

A Study on the Status Quo and the Prospect of the Development of Exchange Program: Based on Cases Between GDUFS and Latin American Universities

LIN Jing^{[a],*}

^[a]Faculty of European Languages and Cultures, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 12 August 2014; accepted 24 October 2014
Published online 26 November 2014

Abstract

In the context of economic and education globalization, exchange program is gradually becoming a new trend for university students' international mobility and an updated way for the communication between universities. Based on the analysis of the questionnaires collected from Spanish-major students, this paper elaborates the status quo and the prospect of the development of the exchange program between Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (hereinafter referred as "GDUFS") and Latin American universities, hoping to provide feasible suggestions for the further development and promotion of the exchange and cooperation programs with Latin American universities.

Key words: The exchange program; International cooperation and exchange; Prospect of development

Lin, J. (2014). A Study on the Status Quo and the Prospect of the Development of Exchange Program: Based on Cases Between GDUFS and Latin American Universities. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 7(3), 7-13. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/5841>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/5841>

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, exchange program is gradually becoming a new trend for university students' international mobility and an updated way for the communication between universities. As a new form and key component of universities' international exchange and cooperation, it is also an important method for universities to reform talents

cultivation, to nurture international talents, to improve students' competitive edge worldwide and to achieve university's goal of strategic innovation.

In the first issue of Peking University Education Review in 2005, The Contribution of International Students' Mobility to Human Development and Global Understanding points out that "International students' mobility (to have foreign students study domestically and vice versa) has become an essential index of the extent of higher education internationalization." Meanwhile, the Medium and Long-Term Plan for National Education Reform and Development (2010-2012) also notes that "the deepening of education opening-up should be achieved by strengthening international exchange and cooperation, introducing high-quality education resources and elevating exchange level" and "we should expand the inter-governmental mutual recognition of degree and diploma and support faculty exchange, credit transfer as well as degree joint-granting." Various policies have indicated the development direction of international exchange and become the background and guidance of universities' exchange program. In Global Summit of University Presidents 2011 APRU 15th Annual President Meeting, the first article of Tsinghua Consensus is "with the background of globalization, we should further strengthen cooperation and exchange between universities in different regions. Through international cooperation, we should reinforce students' exchange, especially in the promotion of young students' mutual understanding and inclusiveness." At the annual meeting, China's State Councilor Liu Yandong also said in her keynote speech that international exchange and cooperation should serve as a bridge for universities' communication globally. Hence, to discuss the development and the trend of universities' exchange program is of pragmatic necessity and value.

Based on the exchange programs between GDUFS and Latin American Universities, this paper examines the status quo, significance and the problems of GDUFS'

exchange programs, analyzes the development potential and prospect for the programs with the result of questionnaires assigned to Spanish-majored students. It also proposes feasible suggestions and methods to further promote the exchange programs.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1 General Introduction of GDUFS's Exchange Programs

Based on the agreements signed with its project partners, GDUFS will send its students to study abroad for one semester or one year, and vice versa. Students are only required to pay tuition fees to the university that sends them out; they will also have to pay their living expenses, accommodation and transportation fees on their own. Students don't have to worry about the problems with their degree and diploma. Credits earned abroad should be transferred into the students' original university. The university's Office of International Cooperation and Exchange is in charge of the exchange program, and its main responsibilities are coordination and management of program. The Academic Affairs Office is mainly responsible for exchange students' course selection, credit mutual recognition and registration issues. Meanwhile, the school is responsible for exchange students' recommendation and evaluation, curriculum's verification and adjustment, credit mutual recognition and reports the above mentioned points to Academic Affairs Office for approval. And the exchange program should adhere to the principles of openness, fairness, free application and merit-oriented selection.

Upholding the motto of Pursuit of Integrity, Practice and Cross-cultural Learning, with distinctive features of internationalization, the university defines its vision as achievement of internationalization in the realms of its faculty, students, research and management. The mission of GDUFS's exchange programs is to foster high-caliber global citizens who are well-versed in international norms, excellent in ethical cultivation, competent in their chosen fields of study, strong in cross-cultural communications and hands-on creativity, and ready to engage in global competition and cooperation. Hence, students with overseas study experience can meet the demands of globalization development, which is one of the evidences of our university's efforts of globalization. By far, GDUFS has signed cooperation agreement with 201 universities and academic and cultural institutions, from more than 40 countries and regions like, the U.S., the U.K., France, Thailand, Spain, Chile and Mexico, with a total of 52 exchange programs.

