 2020). The person leading such an office makes decisions to build partnerships, create strategies, coordinate international activities, and orchestrate solutions for unusual situations (Heyl & Tullbane, 2012; Taylor, 2010). Thus, the leader of the International Affairs Office is critical for strengthening and expanding internationalization and achieving institutional objectives.

Some Mexican private universities have professionalized the management of internationalization by establishing a functional area for this purpose (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013). For successful management of IHE, International Affairs Office leaders must consider external and internal factors and all stakeholders before, during, and after internationalization unfolds. The analysis of such factors and the engagement of stakeholders provide the basis for determining strategies and activities for the implementation of internationalization.

Strategies and Activities

For the implementation of internationalization, HEIs use two strategies: internationalization at home and internationalization abroad. The first one refers to on-campus activities (Bustos-Aguirre, 2020; Gimenez, 2020) to "develop international or global understanding and intercultural skills" (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 45). This strategy eliminates travel and living expenses in a foreign country, allowing a more significant number of students to have an international experience. In Mexico, most universities allocate

resources to provide courses in a second and third language as part of the internationalization at home strategy (Berry & Taylor, 2014).

Universities worldwide implement internationalization at home through activities, such as adopting a global vision into curriculum content, co-curriculum activities, offering distance education and online classes with the collaboration of abroad universities, publishing research in international journals, collaborating in international research teams, visiting lecturers and professors, and offering international seminars (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Gimenez, 2020; Pedraza Nájar, 2016). Before the pandemic, Mexican HEIs sporadically focused on these activities for IHE, thus, neglecting the internationalization at home strategy (Gacel-Ávila, 2020).

Mexican HEIs should devote efforts to the internationalization of the curriculum (Bustos-Aguirre, 2020) to allow domestic students to develop intercultural awareness. Institutions must consider the challenges that the internationalization of curriculum represents. The first challenge is professors' resistance to making changes in the structure of the courses (Oranga et al., 2020). The second challenge is language. Just as in globalization, the English language is fundamental to participating in the IHE (Shu-Jing et al., 2020) but, in Latin America, most faculty and staff lack language skills (Berry & Taylor, 2014). A third challenge is the adaptation of the curriculum to meet the needs of domestic and international students at the same time (Oranga et al., 2020). The development of the curriculum content becomes complex when considering cultural, religious, and political differences. The fourth challenge is that no national policies promote such activity (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013).

The second strategy for IHE is internationalization abroad, "understood as all forms of education across borders: mobility of people, projects, programmes and providers" (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 45). Some activities related to this strategy include studying a language abroad, training faculty abroad, student and scholars exchange, and international master and doctoral programs for international students (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013; Pedraza Nájar, 2016). Such activities receive much attention from HEIs (de Wit & Altbach, 2020).

For the internationalization abroad strategy, the two activities that best work for Mexican HEIs are summer exchange programs and dual degree programs (Camacho Lizárraga, 2017). Summer programs have lower costs because the program's length allows more students to participate in cultural immersion. Dual degree programs are longer and entail higher costs. The benefit of this type of program is students graduate from two institutions; that is, the student gets one degree from the home institution and another degree from the host institution. Regarding this strategy of internationalization abroad, Mexican universities focus on having various programs for students as well as for academic staff, mostly with European and North American institutions (López López, 2016). It is worth mentioning that among Mexican students in mobility, 50% of them opt to go to the United States (ANUIES, 2017).

In support of the activity of mobility, governments and institutions formulate policies to facilitate the crossing of borders to create and transfer knowledge (Shu-Jing et al., 2020; Veerasamy, 2021). In Mexico, *Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología* (CONACYT, National Council of Science and Technology), a government agency, is the most important promoter of IHE (González Bello, 2016; López López, 2016), yet, Mexican government initiatives are still few (Berry & Taylor, 2014; Bustos-Aguirre & Cano, 2021).

Despite the number of activities for each strategy in the implementation of IHE, its development is in two directions: research and publications, and student and staff mobility (Gimenez, 2020).

Research and Publications. One of the activities of IHE is to carry out international research, which is a collaborative activity due to its nature of creating knowledge through sharing (Woldegiyorgis et

al., 2018). This is possible by eliciting opportunities for joint research to address communities' problems (Gimenez, 2020). A rationale for conducting and collaborating on international research is the complex social challenges that go beyond the perspective and study capacity of a single institution (Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018). In the case of Mexico, several HEIs collaborate in international research (Berry & Taylor, 2014) allowing them to strengthen research quality and researchers' productivity (Woldegiyorgis et al., 2018). When participating in international joint research, Mexican universities also become a part of an international network, getting the possibility to apply for international funding (Berry & Taylor, 2014; Pedraza Nájar, 2016).

Student and Staff Mobility. Mexican HEIs' approach to IHE is based on mobility (Bustos-Aguirre & Cano, 2021). Mobility refers to students, professors, or administrative staff migrating to acquire a degree or training in an academic program in a host institution (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013). Institutions of higher education promote mobility through inbound and outbound programs. Inbound programs are those that admit international students while outbound programs are education programs abroad (Raby, 2020). The inbound programs of Mexican universities result in international students accounting for less than 0.5% of the student body (Bustos-Aguirre, 2020). On the other hand, there are several activities for student mobility related to outbound programs, such as exchange programs and dual degrees. Although there is a wide range of outbound programs, only 0.75% of the Mexican student body enrolls in such programs due to the costs and lack of language skills (Barragán Codina & Leal López, 2013; Berry & Taylor, 2014; Bustos-Aguirre, 2020; de Wit, 2020a; de Wit & Altbach, 2020).

Mexican HEIs' internationalization efforts are insufficient to provide students and researchers equal opportunities for access. A key point to note is that though Mexican universities have agreements with institutions abroad for the exchange of students, professors, and researchers, more than half of such agreements are not active (Berry & Taylor, 2014).

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on IHE

Before the pandemic, HEIs' expectations of mobility were good because the number of students seeking international programs was increasing (Oranga et al., 2020). However, with the emergence of COVID-19 and the travel bans, such expectations plummeted. In Mexico, seven of the 35 universities registered in the *Asociación Mexicana para la Educación Internacional* (AMPEI, Mexican Association for International Education) continued with face-to-face internationalization activities during the second half of 2020 (Lizárraga González, 2022). Among Mexican universities offering international programs, 73% canceled student mobility and 75% canceled the programs for academia (Gacel-Ávila & Vázquez-Niño, 2022).

Universities took action to continue promoting IHE during campus closures. For example, Cordova and colleagues (2021) reported the response of eight private universities in Latin America to pandemic restrictions. Such institutions faced the situation with a strategic renewal based on reinforcing previous alliances. Several institutions in Argentina and Brazil implemented strategies based on the use of technology to give students access to international virtual experiences (Perrotta, 2021; Woicolesco et al., 2021, 2022). In Mexico, 76% of universities started to implement internationalization at home (Gacel-Ávila & Vázquez-Niño, 2022).

Concerning research and publications, the crisis caused by COVID-19 created a window of opportunity to return to cooperation (de Wit, 2020a), pushing universities and researchers to collaborate and exchange knowledge as never seen before in the world's educational systems (Barrientos Amador & Cartín Quesada, 2020). For Mexican HEIs, this collaboration resulted in content and structure advances and

transformations like designing digital applications and implementing orientation campaigns for the population (Malo Álvarez, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The epistemology underpinning this study was constructionism, which asserts that knowledge is contextually constructed from people's interactions in their world; and the theoretical perspective was interpretivism, which attempts to elucidate human and social reality (Crotty, 2012). A case study was used because it allowed a holistic view and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2015). The single case study focuses on particularity (Stake, 2006) and proximity to reality, a key characteristic of such methodology (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Setting and Participants

To select the site for this study, I analyzed that the university should have the following two characteristics: the university should have a leading position in international programs, and the university has formalized and professionalized the issue of internationalization at the institutional level. I selected a university located in the central-south region of Mexico that leads in international programs offer (Moreno Rosano et al., 2013); its institutional development plan also includes the objective of internationalization and has an international functional area. This institution is a private, not-for-profit university with more than 50 undergraduate programs, more than 50 graduate programs, and more than 12,000 students. Hereafter, I will refer to the site as the University.

For selecting participants, I used purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015). The inclusion and exclusion criteria were that participants should work in the International Affairs Office of the University and make decisions concerning the change of strategies and activities used for internationalization during the pandemic closure. Fifteen people work in the International Affairs Office and two of them fit the inclusion-exclusion criteria. One of the participants is the Director of the International Affairs Office and the other participant is the Director of the United States Liaison Office. These two individuals were responsible for the decisions to change internationalization strategies during the pandemic. I contacted the two potential participants by email; they were willing to participate in the study and I interviewed both.

Data Collection and Analysis

Concerning data collection, the primary data were semi-structured interviews conducted via digital media and observation of an online activity in which I participated. The secondary data were the website of the institution and three documents gathered from participants. It is worth mentioning that all data collected was in the Spanish language. The Institutional Review Board approved this study and participants were asked for written consent.

I used the Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 2017) for data analysis. This theory explains that the basis of an organization's value creation lies in the relationships generated through the cooperation of each group or individual that can affect or be affected by the organization's performance (i.e., customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and government).

Data analysis involved the triangulation of in-depth individual interviews, observation, and review of documents employing two strategies. The first strategy was understanding members' meanings to identify what was relevant and important to participants (Emerson et al., 2011). This strategy helped me to engage with the data and to get closer to the reality of each participant to understand their perspectives. According to Emerson and colleagues (2011), the researcher must delve into the terms, descriptions, explanations, stories, theories, contrasts, and typologies. I conducted this task through the 40 pages of transcripts.

The second strategy was analyzing the data by coding (Saldaña, 2021). This strategy involved three stages. First, I used In-Vivo, Process, and Descriptive Codes for coding the data. Second, I compared the three resulting lists of codes to identify similarities and differences. Third, I integrated the lists of codes to obtain one and proceeded to categorize the information. Also, I developed a word cloud for each transcript using an online tool (tagcrowd.com). This helped me to identify the most frequent words during interviews, such as networking and virtual mobility, which could then be used as codes. For organizing the data during the coding and categorizing steps, I followed the suggestion of Ose (2016) by using a spreadsheet.

After employing the strategies of members' meaning (Emerson et al., 2011) and coding (Saldaña, 2021), I cross-checked the information to find patterns and discover emerging themes. During the process of using both strategies, I analyzed the data in the original language and then translated it into English for the description of the findings. I conducted this study in the year 2021.

FINDINGS

I studied how a Mexican university implemented strategies to continue IHE during the global health contingency to address the following research questions.

- What strategies for IHE are being used because of the COVID-19 outbreak?
- In what ways is IHE carried out during COVID-19 lockdown?

From the analysis, I identified two findings. First, how the University continued internationalization after the emergence of the pandemic. Second, how the University envisions advancing internationalization in the post-pandemic era.

Finding 1. Response of the International Affairs Office Amid the Pandemic Outbreak to Continue the Internationalization Work

COVID-19 emergence posed a problem for internationalization due to travel bans affecting mobility, which was the activity with the largest number of participants. To address this problem and continue with IHE, the University leveraged the following resources.

Focusing on Internationalization at Home Strategy

Participants indicated that the University is focusing on helping students "to achieve this professional [preparedness] by having ... an international experience." In this way, the mission of the International Affairs Office is "to make them [students] grow or help them grow in intercultural knowledge ... to generate in them intercultural competencies." The International Affairs Office manages ways for students to develop skills that corporates want in college graduates through international experiences, specifically via mobility. Participants described that the pandemic affected mobility by decreasing it due to travel restrictions. However, this led them to think differently to continue to foster IHE in the University community.

The University took advantage of the momentum generated by the pandemic outbreak, when HEIs moved online, to enhance the implementation of the strategy of internationalization at home. As one participant mentioned, they "created the concept of [the University] where we not only offer on-site programs … but we also have virtual and hybrid programs." Among the virtual programs that increased during the lockdown, the University offered webinars, collaborative online international learning (COIL), and global speakers. Another example was the virtual conference organized by the International Affairs Office. During such a conference, I observed students participating in various activities. For example, a virtual tour of a chocolate factory and the chocolate-making workshop including a question-and-answer session.

Collaboration Through Networking

The University collaborates with a network of Catholic Latin America and Caribbean universities. With the pandemic outbreak, collaboration among the members of the network was enhanced. Participants highlighted the work of such a network to face the challenges together and move forward with IHE. One participant shared that due to the lockdown, "a platform was developed to have virtual exchange ... And all of that was done in two or three months ... Then the possibilities of internationalization grew exponentially." The common virtual platform allowed institutions collaborating in the network to share courses and activities by uploading their academic offer; students of any participant institution have free access. The activities range from one single lecture to an entire course. Through this, the University multiplied the internationalization at home activities, having a greater number of students who were able to have an international experience. It is worth mentioning that all the universities belonging to the network did the same.

