

Experiencing negotiated internationalisation: constructing Chinese students' expectation and experiences in a joint venture institution in China

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Research Domains

Student Access and Experience (SAE)

Abstract

Transnational higher education (TNHE) is one of the most prominent symbols of higher education's internationalisation. Existing literature has demonstrated Chinese students' motivation of enhancing their English proficiency and competitive employment advantage in attending TNHE institutions, as they provide a highly internationalised environment. Internationalisation in my case university - Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU) is symbolised through 100% English-medium instruction, internationalised curriculum, and the national diversity of its students and staff. However, in practice, these promises for internationalisation is hardly met, e.g., literature has demonstrated Chinese teachers occasionally use Chinese to facilitate students' understanding. This article unpacks Chinese students' expectation towards non-application of internationalised policy and the consequent (de-)motivation, as well as their lived experiences for negotiated internationalisation. It adopts Bourdieusian framework and analyses whether such negotiation is part of the "rule of the game" of the field of TNHE institutions and discusses its implication to Chinese HE.

Full paper

Transnational higher education (TNHE) is one of the most prominent

symbols of higher education's internationalisation. TNHE institutions are positioned as an option of "internationalisation at home" (Knight, 2014), which aims to provide "internationally focused learning experience within domestic environments" (Mittelmeier et al., 2020, pp. 2-3). According to Wilkins (2018, pp. 6-7), based on different premises, suppliers and target students, TNHE institutions could be operated in different types. In Chinese HE, "no foreign educational institution, other organisation or individual may establish unilaterally schools or other educational institutions providing education mainly to Chinese citizens within the territory of China" (MoE, 2004). In other words, branch campuses are excluded from China's premise since their owners are foreign institutions (Mok & Xu, 2008; Hu & Willis, 2017), and all TNHE institutions in China are jointly owned by a Chinese and a foreign higher educational institution, i.e., joint ventures. However, despite the fact they are all joint ventures, Chinese TNHE institutions can vary drastically in their practices and daily operations. The case university, Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU), represents a more equal collaboration between its parent institutions as they are tied in academic strength. Therefore, compared to the more prescribed route of UNNC, who is working towards creating another UK university in China, XJTLU's future is "fraught with uncertainty" (Feng, 2013, p. 483). Such kind of uncertainty underpins the rationale of selecting XJTLU as a case university in researching internationalisation - it does not aim to build an international university based on a template, instead, internationalisation in XJTLU is established in a more participatory manner that also reflect understanding of its staff and students.

Therefore, this article focuses on Chinese students' expectations and experiences in XJTLU. While there are research discussing international students' experiences in TNHE institutions, experiences of Chinese students who attend their domestic TNHE has been less explored. This might due to potential issues they confront are not as intuitive as those faced by international students, whose experiences are largely shaped by mobility and cross-cultural transition, a well-documented and conceptualised phenomena. Research regarding Chinese students mainly focus on their motivations, for example, enhancing English proficiency, improving competitive advantage in labour market, and gaining international perspective, as Fang and Wang (2014) summarise. However, it should be noticed that these

motivations are based on the internationalised features of TNHE institutions.

Internationalisation in XJTLU is symbolised through 100% English-medium instruction, internationalised curriculum, and the national diversity of its students and staff (XJTLU, 2022). However, in practice, these promises for internationalisation is hardly met, for example, in terms of EMI, lecturers may engage in their native language, either out of their hope to enhance students' understanding, or forcibly switch back to Chinese due to limited language capacity. Therefore, it could be seen that, the non-application of internationalised policy may result in a negotiated internationalising experience for students.

This article unpacks Chinese students' expectation towards non-application of internationalised policy and the consequent (de-)motivation, as well as their lived experiences for negotiated internationalisation. It asks questions such as, to what extent the non-application of internationalised policy (such as use of Chinese) (de-)motivate students in choosing XJTLU? According to Bourdieu (1992), individuals possess the right "feel for the game" may feel like a fish in the water and adapt to the field smoothly, therefore, this paper adopts Bourdieusian framework and analyses whether such negotiation is part of the "rule of the game" of the field of TNHE institutions and discusses its implication to Chinese HE.

This paper adopts qualitative methodology, particularly, a series of focus groups are employed. Due to the contested definition of internationalisation, qualitative methodology is preferred in this research as it provides thick descriptions which are necessary to explore the meaning of it to different actors (Mok, 2007). This research aims to conduct 6-7 focus groups with 25-30 Chinese undergraduates studying in XJTLU, using convenience sampling. Focus group questions will fall into categories "reason for choosing XJTLU", "their interpretations of internationalising policy", "their experiences for negotiating internationalisation" and "whether they see themselves fit the environment of XJTLU". Since the researcher is still conducting focus groups at this stage, in this conference, the researcher will mainly cover the theoretical aspect, especially, why a Bourdieusian perspective is deemed insightful in terms of structuring questions and analysing. This research is believed to contribute to

the understanding of internationalisation in the Chinese context, and generally join the dialogue of the importance and relevance of international education.

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