

Study abroad: are expectations of Chinese students different?

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Abstract: In terms of globalization, students' mobility has become even more important. A large international survey was carried out in order to monitor and compare the willingness of students to study abroad (higher education). Students were examined particularly according to their expectations and fears about studying abroad. Also motivating factors and influencers were taken in account.

This contribution aims at outlining the most important differences between Chinese students and students from other countries. The findings resulting from this research also has practical implications – for example in the management and marketing of universities (how to attract foreign students, how to create their segmentation, how to tailor the conditions, etc.). Chinese students can according to the comparison with students from other countries determine how to create their competitive advantage on the labour market (for example based on foreign work experience).

Key Words: Higher education; study abroad; expectations and fears; international survey; Chinese students.

1. Introduction

Most countries have had to face the transition to a knowledge based economy. This involves also sharing knowledge in international surroundings of a global economy.

Study abroad programs provide young citizens with cognitive and affective competencies necessary for them to thrive in a global economy, while concurrently providing the nation with a citizenry that is economically competitive and politically savvy; with the necessary skills for the maintenance of national interests, security, and the ability to effectively respond to political instability, including the threats of terrorism [3].

Study abroad also ensures that nobody can be discriminated on the basis of race, colour, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, or age.

There are many important higher education institutions which organize study abroad for their students, for example “The Harvard Summer Program in Beijing“, also called Harvard-Beijing Academy (HBA), which gives Chinese language students the opportunity to explore this richly historic city while participating in intensive language instruction [1].

Study abroad has often been a part of national policy. In the USA when formulating a national educational policy, attention must be given to developing foreign training. Study abroad and foreign training serves “the national interest” [4].

This contribution aims to analyse the basic differences between Chinese students and students from other countries from the point of view of being willing to study abroad. It also offers an innovative managerial approach for higher education institutions.

2. Methodology

The research was carried out during the period from April to December 2010 thorough 6 different countries (Belarus, Greece, Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia and China). Questionnaires (consisting of 26 questions) were distributed. The research sample consists of 1093 students in four fields of study: Social Sciences,

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Technical Sciences, Natural Sciences and Art. Also all levels of studies were represented: Bachelor, Master and Doctoral level. Gender structure – 62% of females. The average age of students was 20.87 years.

The statistical processing was done by means of methods implemented in the statistical system SPSS, namely ANOVA Test and Mann-Whitney Test. This methodology was chosen according to the recommendations of various authors [2], [5] or [6].

All the hypothesis tests were conducted at significance level 0.05.

3. Data processing and findings

	Test Statistics			
	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
15.family (1-5)	137316,000	320631,000	-0,196	0,844
15.example (1-5)	121069,500	301369,500	-2,419	0,016
15.staff (1-5)	122504,500	221294,500	-2,154	0,031
15.media (1-5)	119799,000	219480,000	-2,757	0,006
16.culture (1-5)	102016,500	282917,500	-6,571	0,000
16.langua (1-5)	104255,000	286361,000	-6,830	0,000
16.prestig (1-5)	125402,000	221982,000	-1,431	0,152
16.practice (1-5)	118773,000	214914,000	-2,691	0,007
16.diplo (1-5)	103605,500	284506,500	-6,306	0,000
16.job (1-5)	132032,500	231267,500	-0,127	0,899
16.live (1-5)	130080,500	308583,500	-0,014	0,989
17.family (1-5)	122904,000	219484,000	-2,031	0,042
17.friends (1-5)	125634,000	305934,000	-0,924	0,355
17.country (1-5)	111699,000	207840,000	-4,118	0,000
17.costs (1-5)	131097,500	229443,500	-,582	0,561
17.langua (1-5)	106597,500	204943,500	-5,848	0,000
17.religi (1-5)	90247,500	184642,500	-8,633	0,000

Table 1: Results of Mann-Whitney Test for issues “expectations” and “fears”

As seen in p-value in the Mann-Whitney test (grey marked in Table 1), it can be maintained that Chinese students answered differently in comparison to students from other countries.