Participants also emphasized the strength of the network in addressing the pandemic and turning the situation around for IHE. One participant shared that with the implementation of the common platform, they had "daily participation in the promotion of internationalization among all the universities [in the network]." More students are benefiting by being able to have an international experience. For example, one participant claimed that "students from Mexico are doing a research project with students from Argentina, and they are socializing, learning from another culture." Collaboration among the members of the network not only focused on providing virtual activities for students but also on generating joint research.

Leveraging Strategic Partners

It is worth noting the difference between the University collaborating as a strategic partner and participating in a network. Participants explained that the relationship of strategic partners is focused on the issue of internationalization by carrying out the tasks of student mobility, faculty mobility, and joint research. On the other hand, participating in the network includes internationalization among other objectives such as the generation of educational proposals fostering equity and the formulation of public policies. However, the dimensions of internationalization (i.e., student and faculty mobility, and joint research) are not strictly carried out.

The University relied on strategic partners to offer virtual activities from North American universities, specifically, lectures from the United States. One participant said that "by becoming virtual ... we gave access to people from our [Latin American] countries being able to listen to these [American] speakers talking about very interesting topics ... that was something new." In this sense, the lockdown was beneficial for IHE because it helped "to understand a little more how to make internationalization work for everyone." During the interviews, as well as in the documents, I could appreciate the emphasis on the relationship with universities abroad as part of the strategy for internationalization. For example, documents displayed that in 2019, the University had 190 agreements with abroad institutions; by 2020, those agreements increased to 229.

Tapping on Technology to Strengthen Virtual Mobility

The fact that HEIs moved all their courses online, in response to lockdown, opened some opportunities for IHE. Technology offers a potential advantage in providing access to classes, no matter where the students are. This resource, enhanced by the collaboration in the network, allows students to access activities at universities in different countries, virtually. As a result, students could have an international experience through virtual mobility. The event I observed used technology to connect speakers from different countries with the students of the University. Also, one participant said that "the opportunity to access a virtual exchange ... was enhanced [by the platform]. So there is no longer an excuse for

professors or students not to have the [international] activity." Participants also mentioned that virtual mobility was not a new activity, but, before the pandemic, it occurred sporadically.

Through virtual mobility, the University offered a series of activities such as webinars and COILs from different countries. These were rarely performed before the pandemic. By increasing the offer of international experiences, the University was able to count on a greater number of students participating and experiencing diverse cultures in one sitting. For example, one participant commented that "guys from [Mexico] ... can take classes with universities from Colombia from Peru to Argentina from all the ones that are partners [of the network]" during the same semester.

Students' participation in international programs increased significantly due to virtual mobility. The information in the documents showed that during the pandemic, the University had more than 800 students in virtual mobility before the end of 2020. One participant said, "In the last year, in 2020, there must have been more than a thousand students with international experiences of very different types, from short term to long term." The other participant talked about students being involved in virtual events of an American university during the 2020-2021 school year, "I can tell you that we have had more than 2000 participants from [the University] in activities during this period." Also, in the virtual conference I observed, students participated in lectures, workshops, panel discussions, and even cultural events provided by institutions abroad.

Just as the participation of students in virtual mobility increased, so did the number of inbound courses for international students. Before the pandemic outbreak, documents displayed few courses were offered for international students. When the University moved courses online, the demand for such inbound courses increased. One participant gave an example of one course they usually offered on a one-month per year duration, "and instead of having 15 [international] students [face-to-face] ... we had groups of 60, of 70 [international] students" and even it was "the fifth time it [the same course] has been done [virtually] in less than a year."

Involving Professors

It is important to consider professors to catapult internationalization. There are two ways in which the International Affairs Office of the University works with professors. This functional area connects with the Academic Area through a person who takes on the role of liaison; that person is usually a professor. When professors get to know and get involved in internationalization, they become promoters of the programs offered by the International Affairs Office. One participant asserted that "if a professor who is engrained with his/her students promotes that the international [experience] is important, then many more students go [to an international program]."

The University established the guideline for professors to integrate an international component into their courses. An international component is an element within the course that encompasses an international experience (e.g., a lecture with a foreign professor, participating in an international conference, and inviting an international speaker). The International Affairs Office staff supported professors by managing and coordinating the implementation of the international component. This has been achieved through the engagement of both areas. For example, one participant shared that professors can "play a video or invite a Latin American professor to their class. Those [professors] who know English [invite] an English-speaking lecturer." This is an example of collaboration among International Affairs Office personnel, Academic Area, and international partners.

The collaboration between International Affairs Office staff and the Academic Area was being performed before the pandemic. However, because of the increase in the offer of virtual international

experiences, more and more professors are integrating an international component into their courses, facilitating greater cooperation among personnel of both areas.

The possibility of implementing an international experience in every course offered by the University increased due to the breadth of international activities offered by the International Affairs Office after the emergence of the pandemic. Each of the three methods of data collection shows the expansion of the supply of international experiences, now in virtual mode.

Finding 2. Envisioning the Future Path of Internationalization

The pandemic outbreak changed the implementation of internationalization in the University. Such change is generating benefits for students because, with virtual mobility, students have free access to different activities with various universities in diverse countries. With this, students are having international experiences and the possibility to develop intercultural competencies by socializing with professors and students from several cultures. For example, one participant shared that "[students] are taking classes with professors from other institutions" and "gaining knowledge from different experts at an international level." Likewise, during the virtual conference I participated in and observed, I had the opportunity to listen to speakers from different continents. However, to continue to expand internationalization benefits to students, it is important to think about the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Opportunities for Internationalization

Based on the experience of IHE during the global health contingency, participants think that the University and HEIs in Mexico have a great opportunity to keep increasing internationalization at home through technology. For this, the University should continue with virtual mobility; at the same time, it must also integrate hybrid programs. As one participant said:

> So, in this new virtual world ... there's a hybrid world left ... where there is physical mobility ... but let's not forget the learning that has been had in the pandemic, from what we have done in this more virtual or hybrid world internationally.

On the other hand, institutions are returning to face-to-face mode, and with that, to physical mobility. Participants expressed that it is time to design short programs to have a lower cost offer. These programs would be in addition to the programs already offered. One participant asserted "we have to think about these short programs ... as medium and short term to give more possibilities to more students to aspire to have an international experience, [and] continue with virtual [mobility]."

Concerning Mexico, participants believe that there are several opportunities to work on. One thing to do is to replicate what the network of Catholic universities in Latin America did by sharing a common platform for internationalization. That is, Mexican universities could join in to share their international program offer. One participant said they "are going to work towards the existence of an internationalization platform for all the private universities [in Mexico] in order to generate much more movement [with virtual mobility]." The aim is to create value for students by offering more international activities, either inbound and outbound, physical, or virtual.

The other opportunity for Mexico is to use its cultural and geographic diversity to attract international students. With this, it is possible to create programs that encourage international students to participate in online classes and visit the country for a short term. One participant expressed:

> [Mexico] have a golden opportunity to grow in this area [internationalization] ... because it is [a] so beautiful [country] … we have a golden opportunity to make hybrid programs, that if it is going to cost a person from the Netherlands to come and come to Mexico, well, maybe you can't do a whole semester [exchange program] but maybe you can do a one-week program.

With plans like this, the University would create value for various stakeholders.

Upcoming Challenges

For the University to continue advancing in internationalization, it is crucial to have the involvement of different stakeholders, especially professors. Before the pandemic, professors seemed to be the last to react to internationalization. During the pandemic, it was key to work together with professors to expand internationalization at home. However, one participant noticed that the work with professors must move towards internationalization around research. The other participant shared that they are working to connect professors of the University with professors of strategic partners universities to perform research projects "and the idea is that they [professors] will be writing together."

A noticeable challenge for the University is the international component implementation in all courses. With this, the goal is that each student has the feasible opportunity to have an international experience. One participant expressed:

> [The University] is trying to achieve ... that 100 percent of the students at the university have an international experience, whether it is a webinar or a doctorate dual degree … because in some way it is useful for the student to have an experience with another country.

Documents show a diversified international offering being used as the international component in courses, such as global speakers, webinars, and COILs. Faculty needs to work on syllabi to take advantage of virtual events offered through the network or through strategic partners of the University.

A third challenge is to maximize the opportunity to reach more students through technology. Technology offers the possibility of breaking costs, downtime, and space barriers. The participants believe that the recorded virtual courses could remain permanently open, allowing students to access them anytime. This multiplies the possibilities for students to have an international experience. One participant affirmed that "[w]hen it is virtual it does not really exist [a limit] ... because the session is recorded ... The student is going to click on it [anytime] and see the session regardless of where he or she is." The conference I observed was recorded and the students have free access to watch it again, and they can see all the activities as often as they want.

Finally, it is important to keep moving in collaborative networks by encouraging openness to share information. One participant affirmed that networking "is very important ... Because many of these ideas we have shared with other universities, … we openly share the information." It is worth remembering that internationalization at home advanced by leaps and bounds during the pandemic lockdown as institutions shared their courses online for free. That is the power of collaboration for value creation.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Internationalization at home became a key strategic move for the University to continue with IHE during the lockdown. Findings demonstrate that this strategy has potential outcomes with a greater number of students having international experiences (de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Woicolesco et al., 2021). With this, the University is seeking to create value by preparing its students with international awareness.

This study exposed how an organization can enhance its value creation through cooperation among different stakeholders (Freeman, 2017). Findings display the resources that the University used to implement internationalization at home. Participants highlighted the relevance of networking which allowed them to shift from competitiveness to collaboration to perform a common virtual platform. Collaboration has been a lever to combat these unprecedented times in the history of IHE (Barrientos Amador & Cartín Quesada, 2020; Finardi & Guimaraes, 2020; Gimenez, 2020; Tjulin et al., 2021; Woicolesco et al., 2021).

During the COVID-19 lockdown, virtual mobility gained momentum due to the combination of travel bans and the enlargement of international online activities. Findings exhibit the importance of having strategic partners to carry out such activities (Cordova et al., 2021; Gimenez, 2020; Tjulin et al., 2021). The University has several partners, and with that, created an extraordinary dynamism in IHE because the students could have international experiences with different universities from several nations (Bustos-Aguirre, 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2020).

Regarding the international offering, the University gave students virtual access to events that could only be in person before the pandemic. With this, the cost barrier was eliminated because students did not need to travel (Berry & Taylor, 2014). The fact that the University offered all the activities free of charge was something new. In addition, the University offered English and Spanish activities, allowing students to choose the experience they preferred. Findings reveal more students had an international experience because the language barrier was overcome (Cordova et al., 2021). Still, if students choose to participate in more activities in Spanish rather than English, it could foster a lack of language skills (Berry & Taylor, 2014; Shu-Jing et al., 2020).

Before the pandemic outbreak, professors had already begun integrating the international component into their courses. However, the COVID-19 lockdown accelerated this process due to the wide range of international activities offered. Findings denote that several professors integrated such a component, overcoming the challenge of resistance to make changes in their syllabi (Oranga et al., 2020). The proximity in the work of the International Affairs Office and the Academic Area to provide students with elements that allow them to improve their intercultural awareness and competencies is another example of value creation through stakeholders' collaboration (Freeman, 2017).

In virtual mobility, domestic students socialize online with professors and students from other countries. A weakness of virtual mobility could be that students do not live the cultural immersion. Some studies pointed to the development of intercultural skills through virtual mobility (Barbosa et al., 2020), but the impact of such activity on intercultural awareness remains unclear (Cordova et al., 2021).

The pandemic outbreak triggered the use of technology as a means for HEIs to continue their operation. Findings reveal that the University took advantage of technology to open several international activities generating virtual mobility. With such actions, the number of students with at least one international experience multiplied. As a result, the University put diversity, inclusion, and equity into practice in the work of internationalization (Tjulin et al., 2021; Woicolesco et al., 2021), exposing technology as an enabler for pursuing social justice in IHE (Finardi & Guimaraes, 2020). So, it could be possible to remove the emic term that internationalization is for elite students (Bustos-Aguirre, 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2020; Finardi & Guimaraes, 2020; Gacel-Ávila, 2020).

LIMITATIONS

Given its nature as qualitative research, the case study approach, and the usage of purposeful sampling, findings are not generalizable but transferable (Patton, 2015). The data collected are fully contextualized to the University. Therefore, the experiences of other universities in the Global South may differ. However, this study helps readers learn about strategies for IHE coping with the COVID-19 lockdown. Readers can adapt and/or adopt such strategies depending on their context. Another limitation of this study is having two participants. However, I sought to obtain information-rich sources for the purpose of the research through the selecting criterion (Patton, 2015). Thus, the individuals participating were the ones who made decisions regarding internationalization strategies and activities during the pandemic.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

COVID-19 outbreak is affecting the work that HEIs in Global South have been doing for decades regarding IHE. This study aimed to display the strategies a Mexican university implemented amid the pandemic lockdown. The University, like many other HEIs in Latin America, redirected efforts to work with the strategy of internationalization at home. Such strategy not only meant continuing the operation of IHE, but also broadened the scope in terms of the number of students participating in an international activity through virtual mobility. With this, paradigms about IHE are changing. Students moved from physical to virtual mobility, professors and international staff moved from focusing on internationalization abroad to internationalization at home, and HEIs moved from competitiveness to collaboration.

