

A Study on the Life and Effective Educational Method of Chinese Students Studying in S. Korea during the Pandemic¹

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Abstract

This study examines the life of Chinese students studying in the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) during the COVID-19 pandemic and identifies students' most preferred educational method during the pandemic and the most effective educational method post pandemic. A month-long quantitative survey was conducted, supplemented by a qualitative survey. Online educational method (OEM) was the most preferred. While students hoped for the face-to-face educational method (FEM) post pandemic, they also wanted OEM to expand because of their improved awareness about it and having experienced its advantages. Thus, OEM could potentially be the most effective educational method for Chinese students.

Keywords: *Chinese students studying in Korea, Online educational method, Face-to-face educational method, Pandemic*

Introduction

After cases were reported in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019 (Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, press release dated January 3, 2020) COVID-19 (officially named so by the World Health Organization) indiscriminately trans-

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mitted among people, resulting in a pandemic (a global outbreak of infectious disease) (185 million cases and 4 million deaths worldwide as of July 9, 2021, COVID-19 statistics from the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency). Travel between countries and contact between people were restricted. Wearing masks and working from home became the norm. Lockdowns and social distancing were emphasized over opening up and exchanges, hugely impacting the world.

In Korea, the first confirmed case was reported on January 20, 2020 and the second one on February 4 (Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, press release dated January 20, 2020); the virus spread gradually. These confirmed patients in early days came to Korea from China (Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, press release dated January 24, 2020). The Korean government designated the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (promoted from the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on September 14, 2020) as an agency responsible for responding to COVID-19, introduced free tests with the development of COVID-19 test kits, introduced measures like mask-wearing, hand-washing, drive-through tests (MBC, article dated February 24, 2020), and mobile system. The mobile system was designed to quickly send text messages about the occurrence of confirmed cases, and it effectively brought the spread of the virus under control. Without introducing extreme measures, such as banning entry into Korea from overseas or imposing a lockdown in COVID-19 affected areas, the government successfully controlled and prevented the disease along with voluntary participation from people as well as its swift action. Despite such efforts, the number of confirmed cases increased rapidly due to the variants of the virus, difficulties in obtaining vaccines, and fatigue about social distancing imposed for a long time (165,000 confirmed cases and 2,036 deaths as of July 9, 2021, COVID-19 statistics from the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency).

The pandemic affected not just relationships between countries or people, but also educational settings. To stop the spread of COVID-19, schools were shut down and started to implement online teaching. Such turn of events baffled educational authorities and students. As it was difficult to provide normal classroom learning, the gap in learning widened. With the face-to-face educational method (FEM) being replaced by the online educational method (OEM), confusion further worsened. Inexperienced faculty members found it difficult to videotape their lectures, and it was not easy to ensure effective learning. While it was not easy to obtain the Internet system and computers needed to attend online classes, learners were not very interested in online classes either. This threatened the FEM and the education system, which were taken for granted so far.

There are many foreign students studying in Korea, who come from different countries (153,695 students in total, Korean Educational Development Institute, 2020). Chinese students account for the largest share of them (67,030, 43.6%, Korean Educational Development Institute, 2020). Since they are likely to face more difficulties than Korean students with an unfamiliar educational method, contactless communication, and exchanges with school and Korean students, it is important to understand how difficult they are in their study abroad in Korea during the pandemic.

Thus, this study highlights difficulties experienced by Chinese students studying in Korea and identifies the educational method they thought would be the most effective. Even though it has been over one and a half years since the outbreak of COVID-19, it shows no sign of ending due to the spread of the Delta variant. This study examines what educational practice can overcome this ongoing crisis and which is the most effective educational method for Chinese students.

Methodology of Research

Both quantitative and qualitative surveys were conducted on Chinese students. They were conducted for a month from May 10 to April 10, 2021. To begin with, a quantitative survey was conducted, which was then supplemented by a qualitative survey. After surveying how Chinese students adapted to the Korean society and culture during the pandemic, we focused on the effective educational method. To identify a more effective educational method, we looked into changes during and after the pandemic. The respondents were 140 Chinese students studying in the Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS).