1.2 The Status Quo of the Development of Exchange Programs between GDUFS and Latin American Universities

GDUFS launched its international exchange programs with Latin American universities with the facility of

China Scholarship Council's program in 2006. In the same year, the country sent 98 Spanish-majored students to study in Cuba, and our university won 10 places at the University of Havana in Cuba from October 2006 to June 2007. This laid the foundation and direction for the exchange programs between GDUFS and Latin American universities.

Currently, GDUFS has signed 4 exchange-program agreements with four Latin American universities, namely Universidad Santo Tomás in Chile, Autonomous University of Puebla in Mexico, Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola in Peru and La Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Columbia. In the past few years, the university's Department of Spanish has sent about 16 students to these universities to participate in a one-year exchange study tour every year. This year, Universidad de Buenos Aires in Argentina also intends to establish cooperation relationship with GDUFS so as to promote mutual development.

2. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXCHANGE PROGRAMS WITH LATIN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

The author has conducted an open-ended questionnaire survey among 16 Spanish-majored students who has participated in exchange programs in Latin American countries. In this survey, every student shares their experience of study abroad, feelings of their study tour, achievements and findings. Generally, this one-year exchange experience has drawn positive impact on their life which is as expected.

2.1 Conducive to the Students' Personal and Academic Development

What impressed the author most according to the survey is that the students have become more mature spiritually and have got a deeper understanding of life, and they cherish the one-year experience of study abroad. They are grateful for the opportunity they've got and the right decision they've made. During their overseas study, they got the opportunity to discover themselves, to enhance their confidence, to increase their independence as well as to foster their tolerance and inner-peace. When it comes to difficulties, students find it memorable and meaningful to overcome these difficulties. And this exchange experience offered them a chance to have access to rich cultures on Latin American campuses and learn various teaching methods. They have also got to know excellent teachers and students, experienced advantages and features of different universities, all of which has enriched their lives and expanded their vision and their way of thinking.

2.2 Promotion of the Development of GDUFS' Internationalization

With the development of exchange programs, GDUFS and Catholic University of Santa María in Peru signed a contract to establish a Confucius Institute jointly in December 2007. Besides teaching, the Confucius Institute also carried out various levels of Chinese language training and Chinese culture promotion. In 2010, it held its first HSK successfully and became one of the few HSK examination centers in South America. Regarding the Confucius Institute as a platform, both universities have launched cooperation and communication in various fields; both the faculty and students get constant development in aspects of teaching, research and culture learning. Activities' diversification reflects in winter camps, Chinese song singing contest, photography exhibition, seminars, volunteers' language training, etc..

In April 2012, Sino-Chile Research Center was established under Guangdong Research Institute for International Strategies of GDUFS, which marks a new stage for the cooperation between GDUFS and Universidad Santo Tomás in Chile. Both sides took this opportunity to give full play of our university's competitive edge in foreign languages and economics & trade disciplines, to promote cooperation in research and teaching incessantly, to expand the impact of Six-Party Forum, to increase academic visit, lecturing as well as student's exchange.

As is seen, the exchange program is conducive to cooperation and communication between GDUFS and Latin American Universities in many aspects, which helps to create a new prospect for GDUFS to participate in international competition and cooperation.

3. THE PROSPECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXCHANGE PROGRAMS BETWEEN GDUFS AND LATIN AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

3.1 A New Trend Against the Background of Economic Globalization

With the rapid development of globalization, the internationalization of universities is an inevitable result of the economic globalization and integration. In the context of globalization, the mobility of university students has become an important indicator of the extent to which higher education reaches. An increasing number of university students are taking part in the mobility and students can go abroad in various forms. As one form of the international mobility, the exchange of university students is increasingly taking a prominent place, which becomes a new trend for international mobility.

In the past few years, China has attached great importance to the cooperation and communication with major Latin American countries. Two-side strategic partnership has been strengthened and close consultation with Latin American major emerging markets has been maintained. In the long run, both sides are highly complementary in economy and trade, and shared benefits are increasingly expanding. All these multi-field and multi-level development provide a broader space for China and Latin American cooperation. These favorable factors provide a solid and positive educational environment, cooperation support and development condition for our students' further interaction and exchange with Latin American countries. With distinctive features of internationalization, GDUFS has a deep insight into the development trend of today's education, pays great attention to the planning of international talents competition strategy and is thoroughly aware of the importance of the exchange program in the Knowledge Economy Era. Therefore, with the influence of the establishment of the exchange and cooperation platforms with Latin American Universities, GDUFS will further promote the cooperation with them and support two-way faculty and student exchange so as to establish a long-lasting relationship. In achieving this long-term and sustainable goal, we must make use of the opportunities we have and face the challenges we may encounter.

