

The Schooling Experience of Exchange Students from China in Taiwan

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the subjective schooling experience of exchange students from China in Taiwan. Another aim was to find out an appropriate support channels for prospective exchange students from China and the findings can further help university administrative staffs with policy-making and resource-providing that address the needs of exchange students.

Phenomenological orientation was adopted in the research. Data analysis followed the approach of phenomenological content analysis. The results were as followings: 1. There are four factors of motivation and expectation for coming to Taiwan, including enriching their academic knowledge, curiosity about Taiwan, significant others and interpersonal support, and promoting independent living skills. The worries or concerns before coming to Taiwan were high relevant to the pressure from duration of their studies in Taiwan and life adjustment. 2. The schooling experience had five phases, adapting the new environment, increasing academic knowledge, limited interpersonal relationship, a lack of time for travel, and unclear political status. 3. The adjustment issues they encountered included academic life, social life, and execution level for travel. The difficulties in academic and social life especially had greater impact on them. 4. The gains of studying in Taiwan included academic growth, fostering positive interpersonal relationship, multicultural immersion, and developing independent life skills. Their expectation placed more emphasis on their academic achievement.

In brief, academic performance and social life were two major importance of exchange students' schooling experience. Further suggestions based upon the research findings were addressed as regards future research.

Keywords: exchange students, schooling experience, adjustment, phenomenology

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Introduction

The straits exchange between China and Taiwan has become intricately interwoven recently. No matter what in the economic, political, social, cultural, or academic education, they have frequent and diverse interaction. Besides, the improvement of political atmosphere also provides more flexible interactional space (Huang, 2009).

Exchange students are the common way for educational exchange in higher education. Exchange students are the mainstream educational trend in Taiwan nowadays. The majority of overseas study countries are the U.S.A and England which are taken by sixty percent of total foreigner exchange student students (Ministry of Education, 2010). Taiwan and China have the same advantages in culture and geography aspects. However, the policies of educational exchanges of cross-trait are not intimately related as the policy in U.S.A and England. The reason cause this phenomenon is because the policies of educational exchanges are affected by the cross-trait atmosphere and degree certification.

With the development of cross-trait exchanges, Ministry of Education actively sets cross-trait academic education exchange into act, trying to adjust exchange policy. In 2008, the Ministry of Education bring the enforcement rule that “China students come to Taiwan for studying” into law. Based on the, the China students can apply for educational exchange by exchanging students or short-term further study. The number of cross-trait exchanging students has been increased to many times as compared with previous years.

To investigate the related literature in Taiwan, there are eight studies concerning about China exchanging students (Chiang, 2010; Chiang, 2010; Han, 2011; Keo, 2011; Lin, 2007; Lin, 2010; Lin, 2011; Lin, 2012). The research topic can be divided into two sections. The one is to investigate the internal reasons for China exchange students. For example, the reasons why they are willing to study in Taiwan, the satisfaction of school's life and new conditional adaption. The other one is the policy evaluation of China students. As shown in the literature review, existing research in China exchange students has ignored the role of the studying process of China exchange students. Hence, in order to fill the gap in our knowledge, this study investigated not only the probable existence of potential studying process in students learning development, but their learning mental journey in Taiwan.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of exchange students' learning process. This study adapts the methodology “phenomenology”, trying to understand the phenomenal field for exchange students and their perspective of their subjective opinions, feelings and internal adaptations.

The subjects who volunteered to take part in the study were three China exchange students applied for short-term study. Before interviewing, all the participants had over three month learning experience in Taiwan. At the same time, before conducting the interview, the researcher illustrated the interview process, signed the research inform consent and followed the confidential principles.

All the descriptive data in this present study are based on Hycner's (1985) phenomenological content analysis. Through Hycner's framework, the researcher tries to find not only the cross-case categories and topics, but also the descriptions of China students' learning experience. In order to ensure the reliability of this study, this present study was based on Lincoln and Guba's study (as cited in Niew, 2006). They provided four reliability criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Results

According to the three participants' schooling experience, the results can be divided into four categories. First, China exchange students' expectation and motivation. The first category can be further divided into four subcategories. The first one is increasing academic and research knowledge. In that, China students hope they could learn more recent academic knowledge and research concepts to improve their academic research ability. The second subcategory is the curiosity about Taiwan. China students hope they could have more opportunities to contact with scenery and local customs and practices in Taiwan. Significant others and interpersonal support. Supported by China students' family and other China students who studying in Taiwan, they promise take care with each other. Helping with each other cause a lot of China students to study in Taiwan. The last subcategory is promoting independent living skills.