From this study, several themes arise for future research. For example, learning about students' perspectives on virtual mobility during the COVID-19 lockdown would be interesting. Research could also be conducted on the development of intercultural competencies through virtual mobility amid the pandemic. Another future study could be to compare the intercultural awareness development among students experiencing physical mobility and those experiencing virtual mobility.

The long-term effects of this pandemic are not yet apparent and HEIs will be developing defense strategies as these effects appear.

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Empirical Article

Coping and Adjustment during COVID-19: Experiences of Chinese International Doctoral Students in the United States

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ABSTRACT

While the initial outbreak of COVID-19 in China impacted Chinese international students' families' lives, the spread of the virus in the U.S. heavily influenced their own. Drawing upon the stress and coping model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), this qualitative study unpacks Chinese doctoral students' experiences and coping at one large research university in the U.S. during the pandemic. The open-ended interviews with eight Chinese international doctoral students revealed the stressors associated with the sudden changes in participants' personal, social and academic lives. Findings showed that participants experienced learning obstacles, health concerns, funding uncertainties, and limited social interactions. Participants mainly utilized emotion-focused strategies to cope with the daily life stressors, the tense political climate and hate speech targeting Chinese people in the U.S. This study contributes to the dialogue about stress coping in the pandemic and suggests education practitioners possible improvements in student services.

Keywords: Chinese international students, doctoral students, stress coping, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

The United States (U.S.) has seen a significant increase of Chinese students flocking to its colleges and universities with one out of three international students coming from China (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2020). In the 2019-2020 academic year, over 372,000 Chinese students were studying in the U.S. (IIE, 2020), positioning China as the top sending nation of international students to the U.S. for the sixth year in a row. Besides enriching host campuses and communities (Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), international students also bring financial resources to a host nation. In 2019, Chinese students alone contributed $15.9 to the U.S. economy, indicating the broad benefits Chinese international students bring to the U.S.

Doctoral students who are more mature in age than undergraduate students are exposed to high stress levels and mental health concerns (Schmidt & Hansson, 2018; Sverdlik et al., 2018) as they conduct both academic work and research. Some doctoral students take on family responsibilities, adding another layer of stress to the already overwhelming academic work (Brown & Watson, 2010). Doctoral students also seek professional development opportunities (Pásztor & Wakeling, 2018), publish academic papers, present research at academic conferences, engage in teaching or other academic-related work (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). Due to heavy academic workload, American College Health Association (2018) reported that graduate students are at a greater risk for mental health issues than the general population. Despite these challenges, the experiences of doctoral students are an understudied topic (Ye & Edwards, 2017) in the present literature. This study aims to advance the literature by unpacking the Chinese doctoral students' experiences in the U.S. during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 became a global concern when the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) declared a pandemic in March 2020. The pandemic has brought additional challenges to the lives of international students in general, and Chinese students in particular. Besides the sudden shift to online learning, sheltering in place, and travel restrictions, Chinese students in the U.S. also witnessed the anti-China rhetoric that blamed China and Chinese people for spreading the virus. Under the Trump administration, hate speech against people of Asian descent prompted the rise of stigmatization, racism, physical violence, and hate crimes across the U.S. (Gover et al., 2020). Yet, there is little knowledge about Chinese doctoral students' experiences during the pandemic while studying abroad. Given that Chinese international students represent the largest number of international students in the U.S., it is imperative to understand Chinese students' challenges and coping methods during a pandemic. Drawing upon the stress and coping model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the purpose of this qualitative inquiry is to explore the experiences and coping of Chinese international doctoral students at one large Western research university in the U.S. This study also draws implications for institutional support that is crucial for this and other student populations in times of crisis.

In this study, we address two main questions: What are Chinese international doctoral students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic at one large American university? How do these students cope with stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic? Students' mental health is highly related to their academic success; mental health problems are negatively correlated with students' GPA and other educational performances (Eisenberg et al., 2009). Chinese international doctoral students face more challenges than most other populations in this time of crisis. Yet, their experiences and how they cope with stress during the pandemic are underreported. Thus, it is significant to explore how these stressors

from various sources impact Chinese international doctoral students' academic life and professional development so that higher education institutions can provide corresponding support to overcome this population's potential dropouts and academic failure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature indicates that Chinese international students experience various stressors due to different culture, language, political and educational differences while studying abroad. Yet, most research focuses on college students in general. Thus, this paper sheds light on Chinese doctoral students, a more mature group that carries different types of responsibilities than undergraduate students, which is an understudied topic in extant literature.

Stress and Chinese International Students

Previous research has found that a greater cultural distance between the home and the host country causes greater challenges and higher stress levels among international students (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Ye, 2006). The U.S. and China exhibit fundamental differences in cultural practices, political ideology, education system, worldview, and language – factors can cause higher stress levels for Chinese international students in the U.S. (Lin & Betz, 2009). In addition, Chinese international students must switch from the mode of mostly remaining silent and listening to the teachers to the U.S. course structures that encourage students to speak up in front of the class. China emphasizes examinations and scores. Students' opportunity to speak up in class remains few since the teachers need time to cover as much knowledge as possible (Xu et al., 2018). In contrast, the U.S. emphasizes the overall development of students and encourages constructive interactions between the teachers and students in the class (Tanner, 2013). These differences require Chinese international students to make significant adjustments to the new learning environment in the U.S.

Most research to date has focused on the sociocultural adjustment of Chinese international students while studying abroad (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Wei et al., 2007; Ye, 2006). Extant literature suggests that while Chinese international students rely heavily on their family members and co-national peers for emotional support while overseas, this behavior may hinder their adjustment to life abroad (Yan & Berliner, 2011; Ye, 2006). For instance, Su and Harrison (2016) pointed out that forming a cluster of Chinese students on campus limited students' integration with peers from other backgrounds, which led to social self-efficacy difficulties, a factor that was found to negatively affect acculturation stress (Lin & Betz, 2009). Consequently, sticking to co-nationals may significantly increase depression among Chinese international students (Wei et al., 2007). In addition, "English proficiency, length of residence in the United States, and unconditional self-regard" (Lin & Betz, 2009, p. 451) can all impact Chinese students' social self-efficacy.

Regarding doctoral students, research found that Asian students typically sought social support from faculty, advisors, and fellow graduate students (Le & Gardner, 2010). Yet, there is little understanding about what factors and sources during the pandemic regulate doctoral students' lives. We know even less about Chinese international doctoral students' experiences in times of crisis. The sudden life changes that come with the pandemic may affect different aspects of their life. Compared to undergraduate students, graduate students take on more responsibilities such as teaching, research, and administrative tasks working as Graduate Teaching Assistants or Graduate Research Assistants (Gardner & Mendoza, 2010). With double shock from the pandemic, Chinese international doctoral students are

susceptible to various stressors while experiencing the pandemic in a culture and society different from their own. Thus, it is significant to look at these students' experience during the pandemic to explore how universities could better support them.

Stress and Pandemic

Extant research identified diverse stressors during infectious disease outbreaks, including fear, lack of access to resources, disruptions to work/learning, and daily self-care routines (Brooks et al., 2020; Main et al., 2011). For example, Cao et al. (2020) found that the economic shutdown lowered families' income and threatened job security, thus increasing some students' anxiety levels. Moreover, the long-lasting transmission of COVID-19, along with frequent lockdowns and travel bans, forced people to practice social distancing, which leads to a significant decrease in social interactions among friends and families and has added extra stress to those who are used to social gatherings (Usher et al., 2020).

Regarding academics, the sudden switch to online learning in Spring 2020 brought both teachers and students more challenges, such as technical issues that came with online learning (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Following the campus shutdowns, the learning environment for students changed as they became confined to their rooms, which brought more difficulties since some students perceived "home as a source of distraction" (Son et al., 2020, p. 6) as they struggled to focus on academic work. Internet connections become a stressor since poor internet connectivity and technical issues severely impact student learning (Baloran, 2020).

Recent research found that college students' stress levels increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Baloran, 2020; Cao et al., 2020; Rogowska et al., 2020; Sustarsic & Zhang, 2021; Wang & Zhao, 2020). Yet, most of the studies cover college students in general. The literature review has revealed a lack of examination on Chinese graduate students' educational experiences in the U.S. during large-scale stressors, such as the global pandemic, and how these students cope with stress during this time. Instances such as labeling the COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus," and the increasing hate speech and crime targeting Chinese people and the broader Asian population in certain areas of the U.S. (Gover et al., 2020) triggered fear and anxiety among Chinese international students. In the global health crisis, it is vital to examine Chinese international students' experiences and wellbeing, especially at the doctoral level, as these students take on more responsibilities academically, professionally, socially, and individually, with stressors that can lead to mental health issues.

Stress Coping

In the last three decades, stress coping has caught attention from scholars across various disciplines ranging from social and behavioral science to medicine and public health. What most approaches have in common is the recognition of cognitive appraisal and behavioral responses that an individual resorts to in a stressful situation (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). In line with this, Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) define coping as "the thoughts and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful" (p. 745). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed a widely accepted model of stress and coping that refers to coping as a process of cognitive appraisal to determine whether an individual believes they have the resources to respond effectively to the challenges of a stressor. Coping assumes two major roles: problem-focused or active coping and emotion-focused or passive coping. When individuals cannot respond to the stressor, they likely turn to an emotion-focused coping like distancing, denial, or substance use. On the other hand, when individuals possess resources to manage or reduce the stressor, they are likely to develop a problem-focused approach. Examples include

problem-solving and planning (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). In addition, high levels of emotion-focused coping have been associated with greater psychological distress and depressive symptoms. In contrast, high levels of problem-focused coping have been related to lower psychological distress (Compas et al., 2001).

Other conceptualizations of stress coping build on Lazarus and Folkman's (1988) model but shed more light on different strategies, such as meaning-focused coping (Park & Folkman, 1997), seeking social support (Amirkhan, 1990), and positive emotion coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). While most models employ quantitative tools to measure stress among various populations and contexts, narrative approaches present an important alternative to understand how people experience and cope with stressful events. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) argue that "a great deal can be learned by asking people to provide narratives about stressful events, including what happened, the emotions they experienced, and what they thought and did as the situation unfolded" (p. 750), which can unpack various ways of coping that expand beyond the ones measured in existing inventories.

Regarding coping strategies of international students, extant literature has not come to the same conclusions. While some studies argue that international students use more emotion-focused coping, such as denial and behavioral disengagement, than domestic students (Chai, 2009), other studies found problem-focused coping as the most used approach, followed by social support and behavioral disengagement (Amponsah, 2010). The divergence in findings is due to various factors, such as gender (Sapranaviciute et al., 2011) and length of time in the host country (Mena et al., 1987). For this study, it is important to note that most of the research on stress coping comes from western samples, yet the effectiveness of different coping actions is often context-dependent (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In our study, the stress coping framework will serve as a lens to examine the coping of Chinese international doctoral students during a worldwide pandemic.

METHODS

This study explores the experiences of international doctoral students from Mainland China at a large Western research university in the U.S., utilizing a qualitative research approach with interviews (Creswell, 2013). We explore students' lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing two kinds of questions: what individuals have experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). We conducted open-ended interviews to unpack the experiences of Chinese doctoral students during the global pandemic. The theoretical framework guided the development of the interview questions in the research design period.

We asked our participants to reflect on their lived experiences from the Spring 2020 semester when the pandemic started throughout the Fall 2020 semester when the interviews took place. More specifically, the open-ended questions asked about students' experiences and coping related to their academic and personal lives to address our research questions:

- What are Chinese international doctoral students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic at one large American university?
- How do these students cope with stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic?

Data Collection

This paper draws on in-depth interviews with Chinese international doctoral students. The study occurred over a three-month period, starting in September 2020, when authors distributed a recruitment

announcement to various student clubs, associations, graduate student dormitories, and WeChat, a popular Chinese social media platform. Using a purposeful sampling method, we identified a diverse group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018) who were all full-time, continuing international students from Mainland China, currently pursuing doctoral degrees. All participants were physically present in the U.S. during the pandemic. None of the participants were compensated.

Following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, we conducted one-on-one interviews with participants in Fall 2020. We audiotaped each interview that averaged 60 minutes in length. Due to the IRB COVID-19 guidelines, we conducted interviews via online video call platforms (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004) such as WeChat and Zoom that allowed us to observe participants' body language and facial expressions (Salmons, 2012). All but two interviews were conducted in English. The first author conducted and transcribed the two interviews in Mandarin, followed by an English verbatim translation. The use of the native language may allow participants to feel more comfortable during the interview, and consequently, to share their experiences more openly as if they were to speak in a non-native language (van Nes et al., 2010).

