

A Study on the Current Status of Overseas Education Development and Its Impact on Importing and Exporting Countries

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Abstract. The continuous advancement of globalization has made a closer integration of higher education systems in various countries increasingly. Overseas education plays an important role in national strategies and personal growth. This article focuses on the issue of overseas education. By systematically arranging past literature, this article first outlines the facts and development status of overseas education. Subsequently, the literature that explores the impact of overseas education on importing and exporting countries, as well as international students themselves, is classified and sorted. The results show that although exporting countries face the challenge of brain drain in the process of globalization, through the implementation of reasonable and effective policy regulation and guidance, talent flow can be transformed into long-term economic and social benefits. Importing countries gain the benefits of economic growth and cultural exchange through international students. The rewards of careers and cross-cultural adaptation of international students after returning are full of challenging conclusions. Finally, this article puts forward shortages of current research and suggestions on the future research direction.

Keywords: Oversea education, literature review, brain drain, globalization.

1. Introduction

The acceleration of globalisation has led to increasingly closer links between the education systems of each country, and the influence of overseas education continues to grow. Against the backdrop of the rapid development of higher education in China, the domestic demand for higher degrees continues to grow at the same time. Data shows that from 2004 to 2023, the number of graduates enrolled in China increased from 326,000 to 1.302 million, an increase of more than four times [1]. However, despite the significant expansion of domestic graduate education, many Chinese students still choose to study abroad [2]. This phenomenon indicates that even with the rapid expansion of domestic educational resources, overseas education remains attractive. Academic qualifications are widely regarded as a means for individuals to flow upward in society and a standard for companies to quickly screen job applicants [3]. To obtain higher-quality competitive capital, improving their employment opportunities and social capital through overseas degrees has become a common choice for students.

Overseas education plays an increasingly important role in personal career development and social mobility. However, with the development of higher education at home and abroad, changes in the labour market, and global economic and political uncertainties, the value and role of overseas education are also evolving. A large number of literatures have conducted multi-level and multi-faceted research on overseas education. For example, Lai & Jung explored the personal views and motivations of international school students for overseas degrees through empirical research [2], Xu explored the impact of international schools on local education and the strengthening of the Western position in education through case studies [4], and Takeishi analysed the systematisation of modern Chinese education from the perspective of overseas education [5]. In summary, although the existing literature on overseas education has a certain breadth of research, it is mostly focused on individual issues in specific countries or regions and lacks a comprehensive and systematic literature review. Given this, it is particularly essential to summarise and review the current literature to provide a systematic foundation for future research.

This article will introduce the main causes and development process of overseas education first, then summarise the impact of overseas education on importing and exporting countries and international students revealed by existing research, and finally propose the predictions and prospects for future studies of overseas education.

2. The Current Situation and Causes of Overseas Education Development

2.1. Global Scale and Historical Development

According to data provided by UNESCO, the total number of international students in the world exceeded 6.4 million in 2021, of which about 71% chose to participate in higher education courses in high-income countries. At the same time, more than 60% of international students come from middle-income countries. For example, China (16%), India (8%), Vietnam (2%), etc. In addition, statistics from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development show that the average inflow of international higher education students as a percentage of the total number of registered students has continued to grow from 7.89% in 2014 to 10.38% in 2020. It shows that the internationalisation of higher education is deepening. High-income countries not only benefit economically but also dominate the global distribution of educational resources, while the strong demand for high-quality educational resources in middle-income countries is one of the main reasons for the flow of international students [6].

Since the 1960s, overseas study has entered a period of rapid expansion. In 1960, there were approximately 238,000 international college students worldwide. In the following 15 years, this number almost tripled. The globalisation and internationalisation of education is a sustaining and long-term growth phenomenon, reflecting the trend of the expansion of the global higher education system. During this period, thanks to the resources and expertise required by advanced higher education, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Germany became the destinations that attracted the most international college students in the world [7]. Researchers analysed the driving factors of this phenomenon by establishing a push-pull model. They studied international student mobility from the 1960s to the 1970s and believed that higher-income countries would drive students to study abroad because of their emphasis on education needs. At the same time, global trade has greatly promoted the development of overseas study. Economic ties between countries are also related to academic ties, but the political autonomy of the sending country still has a certain position in determining the flow of students [7]. As of 2021, these countries are still among the top ten in terms of total international student numbers [6]. The long-term influence of these countries with more comprehensive development in education cannot be ignored in the international higher education competition.