The second result shows that the schooling experience includes not only diversified but also identical elements. The elements can be divided into five aspects. First. The re-adaptation of city surroundings. When the China students come to Taiwan, they need to find the basic life needs quickly to get with surroundings. Second. Increasing the academic knowledge. Three participants learned new knowledge and use their knowledge on their own. The new academic knowledge has become the common harvests in their studies' aspect. Third. Limit interpersonal relationship. China students interact with roommate, Taiwan classmates and teachers, lacking of the interactional resources. Fourth. The time is insufficient for China students to travel in Taiwan. Three participants have a lot of academic pressure so that they hardly have time to take a trip in Taiwan. Fifth. Due to the unclear political status, it is hard for China students to adapt the new environment.

The adjustment issues the China students encountered included three parts. The first one is academic life. Participants hoped they can learn more academic knowledge so that they overload the courses. Because they have high self-disciplined, they have a lot of learning pressure. The second one is the social life. Limit interpersonal relationships cause them to feel unfriendly when they face to Taiwanese. The third one is low level of execution for travel. They have heavy pressure from studying, so they seldom have time to travel. To sum up, academic life and interpersonal relationship have big impact on exchange students. In order to deal with the difficulties they encountered in their life, they do the self-adjustment to find the solutions. However, the external resources are insufficient.

The gains of China students' studying in Taiwan can be divided into four dimensions. First. Academic growth. China students still gain a lot of new knowledge when they are filled with pressure. Second. Foresting positive interpersonal relationship.

The majority of China students can feel passion, kindness, low competition, sense of trust and high human quality from Taiwanese. Lin (2011) pointed out that positive interpersonal relationship as a social support for China students. Social support has influence on overseas adaptation ability (Huang, Chung, Weng, & Chang, 2005). Third. Multicultural immersion. China students have observed the local customs and practices differences between China and Taiwan. They felt sense of fulfillment and self-reflection through contacting Multiculture. The final one is developing independent life.

Discussions and Recommendations

The results find out that China exchange students can be integrated into a diagram (Figure 1), a diagram for China exchange students schooling experience. From figure 1, we can see that academic performance and social life were two major importance of exchange students' schooling experience.

There are four recommendations for future study. First, research variables could include different graders, trying to understand whether China exchange students have the unique or common experience under the grade variable. Second, this study can bring into policy changing. Detention period have effect on China exchange students' schooling experience. Besides, the researcher also recommended school administration could be taken into consideration. First. Planning China exchange students' activities, helping them broaden their interpersonal horizon. Second. Providing learning assistance with focus on the China cultural backgrounds knowledge. Third. Provide professional assist gateway with China exchange students to solve their problems in time. Fourth. Providing explicit exchange method. The students get familiar with their right and responsibility.

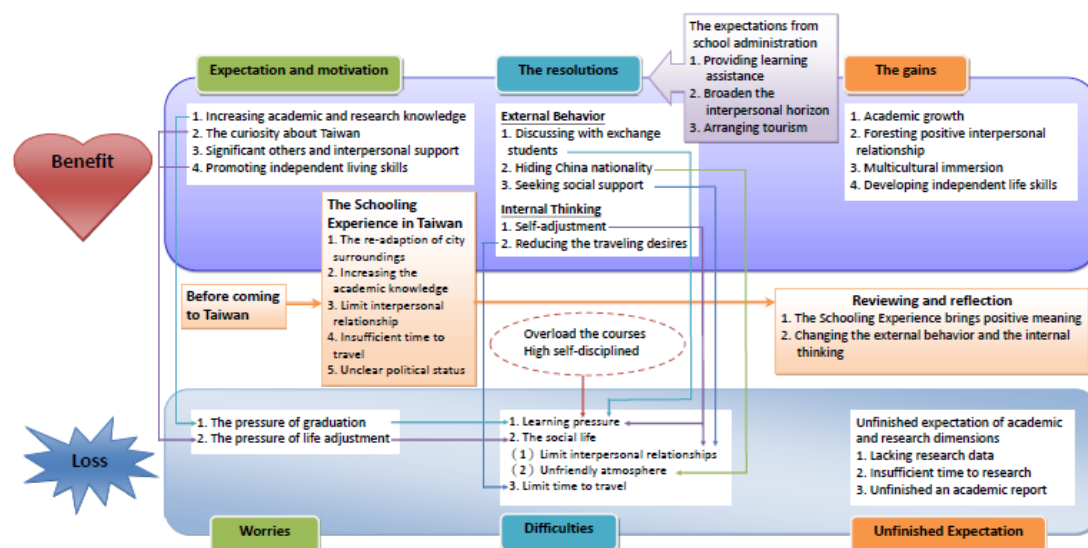


Figure 1: The schooling experience of exchange students from China in Taiwan.

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