We established trustworthiness through member checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018) by asking participants to confirm the accuracy and clarity of the interview data. We then coded the data to identify patterns and emerging themes both individually and across the interviews (Saldaña, 2016). We used a qualitative thematic analysis, a technique for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes to interpret the data (Creswell, 2013). Both authors are international graduate students at the same university. We acknowledge that our personal biases and experiences may have influenced data collection and/or analysis.

Participants

In Fall 2020, 115 Chinese international students pursued graduate studies at this university, making China the top sending country of international students. As shown in Table 1, participants included eight students from China, who were all full-time doctoral students enrolled in various majors. Six students pursued degrees in the science fields, while two majored in social sciences. Participants varied in gender, age, and years in the program. There were four female and four male students. The participants' ages at the time of the interview ranged between 23 and 36, with a mean of 30 years old.

Academically, participants were at various stages in their academic journey. They studied in their programs for 2.5 years on average. Half of the participants had previously studied abroad, either in the U.S. or in other East Asian countries. Seven students held a part-time graduate assistantship that waived tuition fees, while one student lost their on-campus job due to the university's budget cuts in Spring 2020. Half of our participants resided in a student dorm, while the other half lived in private off-campus housing. To protect participants' privacy, we assigned them pseudonyms rather than using their real names.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Name	Gender	Age	Years in the program	Major	Housing
Chen	F	33	2.5	Communication and information science	Student dorm

Shu	F	33	3	Educational foundations	Student dorm
Yuxi	F	30	2.5	Communication and information science	Off-campus
Wenpei	F	23	1.5	Atmospheric science	Off-campus
Jun	M	36	5	Kinesiology	Off-campus
Da	M	34	1	East Asian Languages and Literature	Student dorm
Tianyu	M	27	1	Electrical engineering	Off-campus
Hanlin	M	27	4	Physics	Student dorm

Data Analysis

There were three phases involved in data coding using thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). We used both inductive and deductive approaches. In the first phase, the researchers worked inductively and independently to draft initial open codes and later shared the codes to develop theoretical codes and analytic themes (Charmaz, 2006) based on the guidance of the theoretical framework. In the second phase, we worked independently to develop theoretical codes and analytic themes and later worked together to finalize the codes and themes that stemmed from the literature and the theoretical framework using a deductive approach. In the final phase, we worked collaboratively in writing up the findings and further developing our thinking.

FINDINGS

The data analysis revealed that the sudden changes in life, discrimination, and immigration policy changes during the pandemic triggered stress among our participants, and what is more, these life changes affected their mental health. Participants' responses indicated that mainly emotional coping strategies were used in response to the stressors. This section describes the four main themes that include academic challenges, political tensions and discrimination, health concerns, and stress coping.

Academic Challenges

The academic workload of doctoral students typically includes coursework, during the first 2–3 years, and a heavy research load. Since most of our participants were no longer taking a full course load, the shift from in-person to online learning did not present as many challenges as the changes to their work that they performed as graduate assistants (i.e., teaching or research). Despite challenges that most college students can experience during a pandemic, such as online learning difficulties and lack of peer engagement, doctoral students have a couple of other unique challenges.

Compromised Academic Performance

Qualifying and comprehensive exams typically judge doctoral students' academic performance and progress. While these exams are inherently stressful, three students reported that the pandemic added to their stress levels. Chen and Shu ended up postponing comprehensive exams planned for Spring after

consulting their academic advisors. Depression hindered one student's academic progress: "*My productivity is very low with the fear about the pandemic. I stopped working on my dissertation from June until today. I still have not done my comprehensive exam… All I want is to recover from the depressive and stressful memories that came from the changes during the pandemic.*"

Research is the most important aspect of a doctoral student's academic work. For many participants, the pandemic directly or indirectly impacted their research. This was especially pronounced among science students who needed to work in a lab and those who planned for field research. For instance, Da, who is a linguistics student, could no longer perform his experiments. Hanlin and Chen had to cancel their field research abroad. Hanlin said: "*My plan was to go to Japan this Fall semester until next January, but now I cannot go.*" Similarly, Chen's inability to travel for research "*almost terminated*" research that she had done so far. Most participants agreed that their graduation date would have to be pushed back for at least a year.

Financial uncertainties

Securing funding to continue their studies was an area of concern as all participants relied on graduate assistantships that waived tuition fees that are especially high for international students. Jun lost his on-campus job due to the university's budget cuts in Spring and was left without an income until Spring 2021, when he was planning to graduate. On the other hand, Chen was already searching for a new job because of the insecurity whether her contract would be extended for another year. She said:

> In terms of financial security, definitely there is always a fear. I got my contract at the last moment… At the beginning of the semester some professors in my program started to remind me that I need to look for [new job], that they cannot guarantee the same position next year.

Considering the high cost of living in the U.S. and this university's urban area, several students mentioned the possibility of returning to China, which would allow them to save money that they otherwise spend on housing and food. Hanlin claimed: "*At least for Chinese people, it is too expensive [to live here]. It is really a lot of money.*" However, due to the travel bans, expensive flights to China, and graduate assistantships, participants decided to remain in the U.S. Other difficulties are similar to what other college students can experience during the pandemic.

Online learning and teaching experiences

While most students found online learning "*convenient*" and "*time-saving,*" some participants expressed their concerns about sharing personal information in an online environment. Chen tried to limit what she shared in an online class as she explained:

> In Chinese culture you have to be very considerate in terms of what you say whether you are being monitored or not… Even though you probably really want to share something, but you do not want to lose face and you also want to show respect to the professors, and you want to fit in.

An online classroom environment may not allow for active participation and interaction between students and teachers. Students who were newer to the U.S., like Tianyu and Wenpei, noticed that their English proficiency dropped significantly. The campus used to be their only English-speaking environment. Wenpei shared:

> The biggest change in social life is the decline of my English-speaking skills. This is a particularly interesting phenomenon because most Chinese people around me are like this… After moving out from the dorm, I hardly have any chance to talk to anyone during the pandemic.

The people we met in life, including the landlord, were mainly Chinese. I only have one English-speaking time a week, which is the meeting time with my supervisor.

Knowing that the COVID-19 seriously affected people's lives in China, switching classes online at the end of March came as a relief for the three students who worked as teaching assistants (TA) as they no longer need to worry about being contracted through face-to-face teaching. Yet, to provide quality online learning, TAs faced new challenges, as shared by Shu: "*I had to do more work to prepare for a class. I pretty much self-studied everything about teaching, about how to manage a class, about how to engage students in an online setting.*" Likewise, Yuxi spent all summer learning about online technology. She felt frustrated noticing that some professors "*did not do the same.*" Several others expressed that professors' lack of online teaching skills led to overall lower quality of learning.

A lack of peer engagement

The academic journey of doctoral students who often spend lots of time working on their research can become a lonely one even without the pandemic. For this, students referred to peer support as being crucial for academic growth and development. Yuxi explained:

As a graduate student, one of the very important things is when we meet with each other in the corridor and have informal discussions on what we are working on… There is a lack of social space. I feel strongly disconnected from my peers, what they are working on, what is going on in their lives.

Hanlin thought that the lack of interaction with peers "*can affect the motivation of individuals*" academically.

The absence of regular communication with academic advisors was another big theme that emerged from the interviews. Chen recounted: "*Before COVID-19, I would just go to his [advisor's] office, and we would just sit next to each other, and he would show me certain things.*" Moreover, participants stressed that they rarely reached out to their advisors by email, as per Jun: "*I mainly just talk to her [advisor] about my dissertation. But other than that, I do not want to bother them. They are busy; they have a lot of students.*"

Besides research, doctoral students often engage in professional development opportunities to increase their chances of being hired in academia or industry after obtaining a degree. Doctoral students also attend academic conferences allowing them to make connections with other scholars in the field. Students like Da felt like missing out on these opportunities would have negative consequences:

You can meet a lot of people and you can also share your ideas with other people. If the conference got cancelled, you cannot talk to them, you cannot share with them, and you cannot meet people. It will definitely affect academic development.

Political Tensions and Discrimination

Participants reported that the immigration rhetoric and policies on international student status under the Trump administration brought additional stress during the pandemic. Despite the summer 2020 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement proclamation (2020) concerned all international students, a series of limitations and suspensions were imposed on students from China throughout the year 2020. Tianyu, who majored in electrical engineering, shared his concern:

I hold a one-year visa because my major is a sensitive subject. I originally planned to return to China to renew my visa after finishing my qualifying exam. But now I cannot go back because I do not know what the new visa policy is. I feel that Americans are very xenophobic now.

Besides the uncertainties about immigration policies that may affect Chinese students' visa status, most participants felt discriminated against when the U.S. President Trump labeled the COVID-19 as the "*Chinese virus*." Shu referred to the "*broken window effect*" when political rhetoric enables the public "*to discriminate against Chinese people publicly*." Participants also witnessed hate speech on social media platforms. Wenpei shared:

> *For some time, I did not dare to view social media like Twitter. Because I was sad to see hate speech towards Chinese people. It was already too hard for me when my mother and brother contracted the virus. I can no longer handle any discrimination from the public.*

One student experienced discrimination personally at the onset of the pandemic, saying that some people "*misunderstood the difference between the person and the country*." Students noted that despite being aware of the health risk in January 2020, they tried "*to fit in*" American society to avoid discrimination, as explained by Shu:

> *I know the cultural difference between China and the U.S. If I wear a mask on campus, American people will look at me differently since they will consider I got sick. So even though I wanted to wear it, I could not.*

Looking ahead, participants felt anxious about the wellbeing of Chinese students in the U.S. The political dynamics surrounding the pandemic, and Chinese international students in particular, made students question whether the U.S. is still a desirable study abroad destination.

Health Concerns

Since the Covid-19's discovery in Wuhan province in China, Chinese students became aware of the situation as early as January 2020. They kept abreast with the lockdown in China through social media. Da commented: "*When I saw the news and saw the lockdown, all the images, all the videos, everybody got really depressed… All my relatives talked to me about it. So mentally, I was pretty nervous.*" During this time, students' stress levels increased as they began to worry about their families. Shu said: "*My dad was working at the front line… I got really stressed because I worried about his health.*"

Wenpei's family members in Wuhan contracted COVID-19. The stress from worrying about her mother and brother's health pushed her into depression. She explained:

> *We are far away from home and when family members get sick, I feel guilty because I cannot help anything. At that time, everyone told me that you were lucky and did not go back during winter vacation. I felt very uncomfortable when I heard this because I would rather be the one to get contracted.*

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in the U.S. in March 2020, participants began worrying about their own health. Their parents felt upset about the poor handling of the pandemic in the U.S. as they worried about their children's wellbeing. Tianyu said: "*Both my parents and I had regretted allowing me to study abroad in the U.S.*" Most students reduced the frequency of grocery shopping to once a month, such as Yuxi:

> *Every time I go, I stock a lot of food. I do not have a car. I had to carry a lot of heavy stuff. Life suddenly became harder… I find it challenging to have enough ingredients in my refrigerator to feed myself.*

Being confined to indoor places, several students shared concerns about food insecurity.

Social Isolation

Socially, participants isolated themselves to reduce the risk of infection. For students who lived in a dorm, sharing common areas became an issue. Chen experienced "*loneliness, isolation, and the fear of meeting in this shared environment.*" Due to a higher risk of contracting the virus, Shu moved out of a dorm to her friends' house as she recounted:

> *I felt really stressed out because I could not get used to their lifestyle… I could not go out because my friends were concerned about where I go and whether I would bring the virus back…*

That situation was super uncomfortable. There were a few times I got really frustrated and cried. After two months of living without freedom, Shu felt depressed and decided to move back to the dorm. Even though she considered it as a place with a higher risk of infection, she determined moving back would benefit her mental state at the time.

