

# Strategies for Improving the Training Quality of International Students in China

Luji Liu\*

College of International Education, Shandong Jiaotong University, Jinan 250000, Shandong Province, China

\*Corresponding author: Luji Liu, justiceliu@126.com

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**Abstract:** In recent years, the new measures for opening up have transitioned from concept to action, and from vision to reality, with good outcomes. China is becoming the target country for students from countries around the world to further their studies, and important changes have taken place in the source structure and major selection of international students. Quality is the lifeline of education in China. The key to improving international competitiveness is to improve the training quality. In order to improve the training quality of international students, the principle of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude needs to be implemented, the teaching methods that meet the characteristics of international students should be used, modern information means based on “Internet + Teaching” should be used, and joint training between schools and enterprises should be carried out, so as to promote both, classroom teaching and practical teaching.

**Keywords:** International students in China; Training quality; Reform in education

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## 1. Introduction

The new measures for opening-up include the Eurasian continent. They are considered as a bridge connecting China to the world and a link for other countries to join hands<sup>[1]</sup>. Various cultural years, tourism years, art festivals, and colorful cultural cooperation and bridges connecting the hearts and minds of countries along the lines of cultural exchanges are being built. China is becoming the target country for students from other countries to further their studies; additionally, important changes have taken place in the source structure and major selection of international students. Quality is the lifeline of education in China. The key to improving international competitiveness is to improve the training quality<sup>[2]</sup>. At present, there are still some issues in the management and quality of education for international students. There is still a certain gap in the educational action requirements of jointly building the new measures for opening-up with the state. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to explore practical ways to improve the quality of talent training.

## 2. New characteristics of education

The education for international students in China cultivates not only a large number of professionals for countries all around the world, but also promotes cultural and people to people exchanges as well as communication between China and other countries in the world. Therefore, it should also become a bridge and link for economic cooperation and cultural exchanges between China and other countries in the world<sup>[3]</sup>. With the further implementation of China’s opening-up policy, the education for international students in China has shown new characteristics.

## **2.1. Source countries**

With the further implementation of the opening-up policy, cultural and educational exchanges between China and the world have also seen eventful outcomes. The education for international students has made great progress, and the number of international students in China has been increasing year by year. For example, in 2016, China was housing students from more than 200 countries and regions. The top countries in number include the United States, South Korea, Pakistan, India, and Russia <sup>[4]</sup>. In the same year, the number of international students in China was 442,800; in 2017, there were 489,200 international students in China, while in 2018, there were 492,100 international students in China; the total number of international students in China exceeded 500,000 in 2019.

## **2.2. Source structure**

With the implementation of the policy, the number of international students in China has not only increased significantly, but also the structure has been continuously optimized. The common phenomenon seen is that more and more students are opting to further their studies in China, rather than receiving short-term training. For example, in 2018, there were 258,122 secondary school students and 234,063 non-academic students in China. For the first time, the number of academic students exceeded that of non-academic students, which is a significant change in the structure of international students in China <sup>[5]</sup>.

In addition to the changes in the number of academic students, since 2018, international students in China have gradually diversified their choice of majors, no longer focusing on traditional Chinese medicine, Chinese, and other majors, but instead, engineering technology, machinery manufacturing, and other majors are increasingly favored by international students. At the same time, at the educational level, the number of students studying for master's and doctorate degrees has increased significantly. These changes reflect that the implementation of high-level and high-quality education for international students has become an important practical issue faced by China.

## **2.3. Distribution of majors**

With the rapid growth of China's economy and the significant improvement of its international influence, the pattern of international students studying Chinese in China has changed. According to the 2018 data, the four majors with the largest number of students are western medicine, engineering, economics, and management, with Chinese majors excluded <sup>[6]</sup>; the proportion of students who chose western medicine increased from 8.9% to 11.2%, while the proportion of those who chose engineering increased from 4.9% to 14.9%, indicating that China's economic development is increasingly attractive to students worldwide.