The reason for targeting only Chinese students was that not only do they represent the largest share of foreign students studying in Korea, but they are also well aware of COVID-19, which originated from China. The reason the surveys were only conducted on Chinese students studying in the HUFS (1,810 Chinese students, i.e., 55.4% out of 3,266 foreign students in 2020) was that HUFS has a good lecture practice and system for foreign students (Zbyr Iryna, 2021), which enabled easy identification of changes in the educational method during the pandemic and the effective educational method.

The sample size was 140. Eight questionnaire responses, which were not sufficient enough or had an error, were excluded. Their preferences among three educational methods provided by the HUFS during the pandemic, namely the online educational method (OEM), face-to-face educational method (FEM), and

online face-to-face educational method (OFEM) were examined, which was later supplemented by the qualitative survey about the reason they chose the method. Based on the results, we surveyed the most preferred educational method after the end of the pandemic to track changes in the preferred method.

The purpose of the questionnaire survey was to identify the most effective educational method for foreign students during the pandemic and prepare for a post-pandemic world. It obtained information about how the OEM was being received at a time when the FEM, which used to be taken for granted, could not be provided; whether it could replace the FEM, or whether they preferred a hybrid of the two methods.

Sample: Studying in Korea during the pandemic

How are Chinese students in Korea holding up during the ongoing pandemic? We asked them about the impact of the pandemic on them, how they came into contact with the Korean culture, what they were doing at home, and how they communicated with their family, friends, and school. We also asked them about the effective educational method during the pandemic in addition to studying in a foreign country where everything feels unfamiliar. Before finding out the effective educational method, we surveyed what their life was like.

Table 1. The impact of the pandemic on one’s life (n=132)

| Category | % | | | |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. How does it affect your learning? | ① Negative (48.1) | ② No impact (40.8) | ③ Positive (10.6) | ④ Others (-) |
| 2. How has your Korean proficiency changed? | ① Better (8.8) | ② No change (42.5) | ③ Worse (47.5) | ④ Others (-) |
| 3. How do you feel now? | ① Depressed (18.3) | ② Lost interest in learning (23.3) | ③ Lack of communication (48.3) | ④ Others (-) |
| 4. What makes you the most uncomfortable while studying in Korea? | ① Taking classes (29.3) | ② Housing (26.5) | ③ Meeting friends (22.9) | ④ Eating (21.2) |

Table 1 shows that Chinese students are greatly affected by the pandemic. To begin with, the largest percentage of the students said it had a negative impact on learning (48.1%), and subsequently, 47.5% responded that their Korean proficiency got “worse” during the pandemic. In other words, Chinese students perceived the impact of the pandemic on their learning as “not positive” since there were fewer opportunities to meet friends or Koreans, which led to poorer Korean proficiency.

As a result, Chinese students had “a lack of communication” (48.3%), “lost interest in learning” (23.3%), and even felt “depressed” (18.3%). They lost interest in learning and felt depressed due to the collapse of a normal life where they would otherwise have attended classes on campus, met friends, found references in the library, and engaged in cultural activities during leisure time (Lee, Kim & Kim, 2021). A relational network lost due to a lack of contact and communication adversely affected their life while studying in Korea.

We wanted to know what made them feel the most uncomfortable (currently). They felt the most uncomfortable about “taking classes” (29.3%), followed by “housing” (26.5%), “meeting friends” (22.9%), and “eating” (21.2%). They felt quite uncomfortable as face-to-face classes were banned and replaced by online ones. Additionally, they had difficulties in terms of housing as most Chinese students lived outside the campus and paid monthly rent due to shortage in dormitory rooms.