	Descriptive Statistics			
	CHI		other	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
15.example (1-5)	2,77	1,165	2,62	1,209
15.staff (1-5)	2,78	1,178	2,97	1,241
15.media (1-5)	2,87	1,150	3,11	1,290
16.culture (1-5)	2,14	1,187	1,71	1,023
16.langua (1-5)	1,95	1,118	1,59	1,056
16.practice (1-5)	2,00	1,154	2,14	1,077
16.diplo (1-5)	2,27	1,151	1,88	1,123
17.family (1-5)	2,39	1,302	2,55	1,328
17.country (1-5)	2,49	1,245	2,80	1,207
17.langua (1-5)	2,24	1,153	2,69	1,247
17.religi (1-5)	3,11	1,328	3,82	1,303

Table 2: Characteristics of answers which differ

In Question 15 respondents recorded on the scale (1-5) the strength of influencer of their decision to study abroad (family, experience of someone else, academic staff and informative media). Question 16 focused on expectations from a studying abroad (reasons to study abroad) and the students could choose from options (also 1-5 scale): to explore another country and culture, to improve language skills (English), the opportunity to study at a prestigious school, the opportunity to go through a work practice abroad, getting a diploma recognized in all of Europe, a better position on the labor market in China after coming back and the opportunity to settle down in a foreign country. Also barriers and fears were examined (Question 17) and respondents were able to choose from options: being separated from the family, being separated from friends, security issues in the country, financial costs of the stay, language barrier and different religion.

Table 2, which involves average values of responses on issues differing (showed by test) demonstrates that Chinese students placed more emphasis on the influence of a personal example in their surroundings, influence of academic staff and also the impact of promotional materials when considering their potential study abroad.

The perceptions of family influence on the students' decision - students of various countries do not differ. Chinese students have higher expectations in the field of greater knowledge of a foreign country and its culture, learning a foreign language, study opportunities at prestigious graduate schools, and an opportunity to have practical work experience in a foreign country. Another strong expectation of Chinese students is the possibility of obtaining a diploma with Europe-wide validity (Diploma Supplement). In contrast, no higher expectations (in comparison with students from other countries) occur in the terms of better opportunities on the labor market (having experience from abroad) and no higher expectations based on the potentiality to settle down in the country of study.

When exploring the area of fears/barriers to studying abroad, Chinese students have a stronger fear of separation from their family, the security situation in the country, of language barriers and different religious convictions. On the contrary, they do not perceive differently their separation from friends and also the financial costs of the study.

In summary we can maintain that one surprising fact is that Chinese students in all responses which are significantly different from other students always feel a stronger influence and stronger fears. In none of the investigated aspects did the opposite occur.

In the next step, the survey focused on detecting differences in the family situation of Chinese students in terms of the education level of parents. For this purpose the Mann-Whitney test was used to compare medians in two groups, one of which is formed by Chinese students and the second one by students from other countries.

Mann-Whitney U	87379,000
Wilcoxon W	202339,000
Z	-11,120
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	9.9839E-29

Table 3: Results of Mann-Whitney Test on parents' education (higher education degree)

The p-value Mann-Whitney test (Table 3) indicates that the level of value for the number of university-educated parents is different for Chinese students from those from other countries.

In China, the average number of university-educated parents of students represents 0.17, in contrast to the average of 0.75 for students from other countries.

