LIVING EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DURING COVID-19: A STUDY AT HUZHOU UNIVERSITY, CHINA

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Abstract:

The rapid spread of the Covid-19 around the world following the discovery of a new outbreak in December 2019 has completely paralyzed the lives of all people. The main purpose of this study is to observe the experiences and challenges of international students living at Huzhou University during the epidemic. Qualitative methods in a phenomenological manner have been used in the study through which in-depth research has been conducted and data has been collected through semi-structured interviews using purposive sampling. The results of this study showed that, international students have been able to cope with the challenges they have faced such as psychological, academic & social. At the time of the epidemic, they were paralyzed, but over time, they were able to make a living, as well as communicate regularly with peoples close to them.

Keywords: living experiences, international student, COVID-19

1. Introduction

The epidemic virus was first identified in the Chinese city of Wuhan which started in December 2019. The virus spreads as soon as it is discovered. Millions of people die in a

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matter of months. Life came to a standstill, ghostly environments were created everywhere, all educational institutions, factories were closed, and above all human movement was banned. But where is the end of it? The only question in everyone's mind, when will people return to their normal life? When the big cities around the world began to issue lockdowns and ban the normal movement of people, then the human race finds an answer, that if this trend continues for a long time, normal life will be disrupted. The social and economic impact will be much more serious as everything will suddenly stop like this. The coronavirus epidemic has affected everything. The virus has hit education, health and the economy the hardest. The current epidemic situation is a big challenge for the twenty-first century. When the lockdown begins to be imposed around the world, the situation comes under the house arrest of the human race. Since the virus originated in China, its citizens have to face the first ban. By the end of January, tens of thousands of confirmed cases of coronavirus had been reported. More than two hundred have died. But so far this is only happening in China. Not a single coronavirus infection has been reported outside China. Since that time in January, the whole world and the lives of all of us have changed drastically. So which way is this virus fighting with mankind going? Who will win? If the whole world is to be considered, the picture is not very good. On the other hand, life has become horrible for students! Due to the epidemic, all educational institutions were declared closed indefinitely from beginning of COVID-19. The Ministry of Education of all nation has announced the closure of all educational institutions in stages to ensure the safety of students' lives. The future of the education system and students is in jeopardy as all educational institutions and educational activities are suspended. The lives of students in Corona have disrupted in education sector. The news that every people were watching was frustrating. Now all too are partners in that catastrophe. Diseases, epidemics have come to the world several times before. At different times people have been told to be isolated and unaccompanied. But never before have people been attacked and died so quickly. On the contrary, students are worried about the future. In all cases, there is a handful of uncertainties. As a result, the mental development of the students is being hampered. Students are becoming mentally unbalanced as they struggle with uncertainty about their future lives. As a result, their mental health is being severely damaged, which is never desirable for the country and the nation. The future of the country and the nation depends on today's promising students. Therefore, the government has to keep an eye on the mental development of the students. We have to create a fully learning-friendly environment for the students, which will sharpen the talents and thinking of the students. In this way it will be possible to fully ensure the mental development of the students.

1.1 Research Problem

The sudden onset of the epidemic of corona virus has almost endangered the lives of people all over the world. On the other hand, as the academic activities of the students come to a standstill. During the epidemic, International students have always been plagued by a variety of problems, including the struggle for survival, the rhythm of

normal life, deviations from fulfilment of dreams, being trapped in a web of uncertainty, as well as mental imbalance.

1.2 Research Purpose

One of the functional purposes of this study is to draw a constructive detailed conclusion in the light of the experiences of international students regarding the situation, difficulties adjustment during the epidemic.

1.3 Research Question

In particular, this study focuses strongly on the following questions;
1) What problems did the students face during the epidemic?
2) What were their personal experiences during the epidemic?
3) How did they cope with this epidemic problem?

2. Literature Review

The first outbreak of COVID-19 was reported in December 2012 in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. The epidemic had spread to 19 countries with 1, 17,991 confirmed cases by 19 January. Following 2020, the World Health Organization has announced a public health emergency of international concern (Adhikari S, Meng S, Wu Y, Mao Y, Ye R, Wang Q., 2020). Since then, the WHO and public health authorities around the world have been working to control the outbreak of COVID-19. However, it has spread and posed a threat to health, and millions have been infected and thousands have died in recovery worldwide.