## **3. Factors affecting the quality of education for international students in China**

The rapid growth in the number of international students and the continuous optimization of the structure are closely related to China's policy of opening-up to the outside world. The increasing number of international students receiving academic education in China necessitates an innovation to the talent training mode and an improvement to the talent training quality. In order to improve the education quality of international students in China, several factors need to be taken into account.

### **3.1. Transforming the talent training concept**

An accurate concept of talent training is linked to the overall direction of educational activities and is the basis for improving the talent training quality. In the past, the main idea of developing education for international students in China was to carry forward the Chinese culture and develop friendly relations with foreign countries <sup>[7]</sup>. However, under the background of the new measures for opening-up, the education

concept for international students in China should be transformed, in order to cultivate applied and compound talents that serve the needs of the initiative, and the primary goal should be to improve the talent training quality. It is under the premise of exploring the innovation of international students' training mode and improving the quality of talent training that the transformation of talent training direction and objectives can be achieved. The transformation of the talent training concept embodies a greater emphasis on the teaching quality, the cultivation of students' professional skills, and the improvement of the training quality.

### **3.2. Improving the teaching level**

The level and quality of teachers are important factors that determine the quality of talent training. Intercultural communication in education for international students emphasizes on sensitivity, tolerance, and flexibility in dealing with cultural differences <sup>[8]</sup>. Compared with ordinary education, the academic education for international students in China puts forward higher requirements for teachers. Teaching professional courses requires teachers to have a good grasp of certain foreign languages, proficiency in specific majors, cross-cultural communication skills, and the capability to explain professional topics using simple terms. At present, most colleges and universities in China, especially normal colleges and universities, have a shortage of teachers who are engaged in international education. Majority of the local teachers have poor English and cross-cultural communication skills. They have certain difficulties in teaching with English and other languages. Therefore, assembling a team of teachers with high professional standards and strong cross-cultural communication skills is a significant step toward improving the training quality of international students <sup>[9]</sup>. In addition, it is necessary to build a team of teachers specialized in specific disciplines, thus ensuring high-quality teaching.

### **3.3. Designing tailored textbooks**

Textbooks are the basis of students' learning and the necessary means for students to master knowledge systematically. However, judging from the actual situation of some colleges and universities, there are relatively few instructional materials specifically designed for international students. Teachers tend to either translate the excerpts of materials used by local students into international versions or use instructional materials that were published abroad. These two practices are clearly unacceptable. The purpose of the internationalization of higher education is to raise the national education standard, and not to implement international education for the sake of internationalization. Textbooks, which are suitable for international students, are one of the important factors affecting the quality of international students' education <sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, the development of tailored textbooks for international students is an essential guarantee for the innovation of the training mode in China.

## **4. Strategies to improve the training quality of international students under the new situation**

It is crucial to take initiative to adapt and respond to the new situation, innovate the training mode, and constantly improve the training quality of international students in China.

### **4.1. Exploring the new school-enterprise collaborative training mode**

With the new measures for opening-up, many students are opting to further their studies in China; the proportion of students receiving academic education in China has also increased significantly. Colleges and universities are the primary sources of talent training, while enterprises are the recipients of talents. The integration of production and learning creates a talent support system to promote the internalization of enterprises <sup>[11]</sup>. School-enterprise collaboration is a new training mode for colleges and universities to cultivate innovative talents. Each school and each enterprise is an independent subject; therefore, in order

to achieve complementary benefits and resource sharing through cooperation activities, their information, knowledge, resources, and behavior should be based on their own or common needs <sup>[12]</sup>.

Joint school-enterprise training can supply enterprises with international talents while taking into account of their needs as well as improve students' practical problem-solving skills and their capability to adapt to the society, thus enhancing their employability. The following strategies can be implemented in school-enterprise collaborative training: talent demand information should be provided by enterprises to colleges and universities; enterprises should jointly formulate training plans, teaching methods, curriculum contents, and other aspects with their affiliated universities, so as to promote the educational reform of international Chinese students, drive the formulation of relevant policies, and create a demonstration effect <sup>[13]</sup>.