To delve into the life of Chinese students during the pandemic, we asked about their contact with the Korean culture and we wanted to find out how they spent time at home. After conducting a quantitative survey with six questions, we analyzed the results.

Table 2. Life at home and contact with the Korean culture (n=132)

| Category | % | | | |
|--|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. How often are you in contact with the Korean culture? | ① More often (13.6) | ② No change (42.4) | ③ Less often (43.9) | ④ Others (-) |
| 2. How do you come in contact with the Korean culture? | ① TV (6.8) | ② Internet (82.8) | ③ Movies (6.5) | ④ Others (3.8) |
| 3. How often do you go out? | ① More often (5.3) | ② No change (21.2) | ③ Less often (73.5) | ④ Others (-) |
| 4. Why do you go out? | ① To eat (38.4) | ② To meet friends (35.8) | ③ To exercise (10.4) | ④ Others (15.3) |
| 5. Do you use online platforms more often? | ① More often (49.2) | ② No change (48.5) | ③ Less often (2.3) | ④ Others (-) |
| 6. What do you usually do at home? | ① Learning (33.4) | ② Internet browsing (35.7) | ③ Chatting (21.5) | ④ Others (9.3) |

Table 2 showed that Chinese students came in contact with the Korean culture less often than before (43.9%) and went out less often (73.5%) during the pandemic. Social distancing and a ban on gathering of five people or more had an impact on how often they went out, which resulted in less contact with the

Korean culture. Chinese students came in contact with the Korean culture mostly through the Internet (82.8%). While some used TV (6.8%) and movies (6.5%), the percentages of such students were not high. The biggest reason they went out was “to eat” (38.4%), followed by “to meet friends” (35.8%) and “to exercise” (10.4%).

Chinese students spent the most time “Internet browsing,” while they stayed at home (35.7%), followed by learning (33.4%), or chatting with friends (21.5%). Furthermore, as they went out less often due to fear of COVID-19, they bought more products online than earlier (49.2%).

Table 3. Who and how to communicate during the pandemic? (n=132)

| Category | % | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Do you communicate online more often? | ① More often (41.5) | ② No change (39.2) | ③ Less often (19.2) | ④ Others (-) | |
| 2. How do you communicate with your family? | ① Mobile phone (8.6) | ② Text message (5.2) | ③ Internet video call (84.5) | ④ Others (1.7) | |
| 3. How often do you contact your family? | ① Every day (29.3) | ② 1–2 times a week (41.4) | ③ 1–2 times every 2 weeks (20.7) | ④ 1–2 times a month (1.7) | ⑤ Others (6.9) |
| 4. How do you communicate with your friends? | ① Mobile phone (7.8) | ② Email (6.5) | ③ Text message (53.7) | ④ Internet video call (25.4) | ⑤ Others (6.6) |
| 5. How often do you contact your friends? | ① Every day (12) | ② 1–2 times a week (34.7) | ③ 1–2 times every 2 weeks (22.7) | ④ 1–2 times a month (25.3) | ⑤ Others (5.3) |
| 6. How do you contact school staff? | ① Mobile phone (6.6) | ② Email (72.4) | ③ Text message (13.2) | ④ Internet video call (6.6) | ⑤ Others (1.3) |
| 7. Who do you consult about difficulties in Korea? | ① Chinese family (33.3) | ② Chinese friends (12.3) | ③ Korean friends (9.2) | ④ Chinese people in Korea (33.3) | ⑤ Others (11.8) |
| 8. Who do you consult about difficulties in China? | ① Chinese family (39) | ② Chinese friends (24.8) | ③ Korean friends (4.6) | ④ Chinese people in Korea (29.4) | ⑤ Others (2.1) |

Chinese students communicated with those close to them more often since the outbreak of the pandemic than before (41.5%). They contacted their family in China often, i.e., 1–2 times a week (41.4%) or every day (29.3%). Meanwhile, they contacted friends in Korea 1–2 times a week (34.7%), 1–2 times a month (25.3%), and 1–2 times every 2 weeks (22.7%), which was less often than contacting their family. While they used the Internet video call services the most as means of communicating with their family (84.5%), they used text messages to contact their friends (53.7%). Furthermore, they used emails the most to contact the HUFs staff (72.4%). In the qualitative survey on why they used such means of communication, they responded that they tended to choose video call to contact their family even if it cost more, they used less expensive text messages for prompt contact with friends, and they used email where they could write longer messages to contact school staff if there was no urgency.