Until very lately global higher education dreamed of professional-paras global exchange and sustainable development. Nevertheless, this dream belongs only to the toddling brains of apprentices and policymakers that are shaking. Around the peaks of regional wars and conflicts, famines, natural disasters, epidemics, and other threats. International education is growing in size, but not vigorously; in an increasingly connected world, our interdependence puts us at higher risk of disruption and discomfort. The Covid-19 epidemic has posed a huge obstacle to our increasingly globalized, yet fragmented, globalization of higher education in the world. In 2018, China had more than 492,000 international students studying in 31 provinces in 196 countries (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). Chinese universities are not protected from this disease and the way to deal with it is multifold. Millions are involved in online learning (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China 2020) and primary discomfort and disconnection. Institutions have strict policies for every gold move and many of them are incomplete lockdown. Many international students returned home after the spring break after the disease came under control, thinking they could return home, but are now facing an outbreak in their home countries and strict global travel and customs restrictions. International students in China become self-isolated at home or on campus, and Chinese students are advised against traveling

to other countries. Conventional academic life, in general, is severely hampered. Although 2 months of drastic measures have effectively reduced the number of new cases of Covid-19 to zero outside China's Wuhan, in the province, slowly and carefully taking measures to return to normal life.

This devastating epidemic, therefore, poses many challenges to the lives of people in general and among university students around the world. For example, as the WHO (2020) noted, the (COVID-19) crisis is putting pressure on people around the world. As a result of its devastating effects, a public health emergency has been declared at the national and international levels and extraordinary measures have been taken by the government to prevent and limit the spread of pollution. One of the measures is that universities have at different times forced students to send their home worldwide. The move simultaneously disrupted students' educational activities and livelihoods where they were not physically able to go to school and study during Covid-19 (Rodi KS, 2020).

As the Rodi K. S. (2020) further points out, the epidemic has cut off global economic and social relations, leaving some developed and fragmented education systems in both developed and developing countries, where they have tried to change their courses online and find short-term solutions in remote areas of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, Universities, in particular, faced an excess of higher education challenges related to financing and non-availability of infrastructure through the right technology and methods to educate and engage their students to transform from conventional, campus-based learning to online learning. The association has been influenced by COVID-19 in several doors around the world, in particular, influencing students and driving practices or trying to transit online learning through theoretical approaches.

The COVD-19 epidemic has not only damaged the education system, but also the universities and their communities, especially students. Some research studies in different parts of the world revealed the effects of COVID-19 on the learning process and students. A study in the United States found that COVID-19 worsened the mental health of college-age students and created unbearable mental health. Stress like depression, anxiety, PTSD, and eating disorders (Kerr E., 2020). According to Cao et al., (2020), a study in China on COVID-19 found that economic stress, impact on daily life, and academic delays were positively associated with anxiety symptoms in college students when social support was negatively related to students' concerns. In Kenya, Kovid-19 has created problems facing teaching and learning methods. In Ethiopia, a study was conducted among 422 college students (Nyerere J., 2020). In the city of Daisy, it was revealed that Covid-19 causes higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression disorders among students. From these searches, it is possible to think educationally (Tadesse et al., 2020).

Regarding the prevention and intervention of COVID-19 and related problems, the World Health Organization has issued guidelines for managing the problem, including both biomedical and psychological approaches, since the epidemic was achieved. Preventive and therapeutic action and emergency psychotherapy, Crisis

interventions for people affected by COVID-19 are direct interventions for patients and indirectly important strengthening for relatives, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and the community in general. Communal bonds and mutual support also seem important in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Kovari M. (2020) explained that it is central to strengthening the relationship to support each other by sharing important information, resources, and tools in communities and to deal with such national crisis situations. International Psychotherapy Institute (2020) further mentioned that if the professional learning community provides consistent information about the COVID-19 situation in which we can think, behave and draw our healthy links, it benefits an entire community.