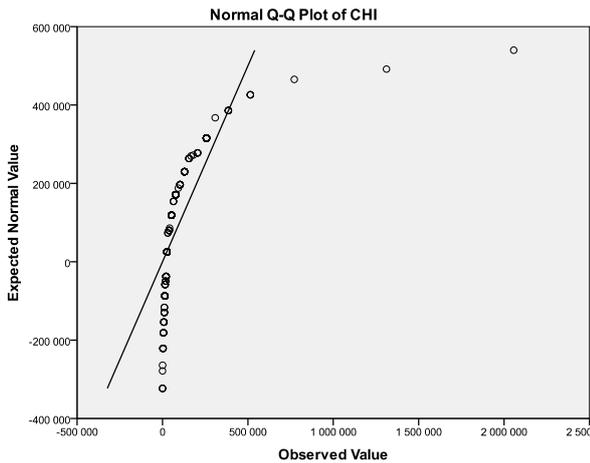


Figure 1: Normal Q-Q Plot of China

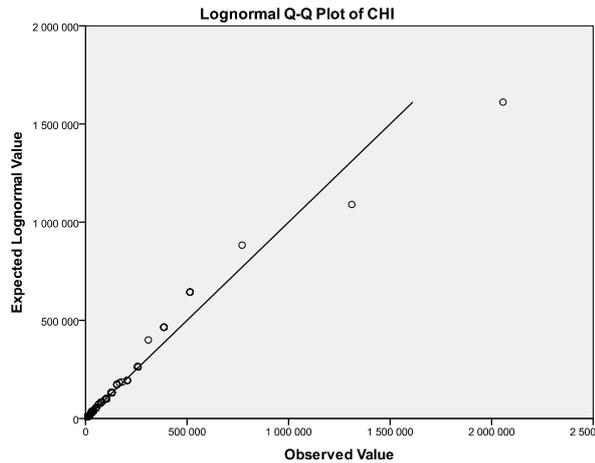


Figure 2: Lognormal Q-Q Plot of China

Furthermore, the survey endeavors to investigate whether the value of the tuition fee that the student is willing to pay for studies in the Czech Republic is the same or different in the different countries of origin of the student. Specifically, attention was paid to congruency and diversity in the behavior of Chinese students in comparison with others.

The level of tuition fee acceptable by students of individual countries showed similar characteristics. This fact can be demonstrated by a graph of values reported by students from China as shown in Figure 1. The graph displayed in Figure 2 shows the same data after logarithmic transformation. It is clear that the data are distributed approximately according to the lognormal distribution.

The level of variance in each group (created according to the country of origin) was not too divergent. Therefore, in the first phase the method ANOVA was allowed to verify the levels of tuition fees (according to logarithmic transformation) in terms of the state of origin. The variable which separated Chinese students from the others was considered as the factor. The null hypothesis was formulated as equality of mean values within the two groups; in other words – independence. The test results are shown in Table 4. The resulting p-values clearly prove that the null hypothesis was rejected; it means that Chinese students are willing to pay different tuition fees in comparison with students from other countries.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6,188E11	1	6,188E11	49,225	4.8191E-12
Within Groups	1,020E13	811	1,257E10		
Total	1,081E13	812			

Table 4: Result of ANOVA Test (searching for dependence of tuition fee level on the country of origin)

Since the conditions of ANOVA test were not completely met, the result was verified at the same time by using the Mann-Whitney nonparametric test for medians comparison; the adequacy of this method for this type of evaluation was proved [7]. The null hypothesis in both cases was formulated as the congruency of values in different groups. The test results are shown in Table 5. The resulting p-values indicate that the null hypothesis was rejected again; thus the previous result was confirmed.

Mann-Whitney U	36709,000
Wilcoxon W	136837,000
Z	-13,549
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	8.0277E-42

Table 5: Result of Mann-Whitney (searching for dependence of tuition fee level on the country of origin)

This part of the research results in the fact that students from different countries are willing to pay diverging amounts of tuition fees. Chinese students would be able to pay a higher amount compared to students from other countries.

4. Conclusions

In this part, only the most important findings are summarized:

- Statistically it was proved that Chinese students differ in their answers from students from other countries;
- Chinese students are more influenced by their parents and academic staff in comparison to other students. More intensive research would be needed to explain this fact; the survey authors assume a higher responsibility of individuals for the family (rather than lack of self-confidence);
- Expectation of benefits acquiring from work experience from abroad is much less important for Chinese students than for students from other countries. It is a very surprising finding because in Europe international work experience might be the crucial factor in being offered a good job. In Europe work experience (especially from abroad) has an enormous significance for the future employer (proves the applicant's independence, communication skills, ability to overcome problems, strong personality to accept a challenge, readiness to solve difficult tasks, etc.);
- More than others, Chinese students (when deciding to study abroad) would view their separation from the family negatively. On the other side, separation from their friends is perceived by Chinese students at the same level as by students from other countries;
- Chinese students would be willing to pay a higher amount compared to students from other countries;
- Chinese students insist on studying at prestigious universities; they recognize a higher education institution ranking more than the others; also the requirement for Europe-wide Diploma validity is stronger.

5. Acknowledgement

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