3.2 The Trend of a Diversified University-Running

Chinese universities consider cross-border students' interaction and exchange programs as key indicators of education internationalization, and are expanding its scale through diversified school-running patterns at present. With the deepening of education reform, school-running patterns will be more diversified and enriched. With the improvement of living standards, people also increase their education demands and diversify their choices. A diversified school-running pattern is beneficial for nurturing talents with all-around gifts and special expertise.

Sino-foreign cooperation in running school is a new form of cultural exchange since China's reform and opening up. We have many forms of joint schools which provide opportunities for our students to study in foreign universities without normal application process. In order to make real the globalization of our university's education, GDUFS makes every effort to explore a more effective method for international educational cooperation and introduce high quality educational resources to GDUFS; the university also makes full use of the advanced education management and integrates it with its own pattern, forming a new education pattern. There are two major patterns of cooperation: co-running school with foreign universities which means one party offers faculty and curriculum while the other provides classrooms and

teaching facilities; in the other pattern, both sides provide courses and teachers and cultivate students jointly and offer students dual degrees from both universities. GDUFS has signed cooperative projects as follows “3.5+0.5” joint education program for Thai-majored undergraduates with Srinakharinwirot University in Thailand; GDUFS has also cooperated with British Lancaster University, establishing “GDUFS-Lancaster University” in Foshan City. GDUFS receives a strong support from the government to help integrating advanced education management theory, talent nurturing and discipline settings into education planning, promoting university-university cooperation. Besides the cooperation mode of “2+2” and “3+1”, GDUFS and Latin American universities are trying to find a curriculum system and a management system that suit both sides, making clear their education targets and planning our student-oriented education theory, meeting students’ demand. What’s more, GDUFS makes full use of its advantage in Chinese language teaching, attracting more Latin American universities of excellence and broaden the exchange programs. All the exchange modes good for student communication and interaction, beneficial for student development are worthwhile and will be made real by signing a contact.

3.3 Students & Parents and Their Wishes & Demand

With the influence of economic globalization and education internationalization, more and more students are realizing the significance of international exchange programs and overseas study experiences. A survey conducted by www.51job.com shows that more than eighty percent of Chinese parents plan to send their children for overseas study. Parents believe that their children will have better opportunities of employment after going abroad and having excellent educational resources; they also believe that sending their children abroad will help their children to be independent, both in their daily lives and in their career. In the past two years, overseas exchange programs have become a hot topic in the consulting conferences held by GDUFS; students and parents are mostly interested in the opportunities of studying abroad, how their credits can be transformed and also about the overseas experiences, a reflection of their will and eager of going abroad for exchange programs. We have conducted a survey of 50 Spanish-majored freshmen in their willingness to study abroad and most of them wish to have opportunities to study abroad, as indicated in the Figure 1.

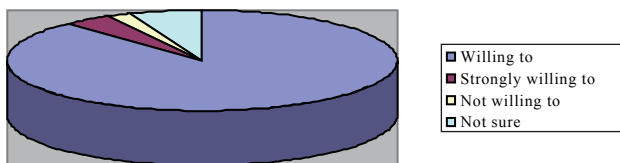


Figure 1
The Survey Results of the Willingness to Study Abroad

Most of the respondents choose to go for overseas study in their junior or senior years for an one-year study. Sixty percent of the students believe that junior year is an ideal time for overseas exchange programs, for they’ve already mastered some basic language skills and knowledge and comparatively more mature mind and their going abroad will not affect their internship opportunities and job hunting; about twelve percent of the students prefer to go abroad in their senior year, for they believe that going abroad during that time will not affect their junior year study and they will be able to study what they like, for they have already mastered necessary language abilities; the rest twenty-eight percent of them believe that both years are OK for them to go abroad. They all believe that overseas environment provides a very good opportunity for their language practice and they will be able to be emerged in the target country and its society and culture; they will be able to actually make use of the language they are studying and broaden their horizon; they will also be able to make more friends, elevate their social skills and have different life experiences.

Students and parents all have come to realize that with an ever more competitive environment in job hunting, they believe that their overseas experience will not only help them get to know the exotic culture and create opportunities for language learning, but will also increase their chances in job hunting and even finding a job abroad. The current society has placed an ever increasing demand for graduates: students of language major will face challenges in terms of language abilities, cross-cultural communication abilities and international experiences. Sole language abilities and skills will not be able to meet the demand of economic market. Facing the pressure of locating an ideal job, many students choose to go abroad. Their experiences abroad will help to foster their abilities to live on their own and will be helpful for them to adapt to the society in the future.