Also, community engagement seems to be important as a way to combat the spread of COVID-19, although there is sometimes confusion and controversy in people's minds about the social distance that pervades government officials. The world and WHO have asked to stay at least two meters away from each other or social distance. This approach often produces social side effects to reduce normal social interaction. As a result, the Student, in general, probably feels alone. Thus, this kind of complication creates emotional and psychological tension. Kanter J, Kuczynski A (2020) stated that, in times of social stress, a demand (stay away from each other) evolution goes against what hard-wired people had to do; find and support each other as family, friends, and community and we want to mingle together. From this point of view, it seems, there is a negative effect of students' social distance that suppresses social communication. As psychologists at the Center for the Science of Social Connection at the University of Washington say, social distance has side consequences. Since, people are social people, being deprived of social connection can create more stress and illness. Lonely individuals have high levels of the hormone cortisol, an indicator of stress; show a weakened immune response to pathogens; and increases the risk of premature death. For example, those who have been infected with the virus should be deprived of social contact and physical intimacy.

From the above justification, it can be inferred that Huzhou university students are not assorted and may be confused with the term social and physical distance and social distance is affected in practice. Awareness of students about how to engage with the community in social and concepts to focus on the physical distance to combat COVID-19. Students need to be aware in times of crisis like COVID-19. Community responses, including from volunteer groups, neighborhood associations, teachers, or others, are important in supporting build trust between the government and citizens by informing the public about the risks of COVID-19 and what steps students can take who lived on campus. Although the authors of this study argue with this idea. Priorities in the fight against COVID-19 are followed by the World Health Organization on a regular basis, including frequent hand washing, covering or masking when sneezing, the social distance at home, and the importance of social contact during periods. Has been and has been applied and the way ordinary and university students adhere to these rules is not seen across the world community. On the other hand, the spread of COVID-19 is increasing from time to time which becomes a cause of concern among the general public

and students. Thus, around the world, university students struggled to manage their mental health even after losing milestones such as extra credentials, social distance, and graduation, and also received extra stress.

3. Research Methodology

This study has been designed in a qualitative phenomenological manner. This design has been chosen mainly because it allows for in-depth search and understanding of data from participants. In this type of research, it is possible to identify the problems of an individual or community and study them in-depth (Creswell, 2020). According to Merriam & Tisdell (2006), through this design, information about the human experience can be collected. How they create everything around them and keep their balance in all situations, how they are aware of all the content, what it means to be involved with all the content, all these elements help the researchers. Based on this concept, one research er used an unprecedented approach to qualitative methods. Phenomenology is defined as a science that aims to describe the presence of a particular event or thing as a living experience (Strubert & Carpenter, 2006). (Braun & Clarke 2006), the purpose of this research is to describe and master experiences as they are brought to life. It is this living experience that gives meaning to each person's perception of a particular event and is influenced by everything internal and external individuals.

3.1 Sample & Sampling Techniques
Purposive sampling has been used in this study because it helps the researchers to get the relevant information from the participants, (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019). In addition, it also collects valuable information from individual participants in the light of their experiences. Based on this concept, 8 participants of Huzhou University have been selected purposively, communicated, and interviewed.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments
Semi-structured interviews were used based on the questions mentioned in the study. This is a form of qualitative approach by asking questions to know the feelings or experiences of the participants. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2006), semi-structured interview is a tool between structured and unstructured that uses the questions used in the research to be inherent or a mixture of structured questions.

3.3 Procedures of Data Collection
The data in the study has also been compiled in a proper manner for the relevant research purposes and in a word-rich way. Based on this research, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview in English and the interview was conducted face to face. The consent of all participants has already been obtained. In addition, there is further agreed that they will disclose all information in the light of their full experience and for the proper application of the research purpose. The interview sessions were conducted by

the researcher himself and each session lasted for about 40 to 45 minutes. To protect the confidentiality of participants 'responses, in the case of copy and analysis of interview data, the actual names of the participants were coded instead. Also, the transcript of the interviews according to the three main categories was aligned to deal with the psychological, social, academic challenges & overall experiences of COVID-19.

3.4 Methods of Data Analysis

In this study researchers used thematic methods where participants' responses were coating and discussed in detail in a variety of different themes. It identifies the data as well as analyses through array (Bazely, 2009). Data generated from the interviews were analyzed by identifying central themes based on informants 'responses, transcripts and coding, and research questions.