#### **4.2. Reforming teaching methods based on the characteristics of international students**

The international students in China come from different countries around the world, and there are significant cultural differences among different individuals. Factors such as the differences in their original living environment, education level, and English communication skills, have also brought challenges to classroom teaching. The majority of international students are able to express themselves well in classroom settings and show enthusiasm by participating in classroom discussions <sup>[14]</sup>. Therefore, the traditional teaching method, where teachers actively teach, while students passively learn, has major drawbacks when applied to international students, as it is incompatible to the learning characteristics of international students. Interactive teaching, case teaching, and other useful teaching methods should be used to guide these students; additionally, the focus should be on the issues that they are concerned with or problems that they will encounter in the future, while highlighting interactivity in the process of teaching <sup>[15]</sup>. Another important aspect is that students' dominant position should be emphasized in classroom teaching. Teachers should guide, organize, summarize, stimulate students' interest in learning, and create an environment where students can learn independently and from each other.

#### **4.3. Using modern classroom teaching methods**

In the context of social development, where network technology has been fully popularized, the education field should grasp the advantages of "Internet +" thinking in the teaching work and assume the construction of campus informatization as a new direction for teaching reform <sup>[16]</sup>. Teaching means are the tools and methods used to improve teaching effect. However, with the development of modern information technology, especially under the background of "Internet +," teaching means should keep pace with the times, maximize the use of teaching resources and teaching forms, such as micro classes, as well as supplement traditional teaching by using simple blackboard and chalks <sup>[17]</sup>. This is particularly important in the teaching of international students. Due to cultural differences, there are certain differences in information exchange between Chinese teachers and these students. This cross-cultural communication barrier negatively affects the transmission of knowledge. Cross-cultural communication refers to the communication between people with cultural and linguistic differences <sup>[18]</sup>, while intercultural communication lies in understanding the differences in the methods of communication between the two parties. Cultural mediums, such as gestures and physical space, can convey information. With the help of modern information technology, they can be expressed more accurately. Therefore, Chinese colleges and universities need to select teaching methods based on the characteristics of international students and use modern educational means, such as "Internet +," to enhance the quality of international students in China.

#### **4.4. Emphasizing on the integration of classroom teaching with practical teaching**

Practical teaching is an effective way to deepen theoretical understanding and consolidate theoretical

knowledge. It is an effective means to cultivate high-quality technical personnel with innovative consciousness and a platform for students to master scientific methods as well as improve their practical skills. In addition, practical teaching is also conducive to the improvement of students' quality and the formation of values. Constructing a scientific practical teaching evaluation system is not only the basis for improving the quality of practical teaching, but also for promoting the reform of practical teaching<sup>[19]</sup>.

The application of the diversified practical teaching mode in the development of higher education has a positive effect on the realization of the goal of cultivating innovative talents in colleges and universities. The application of this teaching mode in colleges and universities meets the personalized needs of students for classroom teaching, thus promoting the quality and effect of classroom teaching as well as the realization of the goal of cultivating innovative talents in colleges and universities<sup>[20]</sup>. Therefore, in order to guarantee the training quality of international students in China, it is of utmost importance to first, strengthen the cultivation of students' skills in analyzing and solving practical problems, and then reinforce the practical aspect and training for these students by integrating classroom teaching with practical teaching.

## 5. Conclusion

The new measures for opening-up are considered as a bridge connecting China with the world and a link for countries to join hands. In this context, China is becoming the target country for students from various countries around the world to further their studies; additionally, significant changes have taken place in the source structure and major selection among international students. Therefore, the education for international students in China should be committed to enhancing the quality of talent training and cultivating high-quality professionals for all countries. In order to achieve the objectives, it is necessary to promote the reform of teaching around the talent training concept, the construction of excellent teaching staff, and the development of tailored textbooks; in addition, it is also paramount to explore the new school-enterprise collaborative training mode, comprehensively use modern classroom teaching methods, and emphasize on the integration of classroom teaching with practical teaching.

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## Disclosure statement

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