2.2. The Causes of Overseas Education

Many factors have abilities to influence students' choices of overseas education. According to Shanka et al., the reputation of the school, the quantity and quality of courses, and the economic cost are several important factors affecting international students' choice of institutions [8]. Li et al. further added that despite the continuous development and improvement of China's higher education capabilities, the number of students studying abroad remains high [9]. This study pointed out that institutional habits and career planning play a vital role in this process. They also pointed out that the government's long-term talent strategy has shaped social cognition that graduates with overseas degrees have greater competitiveness in the job market. This cognition has affected students' academic and career planning, and policy orientation has gradually been internalised as a part of the social system, promoting the continued growth of studying abroad [9].

It can be concluded that the factors that drive international students' decision to study abroad are diverse, including school reputation, teaching quality, and economic costs. In addition, the socioeconomic factors given in different historical periods are also different, which further affects students' decisions to study abroad.

3. Impact of Overseas Education on Importing and Exporting Countries

3.1. Impact on Exporting Countries

3.1.1 Brain drain and return

Brain drain has become a topic of great concern in the context of frequent labour mobility in the contemporary international community. This phenomenon usually refers to the migration of high-skilled labour from low-income countries to high-income countries. The traditional view is that the negative impact of brain drain on the sending country is far greater than its potential benefits. For example, Wong & Yip's research pointed out that the outflow of high-skilled workers, especially permanent immigrants, often has a profound negative impact on the sending country [10]. The analysis shows that the sending country has invested a lot of resources and costs in cultivating these groups, and these costs are difficult to recover after the outflow of them. In addition, brain drain will slow down the accumulation of human capital in the sending country, which will hurt the country's overall education level. However, with the deepening of globalisation and the further acceleration of labour mobility, this traditional view has been challenged. Bangers et al. conducted a more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon and proposed the long-term positive impact of brain drain on global human capital accumulation [11]. The study shows that the increase in the dispatch of high-skilled labour to high-income countries by the sending country will not only help improve its human capital but also promote the growth of the global human capital stock. Rasamoelison et al. also expressed a similar view in their study of the flow of international students in low- and middle-income countries [12]. They pointed out that students studying in English-speaking countries have a significant positive impact on the real GDP per capita of the sending country. For every 10% increase in the number of students studying abroad, the real GDP per capita of the sending country will increase by 0.23% on average, and this effect is relatively steady. Therefore, in a long-term perspective, "brain drain" is actually "brain gain". This view breaks through the traditional brain drain framework and provides a more comprehensive explanation. Both provide new insights by establishing a simple, comprehensive framework. However, some of the indexes and frameworks are relatively simple and cannot fully capture the broader impact of immigration on the sending country.

In summary, although the traditional view explains the negative impact of brain drain on the sending country, recent studies have gradually revealed the positive effects of brain drain from a diversified perspective. With the development of globalisation, the research background of brain drain is also changing. A re-examination of its complex mechanisms verifies the potential positive impact of brain drain on human capital accumulation and overall economic development.

3.1.2 Analysis of relevant policies for domestic students receiving overseas education

When governments are exporting students, they usually adopt three main types of policies to deal with the international education mobility of their students. First, they encourage students to complete most of their higher education in their own country to reduce the possibility of their emigration after going abroad. Second, they encourage students to return to their home country after completing their higher education abroad. Third, students who have settled overseas, take measures to enable them to continue to contribute to their home country [13]. The core principle of these policies is how to transform "brain drain" into "brain gain" to ensure that the country achieves a double improvement in the quality and quantity of human capital. Whether by encouraging local higher education or attracting returning talents, the goal of these policies is to maintain the quality of the country's talent pool in the global competition.

Take China as an example. Its policy focus is more on attracting returning talents. The "Thousand Talents Plan", launched in 2008 is a typical case. The plan attracts highly skilled talents who study and work abroad to return to China for development by providing generous salaries, sufficient laboratory funds and scientific research support. After the implementation of this policy, China's research and development expenditure increased significantly, leading the way among developing countries. In addition, the government also encourages returning talents to start businesses by

establishing overseas student entrepreneurship parks and providing tax incentives and other incentives [14]. Although the "Thousand Talents Plan" has achieved certain results, it also faces challenges. Although the plan provides competitive scientific research support and incentives, there is still a large gap in the total amount of scientific research funding, academic resources and research environment compared with developed countries. Therefore, some highly skilled talents still choose to stay in developed countries for scientific research.

It can be seen from this that it is difficult for the exporting country to completely solve similar problems only through economic incentives when its capabilities are insufficient. To truly achieve the effective return and utilisation of talents, in addition to providing competitive salaries and support, the exporting country also needs to continuously improve its overall scientific research environment and academic resource construction to enhance its attractiveness, to transform "brain drain" into "brain gain".