4. Findings

The basic purpose of this study was to observe living experiences and ways to increase social communication and inner feeling in the absence of social communication in response to COVID-19 among international students in Chinese university dormitories. Out of 8 international students, 5 boys and 3 girls participated in this study. Attempts have been made to understand the issues discussed by the participants through conducting interviews. The data collected were structurally analyzed in the light of the questions posed in the study and the findings were presented according to the research theme.

4.1 Psychological Challenges

Interview participants were asked a general question about what kind of psychological challenges they faced and how they experienced during COVID-19. During the epidemic, participants were asked about their daily lives and their psychological experiences, to which they were all quite responsive. Majority participants described that such a situation can hinder their proper mental development on the one hand and on the other hand it can create a tendency in students to become accustomed to a regular life. The most common emotional responses were related to depression, fear, anxiety, incompetence, emotional isolation, weakness, loss, and obsession. In the next step, the participants' words were recorded and presented. They were questioned about their feelings, thoughts, ideas and daily life related to COVID-19. Reports from participants indicate that they were terrified when the media reported that people around the world were being killed by the epidemic. The rapid spread of the epidemic virus as well as the huge number of deaths in developed countries has caused concern in normal life. All participants were emotionally devastated by the outbreak and rapid spread of the epidemic virus, one of the most horrific experiences of their lives in the twenty-first century. The following key interviews were summarized from the participants;

"Everyone is in the room all the time because the school is closed due to the epidemic virus. Getting addicted to mobile and internet. Losing attention in studies. Laziness and the thought that it will have an effect on future life is becoming more and more dangerous."

"Laziness is becoming more and more oppressive as there is a possibility of moving away from the regular life by being in the room all the time."

"Uncertainty about the future of the students has always been a factor as there are no practical classes and online classes are not taught properly."

"The epidemic has made students think and worry constantly. So, they were always in a state of panic, where people could be attacked very quickly, and they could be attacked at any time."

4.2 Social Challenges

In response to a question about how students experienced social and economic challenges during the epidemic, Participants believe that it is only because of the COVID-19 virus that they have this problem today. Usually students express concern about family, relatives, and friends in their country. The feeling of isolation and loneliness from their people has caused them a lot of pain. Participants felt that they were deprived of all the pleasures of social life, success, important relationships, and going out as they were separated from loved ones, friends, and colleagues around them. In addition, they noted that they felt uncomfortable being separated from their normal social interactions and confined to the room. Participants have expressed their views on this in various ways. The following transcripts are summarized as evidence through observation.

"The social distance was unbelievable to the students and the rule of catching this obstacle was very awkward to them."

"To many it appears that this rule creates a negative relationship to keep oneself away from others socially."

"Because of this inconvenience, it was a wonderful thing to change the traditional culture and exchange greetings with each other in a new way."

"They believe that the epidemic virus has changed social interactions and activities. In addition to enjoyable recreation, to lose the morale to refrain from participating in various social activities."

"The study participants expressed frustration at not being able to get close to their closest friends. It made them think more about social isolation in the future."

4.3 Academic Challenges

The Corona epidemic began in China and devastated the entire human race. We are disappointed to see that news day after day. People all over the world are partners in that catastrophe. Diseases, epidemics have hit the world several times before. At different times people were isolated and isolated from each other but never before has the human race seen such a rapid onset and simultaneous death. Of all the epidemics so far, COVID 19 has been the exception. The nature of any other virus, its kinetics scientists have been able to determine; couldn't reach Corona at all. Stunned, it spread and made the whole human race humiliated. Along with studying in the educational institution, the students used to spend their time happily playing culture, chatting, and playing sports. Moreover, they have been deprived of educational institutions, chatting with friends and they have become isolated from outside activities. Being forced to stay at home, even if you want to or have the opportunity, is not going to go out of the house for a while. Online teaching has started considering the possibility of long-term loss of students in this crisis. As far as is known the students have accepted well and are benefiting. Researchers have heard the opinions of many students. They spoke positively. But we all know that education, acquiring knowledge does not depend only on teaching. There is a saying called interaction. Helps to prepare oneself for fulfilling one's responsibilities towards people. Remarkably, one or another student has to face various conflicts almost every day on various extraterrestrial issues. Whatever they deal with, they adapt to social norms. As a result, they learn more from extraterrestrial reality and nature than we do from institutional arrangements.