3.4 Positive and Affirmative Respond to Overseas Experiences

In one of the author’s surveys, students have reached a consensus that GDUFS should establish exchange programs with more Latin American universities, like Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Universidad de Chile, Universidad Católica de Chile, Universidad de Buenos Aires and Universidad de La Habana. All the respondents believe that people in their overseas target countries are kind and free and the scenery there is uniquely beautiful; the local people there are kind-hearted and the social security conditions there are terrific. In terms of the factors on which students put more emphasis, the quality of teaching, academic environment, campus environment, curriculum settings, competitive disciplines, social security conditions, bilateral relationship with China, positive effect on personal development after going

back home and cultural and historical significance of the local university have topped all that students may have concerns.

On overseas returnee parties, students who have participated in overseas exchange programs will show what they have experienced abroad in terms of written words, photos and videos. Some students are responsible for curriculum system introduction, others will demonstrate the customs and lives of local people and still others will provide some very useful dos and don'ts for living abroad. Their experiences abroad have helped their fellow schoolmates to learn and plan their study abroad. They have experienced curiosity, excitement, bewilderment, struggle, exhaustion and expectation and they have also felt their own development during that time. Though they have suffered and even stumbled in their overseas study, they have also tasted what life should be and they have all developed positive and affirmative attitudes to their overseas study.

3.5 Real Need for Nurturing Talents of Innovation Abilities

Harvard University has five sets of requirement for its undergraduates in which one points out that students should have a broad knowledge of their own culture and other cultures and arrange their own lives with the ideas drawn from different cultures. This requirement is really demanding the quality and talent innovative students should have. The currently existing international exchange programs have provided students with opportunities to learn international cultures, to explore the new world, to think independently, to study and do research independently and to experience innovation; it also provides possibilities for the creation of a multi-academic environment, academic freedom and the reinforcement of innovation abilities.

Teachers and tutors should guide students in nurturing observation abilities, conducting social surveys and carrying out practice; students should be led to discover their own interests and specialties; they should also become familiar with the History & Culture, Economy & Trade and Social development. Based on the summary and analysis of the above mentioned factors, students should complete their planning of innovative research projects independently.

3.6 Promotion of International Exchange Programs by China Scholarship Council

In order to promote the exchange programs and cooperation between China's top universities and the world's famous universities and institutions, advocate the long-term development of diversified education, elevate students' innovation consciousness, innovation abilities and practice capabilities and cultivate international talents in all disciplines and fields, China Scholarship Council has decided to increase the support of exchange programs among undergraduate students.

For example, government-sponsored overseas study project established "International Exchange Programs for Excellent Undergraduates" in 2012. There were 226 programs in 82 universities sponsored by the government scholarship. In April, 2013, 3 programs of GDUFS were approved and 9 students were sent for overseas study; among them, there were sophomores majored in Spanish and were sent to Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla for an one-year study. Their round journey air ticket and living expenses were covered by China Scholarship Council.

In the past few years, GDUFS has made great progress in terms of student exchange programs and faculty exchange programs; the scale and standard of GDUFS's exchange programs have been greatly elevated thanks to the support and sponsorship of China Scholarship Council. While visiting GDUFS this August, Liu Jinghui, secretary general of China Scholarship Council, pointed out that the university should make full use of the opportunities provided by the government and send more students and teachers abroad for exchange and study; he also wished to have cooperation with GDUFS on some specific programs on behalf of China Scholarship Council.

3.7 The Important Role the Latin American Consulates in Guangzhou Have Played

In recent years, Latin American countries, like Mexico, Cuba, Argentina and Chile have established consulates in Guangzhou, which is playing and will play an ever important role in reinforcing the relationship between Guangzhou and Latin American countries. These consulates have maintained stable and sound relationship with GDUFS and the two sides have organized various kinds of communication activities, like visits, lectures, film-screening weeks, sending books as presents and photographic exhibitions. Therefore, GDUFS should establish relationships with more Latin American universities with the help of these consulates, promoting the university's exchange programs and establishing more cooperation platforms.

4. PROBLEMS WITH THE PROGRAMS AND SUGGESTIONS

Though there is still much potential for the cooperation between GDUFS and Latin American universities, GDUFS should be cautious in the choice of cooperation universities; while introducing excellent education resources, sound quality should be placed in the first place; the programs should meet the demand of students and also cater to the development of the university. It is suggested that GDUFS should examine whether the disciplines in the cooperation universities can match what students have learnt in GDUFS and whether the standard of curriculum and discipline settings are up

to the demand of students and GDUFS. In the past few years, students have encountered various problems, among which the match of curriculum is the biggest one. Some students have difficulties in course selection, for the disciplines in their curriculums are starkly different from those of GDUFS's and there are a few courses to select, which adds to anxieties of students. During their study abroad, students have to select course according to the compulsory courses and selective courses they have in GDUFS. Due to the course and major setting differences, students are confined and contradicted in course selection.