In the meantime, while Chinese students showed some differences in the question about who they consulted about difficulties in Korea (Chinese family with 33.3%, Chinese people in Korea with 33.3%) or in China (Chinese family with 39%, Chinese people in Korea with 29.4%), they preferred their Chinese family and people the most. This can be attributed to the fact that the Chinese students grew up in a family-oriented culture (Moon & Nam, 2018) and trust Chinese people more due to a high sense of nationalism (Kim & Jeong, 2004; Yu, 2005; Oh, 2001; Park, 2003).

Results

To compare the educational method most preferred during and after the pandemic, we surveyed their preference about three educational methods for a month from March 10 to April 10, 2021.

Table 4. What is your most preferred educational method during the pandemic? (n=132)

| Category | % |
|----------|-------|
| OEM | 75.8% |
| FEM | 8.3% |
| OFEM | 15.9% |

The Chinese students preferred the OEM the most during the pandemic (75.8%), followed by the OFEM (15.9%), and the FEM (8.3%). It seems that such

results are attributable to school shutdowns and a ban on classroom classes. Then, did Chinese students choose the OEM because of the pandemic? Or because the OEM has its own advantages? To find out, we examined why they preferred the educational methods and what type of classes they desired.

Table 5. Why do you prefer the OEM and FEM, and what type of class do you want? (n=132)

| Category | | % | | | |
|----------|---------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| OEM | Why? | ① Learn repeatedly (89.2) | ② Learn at home (34.2) | ③ Save time to commute (9.5) | ④ Others (7.0) |
| | What type of class? | ① Discussion class (3.5) | ② Lecture class (76.9) | ③ Discussion class (19.6) | ④ Others (-) |
| FEM | Why? | ① Highly effective learning (59.5) | ② Ask questions (13.1) | ③ Meet friends (21.2) | ④ Others (6.1) |
| | What type of class? | ① Discussion class (6.1) | ② Lecture class (57.6) | ③ Presentation class (6.1) | ④ Discussion-lecture class (30.3) |

The most important reason they preferred online education was they could “learn repeatedly” (89.2%), and they preferred “lecture class” (76.9%) the most as a type of class. Total 68.2% of the students evaluated their Korean proficiency as “Intermediate” and 25% as “high,” and they responded that they had “no major difficulty in attending class.” However, it is conjectured that it would be difficult for them to understand their classes 100% by listening just one time since they are foreigners (Nam, Kim & Kim, 2016). Their responses show that the OEM has “an advantage where you can repeat the parts you cannot understand” it has a feature that supplements the limitations of the traditional FEM. The reason almost all of them wanted “lecture class” (76.9%) as a type of class instead of “discussion class” (3.5%) seems to be based on their difficulties in understanding Korean classes.

The qualitative survey asked “what would be the limitations with the OEM.” Many of the students quoted “it had a lower level of learning efficiency” (68.2%) and “you cannot meet friends in person” (30.8%) as reasons, demonstrating that they clearly recognized limitations with the OEM, instead of blindly preferring the OEM. We then asked about their satisfaction with online classes currently provided by the HUFS.