> *"Since the school is closed, everyone involved in education has had various experiences with the alternative arrangements for class examinations and assessments."*

> *"In the changed situation, teachers, students and parents also want the education system to be made more attractive, enjoyable and accessible to all through the use of information technology as a preparation for the future."*

> *"In the future, if we want to keep online information technology-based education going along with the conventional education, everyone thinks that we have to think about these issues from now on."*

> *"Although online teaching is a new platform for both teachers and students. In the classroom the teacher can easily control the class and evaluate the work of all the students at the same time. Teachers can identify less attentive students in the classroom and attract them to the class by taking immediate action. Moreover, any questions of the students can be easily answered without any complication during the lecture in the classroom. But the lack of direct communication between teachers and students seems to make it difficult to make online classes a success."*

5. Discussion

The Coronavirus epidemic is one of the deadliest and most devastating crises in human history ever since. The virus has spread to other parts of the world. Previous research has shown that this virus is far more dangerous than all other viruses discovered and has affected every aspect of human life. The virus makes people lonely and unstable when people cannot be close to others (Kanter, Kuczynski, 2020). According to a study conducted in China, 24.9% of college students are alone and anxious during the epidemic (Cao, Fanga, Houc, Hana, Xua, Donga, et al., 2020). Similarly, as a result of the Coronavirus in this study, psychological issues were revealed among the participants. The most commonly reported psychological issues in this study were fear, anxiety, stress, loss of interest and excitement. In parallel with this study, previous studies have confirmed that emergency health care or other emergency elements volunteers were under a lot of stress at the time of the discovery of other horrific complications, such as the COVID-19 epidemic virus Barello and Graffigna (2020). One of the most important challenges in this study is that during the epidemic, students were deprived of important activities such as academic activities & the joy of graduation could not be properly celebrated due to the epidemic panic around. Similar findings have been found in this study, according to a report by the Guild of European (2020), which found that universities were much more vulnerable to closure and that students became emotionally broken and destabilized. In the current crisis, loneliness, long-term house arrest, fear of death, long-term disruption of academic studies — all combined to worsen the mental health of students, said psychiatrists. The situation in Corona shows that the year 2020 will disappear from the lives of students. In this situation, the students are going to face a really big challenge. The loss of a year from life will be felt in near future. As a social being, people will come to people and talk, this is normal. But the terrible epidemic of the virus has turned everything upside down because it is an infectious disease that keeps everyone at a distance. As a result, "social distance" or isolation is becoming a new aspect of social life. Over the centuries, human relationships have served as a medium of social interaction to strengthen human bonds. The question now is whether some of the behaviors of social intimacy, including shaking hands, hugging, shaking hands, will change or other means of strengthening the relationship will have to be resorted to where the habit of keeping distance from each other has to be developed. Coronavirus effects have been linked to a lack of social education, and a sense of social responsibility around the world. As a result, social distance is increasing and has a serious impact. There is a kind of latent pressure of panic, despair, loneliness among the people. Some images of the humanitarian crisis in the society are clearly visible which is causing concern to everyone.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that the epidemic virus has significantly affected the lives of university students. They have faced various challenges and learned to cope with them. There are also some good indications from the results of this study, which are: Students have adopted cognitive-behavioral activities, social support, and coping strategies to further strengthen social cohesion. In particular, during the epidemic, the Internet and social media were the only means of communicating positive relationships with family, relatives, friends, and neighbors. The blessings of modern technology have instilled something in life during epidemics. Since the epidemic virus is affecting the normal life of university students although they have adopted various strategies to get rid of the negative aspects. Particularly, self-motivation, self-assessment, self-awareness, meditation, empathy, adaptation, and physical exercise help students develop their emotions and stimuli in a positive way. In addition, creative thinking, psychosocial activities, social support activities, cognitive-behavioral practices, and strategies have been shown to help normalize students' emotional well-being.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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