As a result of confinement to indoor places, most students realized that the pandemic had taken its toll on their physical and mental health. For Tianyu, not being able to balance study, work, and social life was a big challenge that could potentially lead to termination of his studies. He explained: "*If it [the pandemic] lasts for another six months, I might consider returning to China. I can bear it for one or two years. If it goes beyond that, I will not be able to handle it.*"

Stress Coping

The interviews revealed that all participants used more emotion-focused than problem-focused coping strategies. Most students talked to their parents more often to relieve their stress levels. Hanlin commented:

> *I talk to my family not only to express my feelings, but more so to let them not worry too much about me. Because I am the only child, it might give them some uncertainty if I do not contact them for a while.*

Students also used negative coping strategies such as avoidance. Most stated that they intentionally blocked social media. Commenting on the negative opinions that fly around on social media platforms, Chen said: "*I will tell everybody, leave social media! … I purposefully created a safe environment for myself to keep the distance from the news.*" One important finding is that most Chinese international students expressed that they would not reveal negative feelings when talking with their families because they did not want them to worry. Some students even tried to cover up parts of the truth by not sharing about their stress, as per Tianyu: "*I did not really want to tell them the truth because it would only make them more worried. So, I told them it was fine here. But the U.S. is, in fact, not doing well in controlling the pandemic. I am so upset about this.*" Similarly, Chen said:

> *I do not want to increase the anxiety for them. That is why most of the time I will show them that I am eating well… There are nice things to show them and it is a way to make them feel relieved, it is a way to make them feel that I am in a safe environment.*

As for the student whose relatives died from the COVID-19 virus, she pretended to stay "*strong and optimistic*" when talking to her mother on the phone. She recounted: "*I cried a lot. But I did not cry when talking with my family on the phone. They would feel sad if they hear me. So, after hanging up the phone, I cried aloud.*" Without a proper way to manage stress, two students resorted to alcohol to release pressure for some time.

As for problem-focused coping, some students developed new hobbies to balance their life during the pandemic. Female students tend to build hobbies such as getting close to nature and cooking. Male students more frequently took on sport activities that did not require gathering to release the pressure from

academic work. Due to the social distancing restrictions, two male students stated that they would take on individual sports like surfing.

DISCUSSION

Part of our findings on Chinese international doctoral students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic correspond with the extant literature studying the broad experiences of international students in the U.S. For instance, our participants experienced learning obstacles when school switched to an online system of learning (Adnan & Anwar, 2020; Son et al., 2020); health concerns during the pandemic (Rogowska et al., 2020); funding uncertainties (Cao et al., 2020), and limited social interactions (Usher et al., 2020). In addition, participants have utilized mainly emotion-focused coping strategies identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) to deal with these stressors.

The present study adds knowledge to our understanding of Chinese international doctoral students' unique experiences during the pandemic. First, the Chinese international students experienced a double shock in the pandemic. On one side, participants worried about their beloved ones in China during the first national lockdown in January 2020. Yet, their stress levels escalated when the WHO (2020) announced a global pandemic in March 2020. At this time, they had to worry not only about their families in China but also about their own health. The Chinese international students experienced prolonged stress levels that, in many cases, developed into depression. Utilizing emotion-focused coping, the most common coping strategy, their communication with families increased as they sought emotional support in a time of crisis. Despite having a hierarchic relationship with supervisors, in line with the Confucian view of the student-teacher relationship, some Chinese students expect to develop emotional bonds and professional closeness with their teachers (McClure, 2005). Some of the participants shared about their academic struggles with their academic advisors. This behavior illustrates the importance of a positive student-advisor relationship building for Chinese doctoral students who sought advisors' support during the pandemic.

In addition to the academic, personal, and social difficulties that emerged during the pandemic, our findings reveal that the way host governments manage the crisis can also affect students' stress levels. These findings are in alignment with existing literature. For instance, students' anxiety and stress levels were comparatively higher in a country that emphasizes individualism, Poland, compared to students in a collectivist society, such as China, because the "lack of controllability caused by COVID-19 may be perceived as more dangerous among people from individualistic countries" (Rogowska et al., 2020, p. 805). Likewise, the U.S. has been facing a historic challenge in controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Miller et al., 2020) when many people request liberal rights and refuse to wear a mask in public. Encountering such individualistic culture raised additional health concerns among Chinese students.

Another dimension unique to Chinese students' experiences rests in political tensions between the U.S. and China. One of them was the trade war that was amplified during the pandemic. In the presidential document (Proclamation 10043 of May 29, 2020) titled *Suspension of Entry as Nonimmigrants of Certain Students and Researchers from the People's Republic of China*, this paragraph targets Chinese international graduate students in the U.S.:

> The PRC authorities use some Chinese students, mostly post-graduate students and post-doctorate researchers, to operate as non-traditional collectors of intellectual property. Thus, students or researchers from the PRC studying or researching beyond the undergraduate level who are or

have been associated with the PLA are at high risk of being exploited or co-opted by the PRC authorities and provide particular cause for concern (Proclamation 10043 of May 29, 2020).

Besides this proclamation that already directly affected Chinese students in "sensitive subject areas," most participants expressed that discrimination and violence against Chinese people in the U.S., raised major concerns. Even if not personally experienced by the participants, the instances of discrimination coming from top U.S. officials made participants question whether they want to continue with the pursuit of education in the U.S. In line with this, previous research found that discrimination negatively related to international students' sense of belonging (Glass & Westmont, 2014) and mental health (Wei et al., 2007). In this context, participants resorted to emotional coping, such as social media avoidance as participants conceived these online platforms full of negative opinions toward Chinese people. Importantly, among the Chinese international students we interviewed, none actively sought support from campus counseling services. This phenomenon follows existing literature arguing that the utility rate of counseling services among Chinese international students remains low compared to domestic students (Ching et al., 2017). There is a reason behind this phenomenon. School counseling remains an underdeveloped area in China; seeking counseling is generally seen as a stigma that discourages students from pursuing it (Shi, 2018). Rather than seeking institutional support, most participants utilized forbearance coping, defined as minimizing or concealment of problems or concerns to maintain social harmony and not trouble others, a coping strategy prevalent in collectivist cultures (Moore & Constantine, 2005). The positive side of the avoidant behavior is that it eliminates potential conflicts among those engaged. Instead, participants chose a peaceful way of avoiding social media rather than arguing with anonymous netizens to create larger conflict. Yet, the negative side is that the participants handled the negative opinions they encountered by themselves, which can generate mental health issues.

CONCLUSION

This study unpacked the Chinese doctoral students' experiences at one American university during the COVID-19 pandemic. An overall finding of this study is that the stressors for Chinese international doctoral students during the pandemic came from the sudden changes in personal, social and academic life, as well as misunderstandings among people in the host society, discrimination, and political tensions between the U.S. and Chinese governments. Understanding this group of students' experiences, including their stressors and stress coping strategies, sheds light on the institutional adjustment and support to better facilitate students' academic performance and an overall wellbeing during and after the pandemic. While there is no one panacea for removing the stressors, this research also provides valuable insights for educators about the cultural aspects that they need to be aware of in further accommodating this growing international student population in the U.S.

The implications of this study suggest that educational practitioners should promote the advantage of using university's counseling services available to international students free of charge. Culturally, Chinese international students choose not to speak up when facing discrimination and racism, and as per our study's findings, they tend to resort to emotion-focused coping such as avoidance and family support (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Thus, it is of utmost importance to approach these student populations with cultural sensitivity when promoting counseling services to them. One of the ways to engage Chinese and other Asian students in conversation about their experiences abroad, and especially in

times of crisis, would be in offering counseling and mentoring services in their native languages, or by the people who are culturally trained to respond to the needs of Asian students. While the stigma can take time to break, developing a more targeted approach to counseling Chinese and other Asian students would benefit the well-being of the biggest international student population in the U.S.

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Empirical Article

Surfing for Answers: Understanding How Universities in the United States Utilized Websites in Response to COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic presented a unique global crisis that institutions of higher education were forced to engage with simultaneously. In this study, we provide insight into the use of websites by institutions in the United States (U.S.) during the pandemic. The sample for this study included public flagship universities within the U.S. and their institutional webpages focused on COVID-19 between January 2020 and April 2020. Guided by chaos theory (CT), we utilized a quantitative thematic analysis that involved the coding of institutional websites and public communications to develop a unique dataset capturing the information that institutions provided on campus websites (e.g., institutional decisions, timing of those decisions, public communications, and informational website structure). Findings indicated that

all institutions in our sample engaged in moving to online instruction, implementing work-from-home policies, and canceling face-to-face events. In addition, we found variance in the accessibility and utility of websites.

INTRODUCTION

As global and international tertiary institutions, colleges and universities in the U.S. play a major role in the production of new knowledge, hosting students from abroad, and sending a large number of American students abroad. While these institutions impact various parts of the world, the history and priorities of higher education in the U.S. have consistently been influenced by national and global events. For example, during World War II, funding for higher education was curtailed, leading to institutional closures and increased access for women to increase enrollment (Thelin, 2019). In contrast, during the Cold War, large amounts of research funding were dedicated to selecting universities that became central hubs for innovation and technological advancement (Cohen & Kisker, 20109; Thelin, 2019).

It is challenging to predict the impact that global events will have on higher education domestically and internationally. For this reason, it is imperative that research play an active role in assessing potential impacts of global events on higher education and the appropriate responses from institutions to ensure that students, staff, and faculty are supported in times of crisis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze initial institutional responses to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020) that took place in 2020, with a focus on the use of websites as information hubs during this time of institutional crisis. A crisis is not an event that institutions experience regularly or are ever fully prepared to handle (Shaw, 2018). However, as the challenges faced by Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) continue to intensify and the management of these events is increasingly scrutinized, additional research is needed to provide insight for postsecondary leaders on how best to engage stakeholders. This is especially important as students, staff, and faculty are exposed to news and information constantly, often leaving the institution to be reactive as opposed to proactive (McNaughtan et al., 2018). In addition, the global nature of IHEs has evolved with the increased numbers of international students and faculty engaged with study abroad programs. As a result, IHEs work to solve not only domestic crises, but also global events such as COVID-19 due to the scientific research to battle this virus being conducted on these campuses (McNaughtan et al., 2019). The crisis response literature within higher education provides many insights into how leaders understand and push through challenges. However, most of this work focuses on a single institution or state, with little analyses of how multiple IHEs in varied contexts engage with the same crisis.

In this study, we critically examined the use of websites as tools for crisis response by flagship public universities across the U.S. to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to better understand the common approaches to the crisis. Sadly, little research exists focusing on the use of websites as tools of crisis communication. By examining institutions within the U.S. that have a global reputation and international impact, this study provides a robust impetus for future work in this area that can be used for more thorough international comparisons. Indeed, how these institutions responded to this crisis may inform how institutions around the world may respond to future crisis (Shaw, 2018). The data collection and analysis for this study focused on how these IHEs utilized their websites to inform and engage multiple stakeholders to accomplish their goals of providing up-to-date information and details. The study was guided by the following two research questions:

RQ1: What were the common institutional actions taken by IHEs in responding to the COVID-19 crisis, and how did the timing of these common actions vary across institutions?

RQ2: What crisis response information did institutions collect and share via their websites, and to which audiences and stakeholders, during the COVID-19 crisis?

Early indications of an aggressive and deadly new virus (COVID-19) were reported on through global media outlets during the latter part of 2019 (Taylor, 2021; WHO, 2020). As an upper respiratory illness, fever, shortness of breath, and chest pain were all listed as symptoms (CDC, 2021). While the mortality rate was debated by physicians (Bump, 2020), COVID-19 was viewed as highly contagious, especially among the elderly and infirm (CDC, 2021). Towards the end of 2019, the virus spread across the world, with cases erupting in Europe and Asia.

In the U.S., public discussions of how to slow the spread of the virus began in earnest in the beginning of 2020 (Walker et al., 2020). Washing hands, wearing face masks, and remaining home when sick were emphasized as important preventive measures to spread the virus (CDC, 2021). As cases of COVID-19 began to increase substantially, more extreme precautions to "flatten the curve" were taken in March 2020 (Paybarah, 2020). Actions, such as canceling sporting events, academic and professional conferences, professional gatherings, and closing schools, happened quickly, despite mixed federal messaging (Feldman, 2020). IHEs similarly began canceling classes, closing campus buildings, moving to online instruction, and postponing sporting events.

While the response from IHEs aligned with the directives from world leaders, the actions taken by higher education leaders in response to this global crisis across the world were unprecedented (CHE, 2020; IAU, 2021; NYT, 2020; Smalley, 2021). In addition to taking similar policy actions, such as closing campus facilities, moving instruction online in a matter of weeks, and altering grading procedures, most institutions developed a COVID-19-specific website to serve as an information hub for all campus constituents. These drastic actions represent a unique case to help understand how institutions respond to global crises using a common communication tool, webpages.

Narrowing the focus, this study analyzed how public flagship universities in the U.S. responded to the COVID-19 pandemic from January 2020-April 2020, which encompassed the initial responses of all institutions in the sample from their first public communication to decisions to close campuses. Guided by chaos theory (CT), we sought to understand the common themes that emerged in the specific institutional actions taken by leaders, the timing of those decisions, and the structure of their institutional information websites as tools for crisis management. We took a quantitative thematic analysis approach that involved the coding of institutional websites and public communications to develop a unique dataset capturing the information that institutions provided on campus websites (e.g., institutional decisions, timing of those decisions, public communications, and informational website structure).