Table 6. How do you take the HUFs online education classes, and how satisfied are you? (n=180)

| Category | % | | | |
|--|-------------------------|------------------|---|----------------------|
| 1. What device do you use to take the HUFs online classes? | ① Desktop (6.7) | ② Laptop (77) | ③ iPad (13.9) | ④ Smart-phone (2.4) |
| 2. What medium do you use to take the HUFs online classes? | ① Zoom (11.6) | ② WebEx (74.3) | ③ Skype (3.4) | ④ YouTube (10.6) |
| 3. How satisfied are you with the HUFs online classes? | ① Very satisfied (18.3) | ② Satisfied (55) | ③ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (25.8) | ④ Dissatisfied (0.8) |

Chinese students mostly used a laptop (77%) or iPad (13.9%) to take online classes provided by the HUFs, and they had a high level of satisfaction. Those who said they were “very satisfied” (18.3%) and “satisfied” (55%) accounted for 73.7%, while those who said they were “dissatisfied” accounted for only 0.8%. As the HUFs has many foreign language departments and is well-equipped with learning programs for foreign students, it seems to provide an effective educational method even during the unique circumstance of a pandemic.

Regarding the medium, the students used WebEx (74.3%), Zoom (11.6%), and YouTube (10.6%). The reason why the HUFs faculty members often use WebEx and Zoom is that they can deliver a lecture in real time, conduct class by groups, and engage in two-way communication, instead of one-way knowledge transfer. While YouTube has an advantage where it allows students to repeat recorded videos, it provides limited communication and is therefore used not very often.

We asked Chinese students, who experienced the OEM during the pandemic, what would be the most effective educational method for them after the end of the pandemic.

Table 7. What would be the most effective educational method for you after the end of the pandemic? (n=132)

| Category | During the pandemic (%) | After the end of the pandemic (%) |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| OEM | 75.8% | 18.3% |
| FEM | 8.3% | 45.1% |
| OFEM | 15.9% | 36.6% |

The students chose the FEM (45.1%) as the most effective educational method after the end of the pandemic. Given that 36.6% chose the OFEM and 18.3% the

OEM, it seems that they began to recognize the necessity and effectiveness of the OEM. This phenomenon was further confirmed by the qualitative survey question “Do you want to see the OEM expand after the pandemic?” Answering this question, 46.2% of the respondents said “yes.” Furthermore, considering that the percentage of students who wanted the OFEM increased from 15.9% during the pandemic to 36.6% after the end of the pandemic, and only 19.3% did not want the OEM expansion, it would be necessary to expand the OEM.

The survey results revealed that while Chinese students studying in the HUFs chose the FEM as the most effective educational method after the end of the pandemic, they also wanted to see the OEM expand. As an increasing number of students prefer the OFEM and the OEM, the OEM is likely to emerge as one of the main educational methods in near future.

Conclusion

We have examined the life of Chinese students studying in the HUFs during the pandemic and surveyed about the most effective educational method. While Chinese students preferred the OEM (75.7%) most during the pandemic, they wanted to go back to the FEM after the end of the pandemic (45.1%). Nevertheless, they sought the OFEM (34.5%) before the expansion of the OEM, instead of rapidly shifting to the OEM.

Regarding why they preferred the OEM, “attending classes anywhere, anytime,” “learning while doing a part-time job,” and “reduction in the risk of infection” were cited as reasons. The reasons they wanted to go back to the FEM after the end of the pandemic were ability to “meet friends and improve their Korean proficiency,” “more opportunities to experience the Korean culture,” and ability to “ask questions in person and have them solved.”

With the emergence of mobile devices and the increasing availability of free communication software programs like WeChat, online communication has expanded, increasing opportunities to access the Korean culture through TV, Internet, and YouTube. Additionally, as the OEM enables two-way communication, the effectiveness of the OEM is expected to increase in the future once an environment where students can ask questions freely is established.

The FEM was taken for granted before the pandemic, and the OEM was an educational method used mostly by online universities. As the OEM became common during the pandemic, however, this survey showed that students recognized its advantages, demonstrating its potential as an alternative to the FED. With more

content and better two-way communication online, preferences for the OEM are expected to increase in the coming days.

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