What's more, non-equivalence of the credits between GDUFS and Latin American universities leads to students' laziness. Some of the courses in Latin American universities are endowed with comparatively more credits than GDUFS's courses and students can select fewer courses to get more credits of GDUFS. For example, 7 points will be the full mark and 6 will be "A", which when transformed to GDUFS's system to less than 85 points; students may think it is unfair and the marks will be readjusted after coming back. Therefore, the credit transfer system will be perfected, making it fair and reasonable. GDUFS may suggest Latin American universities to credit Chinese students with the centesimal system and it will exempt Chinese students with credit transfer when coming back home and the system will be fairer and true to Chinese students.

Most of the students get to know the cooperation universities by visiting the official websites of the universities and by consulting those who have taken part in the program or by the information sharing session of the exchange programs set by GDUFS's Office of International Cooperation and Exchange; according to the survey conducted by the author, however, students have much to do to get to know and master the information of the cooperation universities. It is suggested that both sides shall have special coordinators responsible for international exchange programs; they should make use of the convenience of the Internet to provide students with useful information about the curriculum settings, campus life and accommodation. Both sides should collect feedbacks from those who have participated in the exchange programs and universities should set up special online platforms for fellow students to communicate for a better understanding of university information.

Economic burden is one major factor that has curbed and affected students from participating in the exchange programs. For example, students shall pay most of the fees (except tuition fees), like living expenses and travel expenses. The universities may have to set up new scholarship system or a study-work program to earn students some basic living cost; the universities can also raise funds from enterprises to ease the economic burden on students' families.

In the recent years, GDUFS has sent out about 16 students for exchange programs every year, but received no students from abroad. The author believes that more foreign students should be attracted to GDUFS to promote the cultural communication between different countries and different cultures, elevating the globalization of campus life; it is also suggested that both sides should set platforms for the faculty communication, which will promote the exchange and sharing of both side's research results and other resources, a significant mechanism for the campus culture and education development.

The exchange program of GDUFS adheres to the principles of openness, fairness, free application and merit-oriented selection. At the same time, the university should also instruct students to view and plan their study; parents and students should be informed that the exchange program is not the only way to study abroad and they should be made to realize the benefits of studying at home. Students will have the most courses in the junior year during their four year study in universities; they will have more field internship opportunities, preparing themselves for the job location.

CONCLUSION

Culture communication and education development are powerful driving forces for the cooperation between GDUFS and Latin American universities. Culture communication is a very crucial basis for the mutual understanding between countries. The cooperation relationship between GDUFS and Latin American universities will not only increase the development of the universities, but will at the same time promote the research of the cultures, economy, environment and politics of both sides; what's more, it also provides good study environment, practice opportunities for students, and a spur for students' development. Based on what has been discussed and studied, there is still space for the further development of the cooperation between the two sides; the cooperation mode and channel should be explored and the content of the programs could be enriched. Besides cultivating future talents, both sides can initiate faculty exchange programs, promoting the cooperation of scientific research and university level academic projects.

International mobility will not only cultivate students' cross-culture sense, but will also reinforce students' mutual understanding and mutual acknowledgement between different countries and cultures; it will also nurture students' feeling of unity and tolerance, learning to respect difference and accept individuality. During the exchange programs, universities will complement each other in terms of education resources, like disciplines with competitive edges and superior majors. Under the guidance of the discipline of "Bringing our students to the

world and bring the world for our students”, GDUFS will further perfect the exchange program system, broaden the channel and model of cooperation, promote the further and all-around development of the international exchange programs between GDUFS and Latin American universities and provide more opportunities for students to study abroad.

REFERENCES

- Dai, W. D., & Hu, W. Z., et al. (2009). *A study of the development of China's foreign language education (1949-2009)* (p.375). Shanghai, China: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Gao, X. (2006). Global exchange cooperation between universities in the context of globalization. *Tourism Tribune, (Special Edition for Human Resources and Education)*, 97.
- Liu, K. L., & Luan, Y. Y. (2009). *A study of the reform and construction of China's culture system* (p.9). Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Qin, J., Zhong, F., & Cai, J. Y. (2011). The practice and discussion of exchange programs conducted by universities. *Science and Technology Innovation Herald*, (32), 194.
- Tong, Q. W. (2008). The basic characteristics of talent with innovation capabilities and their ways of cultivating. *Experimental Technology and Management*, (5), 15.
- Wang, R. D. (2011). *University international exchange program* (Abstract). Thesis of MA, East China Normal University.