LITERATURE REVIEW

While campus crises are not new to higher education, advancements in social media and other online applications have provided not only increased transparency but also raised awareness about how these challenges are handled. This has also led to increased interest and attention from higher education researchers and practitioners (McNaughtan et al., 2018). In addition, the sheer number of students served, people employed, and the undeniable impact of universities on the local economy have also provided an impetus to enhance our understanding of how crises are managed by IHEs. Arising from areas such as higher education leadership (Catullo et al., 2009; Hutchins, 2008; Mann, 2007; Wang & Hutchins, 2010), media and communication (Varma, 2011), and management (Helsloot & Jong, 2006), previous studies have focused on various aspects of responding to campus crisis.

For instance, Wang and Hutchins (2010) focused on the Virginia Tech campus shooting and proposed implications for crisis management, such as developing crisis managers, offering training and programs to prepare campus constituents, and providing more intentional crisis communications. Similarly, from an institutional leadership standpoint, after their investigation of the risk management in IHEs in the Netherlands, Helsloot and Jong (2006) identified a lack of "routinely integrated policy on safety, security, and crisis management" (p. 157), a tendency not to share experiences in the field of crisis management, and the limited "involvement of staff and students in safety and security policy and its implementation" (p. 157) during significant campus crises. From a communications and public relations standpoint, Varma's (2011)

case study was based on a specific incident of inappropriate conduct by a university head women's basketball coach. She concluded that the institution's primary crisis management focus was on the protection of its reputation and suggested that forthright communication is crucial.

One common theme of these crisis management studies was the need for leaders to learn from the past to better prepare the institution for potential crises in the future. Considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to understand how such a crisis has been managed by IHEs. In the following section, we define "crisis" in the context of IHEs, review the types of crises at IHEs and their responses, and provide additional information to the COVID-19 crisis that contextualizes this study.

Impact of COVID-19 on International Higher Education

As of the end of March 2020, there were over 249,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide (Rumbley, 2020) with more than 3.4 billion people on lockdown globally (Marlnonl & van't Land, 2020). A survey conducted in March of 2020 regarding IHEs' responses to the global pandemic found that approximately 60% of responding institutions were in the process of implementing a response plan (Rumbley, 2020). The pandemic greatly impacted IHEs around the world as it forced the sudden shift to online teaching, closing campuses, and halting collaborations and research (Mok et al., 2021). Additionally, there was a decrease globally in student mobility. Just within the U.S., it is estimated that 90% of institutions experienced a decrease in international student enrollment during the 2020-2021 academic year.

The COVID-19 outbreak has confronted IHEs throughout the world with never-before-seen challenges. Zdziarski et al. (2007) defined a crisis in higher education as "an event, which is often sudden or unexpected, that disrupts the normal operations of the institution or its educational mission and threatens the well-being of personnel, property, financial resources and/or the reputation of the institution" (p. 28). Said another way, crises cause institutional disruption and the impetus for that disruption can come from a variety of potential events.

Institutions of Higher Education Responses to Crises

Our review of the literature resulted in several parallel comparisons with the current COVID-19 pandemic, though it highlighted gaps in this line of inquiry as well. For example, most work in this area examined the same crisis, the mass shootings of Virginia Tech in 2007. Many scholarly researchers conducted a range of studies on crisis (Barker & Yoder, 2012; Treadwell, 2017; Wang & Hutchins, 2010), but few analyses that we are aware of were conducted while the crisis was still unfolding. This can lead to confirmation bias if researchers conduct analyses after having had difficulty making sense of the crisis in their own ways (as opposed to studying the crisis in real time, having not yet "processed" the incident fully).

Previous studies on IHE crisis responses can generally be divided into three main categories: crisis resulting from natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, etc.); human-induced crisis (e.g., shootings, stabbings, etc.), and general crisis management practices connected to institutional challenges (e.g., building/structure collapses, leadership resignations over allegations of financial impropriety or sexual misconduct, campus events that solicit negative institutional press coverage, etc.).

Focusing first on crisis management references to natural disasters, much of the work has centered on institutions' initial responses and examined established priorities in said responses, as well as the long-term effects of the crisis and institutional post-crisis plans (Bates, 2019 Hayes, 2011). In addition, research examining responses to natural disasters typically has a relatively narrow scope (i.e., crises that are geographically and temporarily limited to a certain location and finite time span). While devastating, natural disasters have a definite beginning and end. Additionally, natural disasters typically only affect a limited number of IHEs, given that they are geographically bound within a limited area.

In one example, Aschenbrener (2001) analyzed three institutions' responses to natural disasters: a tornado impacting Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota in 1998, flooding following Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd affecting East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina in 1999, and a tornado impacting Kentucky Wesleyan College in Owensboro, Kentucky in 2000. Their case study analysis centered on "the short, medium, and long-term response to the disaster" (p. 43). To answer those

research questions, documents, interviews (i.e., conducted with the disaster management teams, members of the administration, faculty, staff, and student leaders), and video recordings were analyzed. Findings of Aschenbrener's (2001) study revealed that the first 48 hours after a disaster are particularly crucial for successful recovery because that is when stakeholders are seeking information. Similarly, Bates (2019) found that among crisis management leaders their style, communication, and preparation were all critical to perceptions of success. Said another way, leaders need to ensure that people have the information they need. The president of the Canterbury, New Zealand branch of the New Zealand Educational Leadership and Administration Society shared that after a devastating earthquake in 2011, one of them most important lessons learned was that "Above all, the earthquake has reminded me that leadership is not about budgets and buildings, it is about people" (Hayes, 2011, p. 136).

The second area of focus in the literature is human-induced disasters like school shootings, escalating racial tensions, and campus protests. Like natural disasters, most of the work on human-induced disasters focuses on pre- and post-crisis communication from crisis response leaders, defining a clear starting and end to the crisis under examination (Barker & Yoder 2012; Fortunato et al., 2018; Menghini et al., 2014). Research has indicated that both natural and human-induced disasters pass through four distinct phases: preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation (Drabek, 1986; Mitroff & Pearson, 1993). Mitroff and Pearson (1993) specifically examined human-induced crises "that can devastate the long-standing reputation of an organization" (pp. 48-49). Utilizing interview and survey responses from over 500 individuals in crisis management, the two authors provided a solid depiction of crisis types, phases, organizational systems, and stakeholders. Their study presented a useful framework for the responses to crises but failed to consider the application of the framework in other new or unforeseen crises, such as global pandemic that crosses all borders and permeates all institutions. Fortunato et al. (2018) analyzed a human-induced crisis around racial tensions at the University of Missouri in 2015 and revealed that the racial tension was evident across stateliness and led to campus unrest across the U.S. Using a content analysis of public messages and decisions made by leaders and media accounts of the crisis, Fortunato and colleagues concluded that a communication of the crisis provided information for not only their campus, but other campuses facing the same challenges.

In the crisis management literature in higher education, there is a focus on general crisis leadership and practices for common or less severe campus crises. The importance of well-developed and organized leadership in times of crisis has been demonstrated by several scholars and studies (Garcia, 2015; Gigliotti 2016, 2017, 2020). Garcia (2015) chose a case study approach to examine the phenomenon of crisis leadership, focusing especially on presidential responses. Interviews with six presidents and ten crisis managers at Florida State University, inquiring about their definition of crisis, crisis management, resources, and the diverse roles associated with crisis leadership. The study findings supported the advantageous nature of a close relationship between university leadership and crisis management. Similarly, Gigliotti (2016) conducted interviews with randomly selected presidents of public and private postsecondary institutions across the U.S. to learn about how they make sense of crises and how those crises influence and shape their leadership identity. The results suggested that crises in higher education possess discursive properties that are used by leadership in identity formation processes.

Gigliotti (2017) one year later took a closer look at crisis communication and its role before, during, and after a crisis including the social construction of 'crisis' itself. The research design included an analysis of content from several print sources and 37 semi-structured interviews with senior university leaders. Results reflected the variety of crises higher education leaders found themselves potentially faced with as well as the often-problematic difficulty of labeling and classifying of the various crises. Gigliotti (2021) presented a framework of crisis leadership informed by interview data with senior university leaders and a content analysis of a multitude of news publications. The overarching theme here is the chaos and uncertainty inherent to all crises, and thus needs to be anticipated and counteracted by leadership.

A major theme in the literature on crisis management and communication, regardless of whether the crisis is induced by nature or humans, is the reliance on experiences and learned lessons from past crises, which highlights the importance of work that can identify multiple perspectives and response actions for the same crisis (Gigliotti, 2017). Given that the COVID-19 pandemic confronted IHEs around the world,

research on how IHEs respond to this kind of global crisis is critical to advancing our understanding of crisis management.

One example of how this crisis is being handled is through virtual information dissemination. With many campuses completely shut down, one of the only connections students have with their IHEs is through online communication (e.g., email, virtual meeting platforms, etc.). Lin et al. (2016) made interesting points in their research on the use of social media in crisis communication, arguing that crisis communications that take place exclusively online are often lacking in personalization and connection for students. However, a full integration of online communication, active engagement through an online dialogue, taking advantage of legitimate sources of information online, and the speed of virtual communication (Lin et al., 2016) provide university leaders with a set of unique tools to utilize during crises.

THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

This study is guided by CT that was first introduced by mathematicians and quantum physicists in the mid-1970s (Bütz, 1995). The correlation of chaos and crises has been pointed out by several scholars, making CT highly applicable to crisis research. For example, Myer and colleagues (2011) discussed how, throughout a chaotic crisis that appears to have no sense or solution to it, a complex solution is reached over time and through much human trial. The authors described this arrival at a common solution as "… evolutionary in that it is essentially an open-ended, ever changing, self-organizing system whereby a new system may emerge out of the crisis" (p. 30). This productive aspect of chaotic systems demonstrates the potential for CT to help leaders and researchers understand and resolve various types of crises. Specifically, the unpredictability of crises is captured and tamed by the flexible and dynamic nature of CT.

CT is made up of four major components. CT is an admission that (a) interaction and interdependence are a major part of the complex human condition, (b) the human condition tries to make sense out of mess with "no sense or order to it" (Myer et al., 2011, p. 30), (c) CT forces administrations to take action in response to crisis, even when, at first, there appears to be no solution, and (d) once organized, the critical mass of people find new and creative solutions to the crisis (Postrel, 1998; Ramsey, 1997). Bütz (1995) argued that one of the main strengths of CT is its application to describe processes that provide people the greatest opportunity to heal as they find common approaches to overcoming challenges. Other authors emphasize that CT needs to be thought of in terms of order and disorder (Blair, 1993; Hayes, 1990), both existing parallel and within each other. The existing literature on CT also illuminates a broader use of the theory (Gregersen & Sailer, 1993). For example, during crises in higher education, there is often a coexistence of order and disorder as institutional leaders attempt to provide structure and support for constituents in turmoil while performing their official duties in the turmoil themselves (Cutright, 1997; Galbraith, 2004; McNaughtan et al., 2018).

While CT has its roots in the natural sciences, it has been used by social science researchers to describe and explain solution finding processes in crises. Regarding higher education administration and CT, specifically the work of Blair (1993) and Galbraith (2004) provided clarity on how the theory can be conceptualized and applied. Galbraith (2004) suggested that interacting feedback loops that promote interactions among various actors in non-linear organizations, such as higher education structures, is important when dealing with chaos. Foundational for Blair (1993) is "the discovery that, contained within chaotic and unpredictable systems, are embedded structures of order" (p. 579).

The context of higher education administration provides at least two areas to study CT in practice. First, CT is a prime tool to conceptualize organizational leadership studies because of the complex way leaders act and make decisions in non-linear 'chaotic' situations. (Burns, 2002; Galbraith, 2004). The second area of application is in communication studies, with a focus on crisis communication. CT "represents a particularly powerful framework for understanding the radical system breakdown experienced during organizational crisis" (Seeger, 2002, p. 329). By acknowledging the aspect of uncertainty and the need for spontaneity, CT can successfully be applied to situations of crisis where communication is expected and critical to overcoming the challenge (Purworini et al., 2019). Third, CT can help guide the restoration of order in crisis (Seeger et al., 2003; Sellnow et al., 2002, 2012), which aligns with the goal of

crisis management. The potential applications in both leadership and crisis communication studies illustrate how CT can be valuable in understanding issues related to crisis communication and management.

RESEARCH METHOD

A purposive and homogenous sampling method was used for this study (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). We focused on the 50 flagship universities in the U.S. (see Table 1). These universities are defined as the oldest, or best-known public institution in their respective state (Gerald & Haycock, 2006). They are publicly funded and are often closely connected to state political networks, and their missions well align with the public missions within their state (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Furthermore, flagship institutions provide a natural, national sample of institutions in varied contexts, given the tension between centralized (federal) and decentralized (state) governance during national crises. Also, the high visibility and potential these institutions have in setting trends for higher education within their state makes them most relevant when seeking to understand how institutions responded to a specific crisis (McNaughtan et al., 2018). Finally, flagship institutions typically have the most resources when compared to other public institutions within their state, which may afford them additional flexibility during crises. This combination of public visibility and available resources made it more likely that we could analyze institutions' responses using a search of publicly available information.