3.2. Impact on the Receiving Countries

The impact of international students on the receiving countries is mainly reflected in the economic aspects, participation in the labour market and the direct economic benefits to local educational institutions. First, during the period of international students' overseas education, many countries allow them to work during their studies. According to a study by the British Council on International Student Affairs, more than 50% of international students participate in the local labour market, and their labour participation rate and working hours are higher than those of local students [15]. Blackmore et al. studied the employment situation of international accounting graduates from China in the Australian labour market more specifically [16]. Their core conclusion shows that international graduates face systematic disadvantages in the Australian labour market. The main reason for this disadvantage is that employers generally believe that international graduates lack communication and language skills, which puts them at a disadvantage in the competition for employment. International graduates need to invest more resources than local students to gain a competitive advantage in the labour market. However, national policies tend to attract mid-career immigrants with skills and experience rather than newly graduated international students. These two studies reveal the plight of international students in the local labour market from a macro and micro perspective. They face more intense competition in a narrower employment space. Both studies highlight the disadvantaged position of international students in the labour market and emphasise the need for policy adjustments and skills improvement to enhance the professional competitiveness of this group.

The relevant literature reveals the dilemma faced by international students in the local labour market and analyses the reasons for this phenomenon. The identity of international students is one of the obstacles to their employment. This identity usually represents insufficient language skills, poor cultural adaptability and lack of social networks, which puts them at a disadvantage when competing with local labour. In addition, the prevalence of this prejudice further deepens the problem. It not only affects the career choices and development opportunities of international students but also hurts their social integration.

From another perspective, the contribution of international students to the income of local educational institutions is obvious. In the United States, due to funding shortages, tuition fees paid by international students have become one of the important economic pillars of public universities. For private universities, recruiting more international students not only increases economic benefits but also enhances the competitiveness of these institutions in the global education market [17]. Therefore, the impact of international students on host countries is not only reflected in their huge economic contribution and promotion of economic development but also in enriching the local social and learning environment at the cultural level, helping to build a more diverse social and academic atmosphere.

3.3. Career Returns and Cross-Cultural Role Identity of Returned International Students

Although returned international students are generally believed to be more likely to find high-paying jobs, the actual situation does not fully conform to this stereotype. Wang surveyed returned international students in the 1980s and 1990s. The results showed that although most international students in this period relied on public funds for overseas education, they faced significant problems such as a lack of research funds, low wages and benefits, and housing shortages after returning to China [18]. This shows that at least in the early 20th century, the economic return rate of returned international students was relatively low, far from the high return generally expected by society.

It can be concluded that the income of international students after returning to China is not the high-paying employment in traditional cognition but is constrained by multiple factors, including cultural differences between their home countries and foreign countries, economic environment, and academic resources. At the same time, when they reintegrate into social networks after returning home, the complex psychological and social needs caused by role identity also pose additional challenges.

4. Conclusion

This paper explores the important role played by overseas education in the context of globalisation. First, research shows that overseas education not only promotes the transnational mobility of international students but also plays a key role in improving students' professional competitiveness and promoting social mobility. Despite the increasing popularity of higher education, obtaining an overseas degree is still seen as an important way to enter the global job market. Many students have gained a broader perspective and skills through their study abroad experience, laying a solid foundation for their future career development.

Second, studying abroad not only affects individual students but also has complex multiple effects on both the exporting and importing countries. Although talent-exporting countries face the challenge of talent outflow, this phenomenon also promotes the accumulation of human capital, especially when international students return to their home countries after completing their studies, they can bring innovative ideas and new skills to their home countries. Importing countries benefit greatly in terms of economy and culture. The arrival of international students has promoted local economic growth and enriched cultural diversity. Therefore, it is particularly important to formulate reasonable education policies and talent attraction strategies, which will help balance the global talent flow and optimise the role of countries in globalisation.

Third, the performance of returned students in career returns has certain volatility, which is affected by many factors, such as the domestic economic environment, personal cultural adaptability, and social capital. Although many international students expect to achieve significant career advancement through studying abroad, the actual results often vary due to differences in different backgrounds and situations.

However, this study also has some limitations. The references of the study are mostly based on public information and statistical data, which may not fully cover the diversity of all international student groups. Students from different countries and professional backgrounds have different experiences in overseas study and career returns. Future research should expand the sample range to enhance the universality of the research. On the other hand, most of the research materials are in the form of interviews or questionnaires, which may bring a certain degree of subjectivity and are easily affected by factors such as cultural adaptability, social capital and changes in the job market. Since these factors are more effective in the short term and under specific conditions, the applicability of the research conclusions may be limited by time and environment.

In summary, this study provides preliminary insights into the impact of studying abroad on individuals, sending countries, and receiving countries, but more in-depth and diversified research is still needed in the future to further improve the understanding of this field.

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