Analytical Approach

While the use of institutional webpages is not new as a tool for disseminating information during a crisis (e.g., locations of shelters after natural disasters, information for students and parents after campus violence, etc.), the ubiquitous use of these tools in response to COVID-19 presents a unique opportunity to analyze how institutions employ them in response to this crisis. In addition, the comprehensive collection of communications and resources on websites allows for a robust discussion of not only what information was provided, but also when it was released and for whom the information was intended.

Our study used a quantitative thematic analysis approach, which included identifying themes and counting the number of times when a piece of information was included on an institutional website for each of the institutions in our sample (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorf, 1989). We focused our analysis on the content of the institutional COVID-19 information page and the public messages sent between January 1, 2020 and April 15, 2020 which were also posted on the website. These dates encapsulated the timeframe that most institutions in the U.S. made their first public statements until after their initial actions had been taken for the Spring 2020 semester. During this process, we also identified which date the institutional decision was released to the public. The quantitative thematic analysis approach utilized concepts from Hsieh and Shannon's approach to content analysis (2005), which is similar to grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). That is, Hsieh and Shannon described this method as "appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited" (p. 1279). Though theoretical guidance for this specific research area is limited, our work was guided by CT, which Blair (1993) emphasized "may require methods not ordinarily accepted in quantitative research" (p. 579). When analyzing the data in this way, "researchers avoid using preconceived categories, instead allowing the categories and names for categories to flow from the data" (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002, p. 1279), making it an inductive process wherein themes are generated.

For our analysis, a team of seven researchers each analyzed between seven and eight institutional websites during the first round of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following this initial coding process, the lead researcher reviewed all codes to identify common coding categories, and the group discussed these codes until a list of 31 codes were confirmed (see Table 2 for a complete list of codes and brief descriptions). The team then re-coded their initial seven to eight institutions using the agreed upon codes and reviewed seven to eight additional institutional websites as a second coder to ensure interrater reliability.

Table 1: U.S. Flagship Institutions Analyzed

Indiana University Bloomington	University of Georgia	University of Alabama
University of New Hampshire	University of Hawaii at Manoa	Louisiana State University
University of North Dakota	University of Idaho	University of Florida
Pennsylvania State University	University of Arkansas	University of Montana
University of South Carolina	University of Iowa	University of Arizona
University of South Dakota	University of Kansas	University of Oklahoma
University of Texas at Austin	University of Kentucky	University of Oregon
University of Alaska Fairbanks	University of Maine	Ohio State University
University of Maryland, College Park	University of Connecticut	University of Delaware
University of Massachusetts Amherst	University of New Mexico	Rutgers University
University of California, Berkeley	University of Michigan	University of Tennessee
University of Colorado Boulder	University of Minnesota	University at Buffalo
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign	University of Mississippi	University of Utah
University of Rhode Island	University of Missouri	University of Vermont
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	West Virginia University	University of Virginia
University of Wisconsin-Madison	University of Washington	University of Wyoming
University of Nebraska–Lincoln	University of Nevada, Reno	

Table 2: Institutional COVID-19 Website Response Codes

CODE	Description
Website Information	
Date_website	This is a code that provides the date the COVID-19 website was created per the website source code.
Date_first_message	This is a code for the date that the institution first sent a public message about COVID-19
Date_first_travel_rest	This is a code for the date of the first travel restriction (i.e., not travel to China)
Date_studyabr_home	This is a code for the date that students were first called home from Spring study abroad
Date_online_first	This is a code for the date of the first action to online/remote learning, not preparing, but actually moving courses online
Date_online_full	This is a code for the date the campus announced all classes online for the rest of the semester.
Date_res_halls_close	This is a code for the first announcement of residence halls closing, or that students were encouraged not to come back to the residence halls.
Date_work_home_fir	This is a code for the first reference that some employees would be working from home.
Date_work_home	This is a code for the announcement that all employees would work from home.
Date_grad_cancel	This is a code for the date graduation was cancelled.
Date_grading_change	This is a code for the date the university announced modified grading
Date_facility_closures	This is code is for the first ref. of buildings being closed due to COVID-19.
Date_ment_minotity	This is a code for the first time the institution referenced minority groups.
Date_cancel_events	This is a code for the first reference to canceling large events.
Date_refund_offer	This is a code for when the institution announced a refund policy for any service or course.
Date_research_altered	This is a code for when institutions announced official alterations to how research will be conducted (i.e., IRB, lab space, etc.)
Date_ref_student_emp	This is a code for the first reference of how institutions will support student employees
Website Structure	
Total_camp_updates	This is a code for the total number of campus messages on the cite up to 4/15.
Fac_supp_pg	This is a code for if there is a faculty support page or set of information.
Stud_supp_pg	This is a code for if there is a student support page or set of information.

Staff_supp_pg	This is a code for if there is a staff support page or set of information.
Minor_supp_pg	This is a code for if there is a minority student support page or information.
Minor_supp_group	This is a code for the minority groups referenced to the above code. *International (INT), race (RACE), disability (DIS),*
Last_update_date	This is a code for if the institution has a date of last update on the page.
Diagnosis_info	This is a code for if the website has diagnosis information or a link to it.
Hygiene_adv	This is a code for if the website has hygiene information or a link to it.
Contact_ques_link	This is a code for if the website has a contact us link.
Link_CDC	This is a code for if the website has a CDC link.
Live_townhall	This is a code for if the institution had a live townhall.
Link_to_health_dept	This is a code for a link to community health department or organization.

RESULTS

In this section, we will first focus on the institutional actions taken and publicly announced on websites, with an emphasis on the timing of the information shared. Second, we will present the results of our analysis of the websites focusing on which stakeholder groups are identified on the websites. Throughout our discussion of the findings, we will provide examples of the content found on institutional websites.

RQ1: Common Institutional Actions

The analysis of the institutional websites resulted in 17 common actions taken by institutions. As shown in Table 3, we presented the number of institutions that took each action, the earliest date an action was taken, the latest date, the mode (i.e., most common) date, and the average date. In focusing on the common actions and the timing of those actions, this study revealed a few notable trends.

Table 3: Number of Institutions Making Specific Decisions and Earliest, Latest, Average, and Mode Dates for Each Decision

	Total Institutions Making Decision	Earliest Date	Latest Date	Average Date	Mode Date
Date website created	50	1/24	3/13	2/27	3/05
Date of first public message	50	1/22	3/13	2/08	1/24
Date of first travel restriction	49	1/22	3/16	2/19	1/31
Date study abroad canceled	41	1/29	4/01	3/09	2/27
Date classes moved online	50	3/02	3/19	3/12	3/11
Date all classes moved online	50	3/09	3/20	3/14	3/11
Date residence halls closed	48	3/10	4/05	3/17	3/19
Date work from home fist allowed	49	3/06	3/25	3/15	3/17
Date all work from home	41	3/05	3/31	3/20	3/16
Date graduation cancelled	50	3/13	4/03	3/22	3/17
Date grade policy changes	42	3/16	4/08	3/27	`
Date first facility closures	42	3/11	4/06	3/18	3/16
Date first mention of minorities	26	1/31	4/13	3/08	3/27
Date all events cancelled	48	2/25	4/16	3/15	3/11
Date student refund offered	33	2/27	4/08	3/21	3/17
Date research protocol altered	41	3/03	4/11	3/16	3/18
Date reference to student employment	20	3/12	3/27	3/17	3/17

First, there are five actions presented on all 50 institutional websites. These included creating a specific COVID-19-related webpage, sending a campus-wide message, announcing a potential move to online instruction, officially moving classes to online instruction, and canceling face-to-face graduation. While all institutions completed these tasks, there is significant variance between the first institutions to do

so and the last institution to do so, which may be the result of differing state contexts (i.e., political environment, exposure to COVID-19, and the location of institution in relation to densely populated areas). In addition, there were nine additional actions that over 40 of the institutions posted on their respective webpages.

Second, except for sending an initial message, creating a website, and travel restrictions, the average institution completed all the other actions during the month of March. A flurry of decisions was made between March 8 and March 18, which included going fully online for instruction, closing residence halls, and enforcing work-from-home policies, among others. The collection of these decisions marked a turning point from taking actions that focused on providing information and actions to taking actions that had more direct, tangible impacts on students, faculty, and staff.

The third main finding of this study is that some decisions were made in a similar time frame by most institutions while others were made much more sporadically, which is evident by examining standard deviations in the data. In reviewing the apparent disparities in standard deviations, we note that decisions that were informational with little impact on students or the institutions operations, such as creating a website, sending an initial message, or talking about travel restrictions, were made more sporadically than decisions that did alter the operations of the institutions. For example, moving classes online, canceling graduation, or closing residence halls were all made at a similar time by all institutions. This finding illustrated how institutional decision-making in times of crisis may be interconnected, in that HEIs are paying close attention to the actions of peer institutions and may be engaging in crisis response isomorphism.

While it is outside of the scope of this study, institutions could also be responding local and national health departments such as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as to what guidelines and recommendations they are making. Regardless of the impetus of the communication, it was evident that institutions were attempting to provide clarity through institutional websites in a quickly unfolding chaotic situation that they had very little control over. Some institutions were clearly more up-to-date than others, which provides more effective communications, while others appeared to have waited to see how things unfolded before they updated websites and communications.

Finally, the results of this study showed a lack of support for student groups that may have been disproportionately affected by the actions taken in response to COVID-19. Around half of the websites (26) had a specific reference to students with disabilities, international students, or first-generation students, who are more likely to face hardships with the loss of housing, jobs, or when traditional classroom settings are changed. The lack of specific messaging to these student groups was notable, and even when it was present, institutions varied widely in terms of when they provided information, with some institutions offering support for minoritized student groups as early as January (1/31) and others not providing support via their website until late March (3/27).

RQ 2: Institutional Stakeholders Identified

Table 4 summarizes the content of the main page of each institution's COVID-19 website. We found nine common links available on institutional webpages that can be classified into two categories. The first category is constituent-focused pages, such as faculty, staff, and student pages. These pages provided information and links specific to each of these respective groups. For example, on student pages, there was information about online course delivery, student refunds, and/or housing information. Faculty pages contained information on how to request an online course shell through the institution's learning management system and information about changes to research protocols. In total, 42 institutions had a link to a faculty page, 44 institutions had a link to a student page, and 38 institutions had a link to a staff page.

Table 4: Key Links on Websites by Institution (X= Link on Website and .= Link not on Website)

Institution Name	Faculty	Student	Staff	Last Update	Diagnosis	Hygiene	Contact Us	CDC Link	Health Depart.
University of Nebraska–Lincoln	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	.
University of California, Berkeley	.	x	.	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Idaho	x	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	.
University of Virginia	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	.
University of Arkansas	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	.
University of New Mexico	.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
West Virginia University	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Texas at Austin	x	x	x	.	.	x	.	x	x
University of Oregon	.	x	.	x	.	x	x	x	x
University of Minnesota	x	x	.	x	.	.	x	x	x
University of South Carolina	x	x	x	x	.	x	x	x	x
Pennsylvania State University	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	.	x
University of Delaware	x	x	x	x	.	.	.	x	x
Ohio State University	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Alabama	x	x	.	x	.	.	x	x	x
University of Arizona	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Connecticut	x	x	x	.	x	x	.	x	x
University of Michigan	.	.	.	x	x	x	x	x	x
University at Buffalo	.	.	.	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Georgia	x	x	x	.	x	x	x	x	x
University of Maryland, College Park	.	.	.	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Washington	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Massachusetts Amherst	x	x	x	.	.	.	x	.	x
University of Florida	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	x	x	x	.	.	x	.	x	x
University of Alaska Fairbanks	x	x	x	.	.	.	x	x	.
University of Colorado Boulder	x	x	x	.	x	.	x	.	x
University of Hawaii at Manoa	x	x	.	x	.	.	.	x	x
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign	x	x	.	.	.	.	x	x	x

Indiana University Bloomington	.	.	.	x	x	.	x	x	x
University of Iowa	x	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	x
University of Kansas	x	x	x	.	x	.	.	.	x
University of Kentucky	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Louisiana State University	x	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	x
University of Maine	x	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	x
University of Mississippi	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Missouri	x	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	x
University of Montana	x	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	x
University of Nevada, Reno	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of New Hampshire	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of North Dakota	x	x	x	x	x	x	.	x	x
University of Oklahoma	x	x	.	x	x	x	.	x	x
University of Rhode Island	.	.	.	x	x	x	x	x	x
Rutgers University	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of South Dakota	x	.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Tennessee	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Utah	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Vermont	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Wisconsin–Madison	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Wyoming	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Total	42	44	38	41	39	39	36	46	45

The second category was informational pages that were tied specifically to the crisis. Given that COVID-19 was a global pandemic, a link to the CDC and local health department was common. In addition, most institutions had links to diagnosis information and hygiene tips aiming to limit the spread of the virus on their campus. These informational links were not for specific groups, but illustrated what institutions felt was critical for constituents to have access to. In addition to the two categories, most websites also included a sentence at the top of the page informing the reader when information was last updated and a link that could be used to contact institutional leaders with questions. These links, while informational, provide readers a sense of security around the accuracy of the information and an opportunity to ask questions when information is not clear.

Limitations

This study has three limitations that warrant discussion. First, the analysis was limited to publicly available messages on the institution's website. It is possible that some messages were sent internally and never made available. However, given the lack of missing data in our analysis, it appears that a missing communication would be unlikely. Second, we confined our analysis to the main institutional COVID-19 resource webpage for each institution in our sample and pages linked to that page. During the data collection process, we realized that some institutions took a decentralized approach in which each college, unit, program, etc. would have their own information page. For example, some institutions would have a webpage for individual units, such as Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Housing, etc., that required individuals to navigate to the appropriate page in order to obtain specific updates rather than the institutions providing relevant community-wide updates on a central university-wide page. However, this also appeared to be an exception, and, in most cases, these external pages were linked to the main institutional page. Finally, our analysis focused on a specific window of time. The COVID-19 pandemic endured beyond April 2020, and institutions continued to make critical decisions about opening residents' halls the following fall, participating in athletic competitions, and conducting instruction face-to-face versus online, among other issues. However, for the purpose of this study, we focused on the initial development of the website because the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was the focus of this study.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to understand the decisions public flagship universities in the U.S. made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and how they engaged in crisis communication via dedicated institutional webpages. Our findings showed that universities in this study took 17 common actions, and they did so within a relatively short window of time (e.g., mostly between March 8th and March 18th), while directly engaging with faculty, staff, and students. These findings provide valuable insight into how IHEs respond to a global crisis in terms of the type, mode, and timing of the information provided. This is important as previous research emphasized the importance of providing quick and up-to-date communication during a fluid and evolving crisis.

Our research showed that websites and announcements regarding COVID-19 were published at similar speeds, agency, transparency, and followed an analogous chronology. This demonstrates a level of isomorphism amongst IHEs and illustrates that, in times of local and global crises, universities are aware of peer institutions movements (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, just posting has been found not to completely alleviate the concerns of all institutional stakeholders (Driedger et al., 2018; Lofsted & Bouder, 2014). Driedger et al. (2018) found that when examining universities response to the H1N1 pandemic, both the "communicated science and the science of communication" (p. 16) should be prioritized. They argued that leaders who are perceived to be in positions of influence should be aware of how their health-centered messages are perceived by their audiences and strive to promote critical actions that can encourage stakeholders not only to be informed, but also to be active in reducing risk.

Our findings are comparable to studies examining the response of institutions of higher education internationally. In a survey of institutions within 38 countries in Europe. For example, Rumbley (2020) found that 60% were implementing a response plan. It was found that email was the most common means of communication in order to disseminate information, followed by the posting of updates on the institutional website (Rumbley, 2020). With international students unable to return to their home countries, institutions had to navigate supporting these students, who, at times, face social exclusion and xenophobic attitudes (Bilecen, 2020). Our study highlights the use of websites as both repositories for institutional messages and means for communicating new information for students. Although confined to the U.S. educational setting, this study can provide a useful framework for other institutions around the world to consider in their own crisis response and use of websites.

A contemporary approach to emergency communication, such as the use of text messages and various social media platforms (i.e., Twitter, Snapchat, Whatsapp, etc.) will require institutions to seek input from various campus communities (i.e., students, staff, faculty, and administrators) to ensure that communication is accessible to campus stakeholders and parents or off-campus community members at-large. In this study, the use of dedicated webpages was seen as the vehicle to share critical information in a timely manner. Applications like URep and CrowdHelp have also been utilized to report incidents and the locations of those incidents for more local issues or crises (Saroj & Pal, 2020). Even when local issues arise, Saroj and Pal (2020) found that leaders were expected to communicate on social media, such as Twitter to ensure timely communication to the campus community.

One of the major characteristics of chaos theory (CT) connected to this study (Myer et al., 2011) is its ability to compel administrations to react to meet the needs of various constituency groups on- and off-campus. That is, it was evident that leaders made sense of the fluid situation to provide information on their campus websites so that campus communities (i.e., students, faculty, and staff) and outside members (i.e., residents and business members in the surrounding community). Not surprisingly, all campuses we examined created a response website where and COVID-19-related messages were communicated. Another defining characteristic of CT is its forceful impetus towards finding new solutions. Bütz (1995) calls this CT's "greatest power" (p. 96) in that it describes processes that are useful to those who experience the chaos while overcoming the challenges created. The isomorphic way in which COVID-19-related communication was distributed, as our findings demonstrated, can be seen as a way for stakeholders and others impacted by COVID-19 to navigate the chaos of such a crisis. The fourth component of CT suggests that once organized, the critical mass of people find new and creative solutions to the crisis. Based on our exploration of websites relating to COVID-19 updates, our findings suggest that CT is a powerful tool to help explain why campus leaders are compelled to provide information during times of crisis in ways that prior crises have not induced.

IMPLICATIONS

These isomorphic actions taken by institutions in our analytical sample may have been guided by state and national politics, peer institutional responses, legal obligations to their stakeholders, athletic conference affiliation, or some other unforeseen influencing factors associated with institutional power dynamics. In contrast, when distributing information, some institutions provided it early, while others waited until they made significant decisions that directly impacted the stakeholders or waited to see how other peer institutions responded first to help guide their decisions. These concerns illuminate three important implications for practice.

First, we suggest that when information is important, particularly during a global health crisis, early communication via institutional websites, email, and social media is critical. Early communication may also serve to prepare the institutional stakeholders for later decisions that may directly impact the university operation (e.g., residence hall closures, work-from-home orders, dining hall closures, and other important decisions). Institutions should not wait to see how other institutions are responding to a crisis.

Second, while not specific to any of our research questions, our findings highlight the potential challenges for minoritized student groups who may be disproportionately affected by institutional decision-making (Salerno et al., 2020). For example, as prior research has found, LGBTQ students may be unable

to return home in response to a residence hall closure because they may not have family support (Herridge et al., 2019). Therefore, while we did not interview members of this community as it relates to COVID-19 institutional decision to shut down campus and close residential halls, it is clear that there is potential harm for this population of students. In addition, first-generation students from working-class backgrounds may find it disproportionately difficult to navigate transitions to online learning if they have housing insecurities and financial concerns. They may lack access to the Internet and secure housing.

Another student group who were adversely affected were international students on student visas (Sahu, 2020). Within the U.S., many institutions informed their students that they needed to move off-campus or go home. This decision presented immense challenges for these students and their families due to the cost of international flights and international travel restrictions. In addition, this rapid exodus of international students put campuses in a difficult position as they risked putting students out of visa compliance. Not considering all the implications for minoritized student populations was consistent in our findings; very few institutions made specific references to these groups and even fewer had specific links to support these students. In thinking about future responses to future crises, IHEs should address this lack of guidance specifically for their most vulnerable stakeholders. While these conditions were not explored in our study, the findings would suggest that some of the decisions and communications may hamper these vulnerable student populations.

Finally, since our study found that some institutions were clearer and more accessible to various communities than others, institutions should strive to collect information methodically, disseminate information more efficiently, and provide data that are easy to interpret by different community members. For example, some postsecondary institutions around the world can implement dashboards or applications (app) to disseminate up-to-date data regarding various datapoints (Wood-Harper, 2021) while others did not. Like crisis-specific websites, these dashboards and apps can be a source of obtaining up-to the-minute data to inform various community members and families. Through the use of a dashboard or app, we suggest that institutions can do a better job of providing a quickly accessible institutional website with up-to-date information that all community members and families can turn use. This information will ensure that families and community members are receiving information necessary to make informed decisions for the safety of all students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

For Future Research

The nature of a global crisis brings into question the processes that guide the decision-making of university leadership. It is important to better understand which factors influence both the nature of the decision being made and the timing in which the decision is delivered. The clustering of decisions being made in the second and third week of March in this study highlights the need to better understand the impact of peer institution decision-making, political climate, and obligations to stakeholders during a university's response to a global crisis. Furthermore, as IHEs grow in their global outreach through study abroad programs and foreign satellite campuses, there will be a growing need to understand how changes in the global higher education community impact local decision-making.

Future research should also explore how university presidents utilize all the information available to them when making decisions that directly impact university stakeholders during a crisis. This is especially true of a global health pandemic in which it would make sense for information rooted in science to rise to prominence over political and ideological pressures, especially when it comes to decision-making that directly impacts university stakeholders and operations. It would also be beneficial to explore how university leaders receive and interpret feedback from their decisions, their implementations of policy decisions, and their communications. Having the ability to obtain and analyze feedback from stakeholders in a timely manner may help to increase efficiencies and effectiveness in making and delivering operationally important decisions during a crisis. This is particularly important in terms of communicating with stakeholders from marginalized groups, who are most vulnerable to such institutional changes. Finally, a narrative inquiry exploring the lived experience of minoritized students who had to navigate institutional decision-making illuminate how effective these communications were in helping these students through those difficult times.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we sought to better understand how public flagship universities in the U.S. utilized their websites to share information with institutional stakeholders during a global crisis. Our findings indicated that these universities had 17 common responses that were made, and predominately did so in unison with one another. The common responses and the nature of their dissemination to university stakeholders, sheds light on the nature of IHEs response to a global crisis. As IHEs worldwide begin returning to semi-normal operations, the ease of access to information can enable students and faculty to engage in study abroad and international collaborative research projects. As such, IHEs will see an increase in the globalization of higher education. By exploring how campuses responded to COVID-19 and communicated via institutional websites, we believe that campus leaders and policy makers can utilize our findings to help shape future policy decisions, better support their community members, and limit how much online "surfing" they must do to have their question answered and concerns alleviated.

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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.

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.
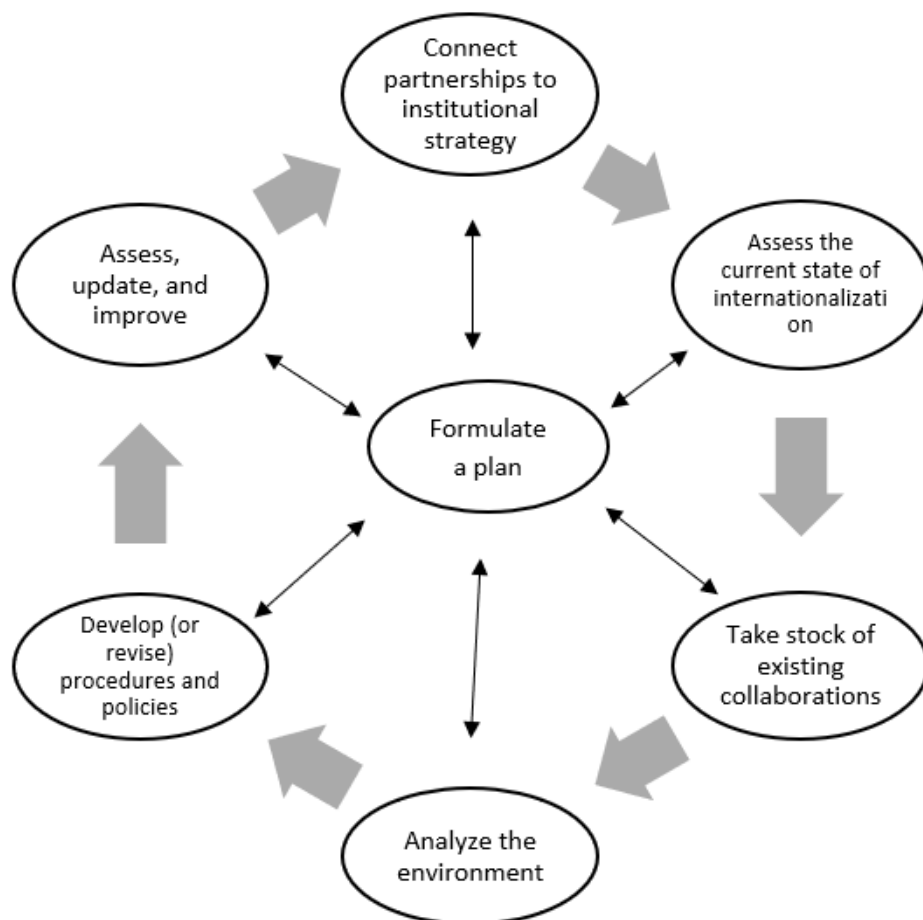
Figure 3: Modified Seven-step strategic planning process. Adapted from "*Internationalization in Action – International Partnerships, Part Two: Strategic Planning*", by Academic Council of Education, n.a.

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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