

Barriers to Sino-Hispanic Information Exchange Through the Lens of International Education: Spanish-speaking Latin America and China

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Abstract. Nowadays, with the background of globalization, not only does international communication bloom in English-speaking regions, but also the integration in various fields between Spanish-speaking Latin America and China has occurred naturally. International education is just one of those areas. However, although the relationship between them ushers in unprecedented development opportunities, China and Spanish-speaking Latin America still face numerous obstacles, especially those barriers to Sino-Hispanic information exchange. Information exchange is an unskippable step for two sides that hope to cooperate well with considerable differences. The barriers involve many aspects, and even though some of them have received widespread attention, more problems are still underexplored. In order to address the above issues and investigate how international education between both sides could develop better, this article analyzes barriers to Sino-Hispanic information exchange, searches for causes, and countermeasures. This study concludes that the barriers are about diverse areas, including not only the language differences themselves, but also the corresponding cultural divides, educational policies differences, cognitive defenses against each other, as well as many other crucial factors behind languages. The radical reasons are respectively the asymmetry, deviations, and the decline in the willingness to exchange information. Based on such phenomena, this paper puts forward the following suggestions: A possible underlying solution to break down prejudices is actively implementing more educational programs, including language teaching and culture outreach. More communication channels should also be transparent.

Keywords: International Education, Sino-Hispanic, Spanish-speaking Latin America, Information Exchange

1. Introduction

From the perspective of social background, against the macro backdrop of the deepening implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative and the development of a China-LAC community with a shared future, it is obvious that nowadays globalization and internationalization have become

an inevitable trend in various areas. The cooperation of China and Spanish-speaking Latin Americans in the field of international education is also growing increasingly.

However, in numerous scholarly articles, there are also several useful research results showing some problems between China and Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, which may affect the effective exchange of educational information. Lu's analysis also indicates that China's cooperation under the "Belt and Road" framework is providing a new path for sustainable development in Latin America, but it also faces the challenges of squeezing governance space and geopolitical risks [1]. This view illustrates many diverse influencing factors of information exchange. On one hand, it means the macro context of policies could occupy a key position. Suitable policies will affect the development of the regions communicated with, through which the views of their people on their partner, where the policies are issued, may also be changed. It will modify their willingness to exchange. On the other hand, there are still several challenges, like governance space and geopolitical risks. These objective deficiencies can also create cognitive defenses, affecting the willingness to exchange information, too.

The social background and so many scientific research achievements together illustrate the inevitability of a closer relationship between the two sides in recent years, as well as the objective existence of various information exchange barriers. Even if there have been numerous useful studies on this topic, their contents often focus more on one side's individual conditions and situations, ignoring more mutual influences and sometimes focalize international education area less, still with enough room for improvement.

Therefore, this study will discover more specific aspects of barriers to Sino-Hispanic information exchange between China and Latin America through the lens of international education. From three parts, including the cultural divides, educational policies differences, and cognitive defenses against each other, this article aims to find the root problems. From the other three parts, including the asymmetry of information exchange, deviations of information exchange, and the decline in the willingness of information exchange, this study will also explore their radical causes. After that, corresponding suggestions and conclusions are going to be provided.

2. Problems in information exchange and manifestations of contradictions

2.1. Cultural divides

Cultural divides refer to the estrangement, misunderstanding, or antagonism between groups with different cultural backgrounds due to differences in values, beliefs, behavioral norms, and ways. They often hinder effective information exchange and mutual understanding.

Wang points out that there is a key missing link in China-Latin America, which is consistent with the findings of the research based on Americas Barometer and Pew Global Attitudes Survey [2]. This missing link means that although Latin Americans generally recognize China's economic influence, their evaluation of China's soft power is limited, showing a deep cultural gap. For a long time, under the framework of Western cultural propaganda, stereotypes about China have always existed, leading to resistance to information exchange. Another article by Miguel Carreras has also demonstrated such a viewpoint, especially in the field of international education [3].

In addition, the study of Ran has discussed the comparison of Chinese and Spanish teaching in international education, especially the language teaching [4]. It is the cornerstone of information exchange. Since the language is the most basic tool of communication, and numerous expressions have cultural comprehension bias, it may also lead to cultural divides. In other words, language is just one part of cultural divides. At the same time, language teaching is also one part of international

education, which needs multicultural integration, cross-cultural communication ability, and localization adaptation. Every link of them involves information exchange, which in turn affects the exchange of information.

2.2. Differences in educational policies

Educational policies differences refer to systematic differences in educational goals, resource allocation, curriculum settings, evaluation standards, and some other policy-levels between different countries, regions, or groups. They often reflect differences in social values, economic conditions, and political orientation.

According to a literature review of international students in China by Meng and their companions, there are significant differences in the experience and expectations of students from various regions with different sources [5]. It suggests the influence of the regional policies background on the learning process. Every student from different regions of the world has been exposed to different educational policies for many years from an early age, resulting in uneven access to educational resources and experience. At the same time, their expectations for the communication country are also limited by their own country's educational policies, which also limit the information exchange in the process of studying. The situation shows an asymmetry of information exchange that has existed since the very beginning.

Wang's research reveals that the internationalization of higher education in Latin America also faces challenges, such as a "passive-reactive" approach [6]. This signifies the lack of enough motivation and policy coordination, even sometimes showing a bit of conservatism. The loss of enthusiasm also leads to a disconnect between academic theory and practical application. This kind of passive attitude, with the above regional nature of different policies, together causes regional countries to portray a different picture and different strategic priorities.

Some studies show that the internationalization process of Spanish-speaking Latin Americans is uneven [7,8]. At the same time, there are also several dilemmas as a study abroad destination. Actually, the unevenness is manifested in these aspects. One study clearly points out that Latin America faces three major dilemmas in the international student education market [9]. To sum up, there are few enrollment channels, loss of students, and language barriers. Such dilemmas are all primary barriers to Sino-Hispanic information exchange.

2.3. Cognitive defenses against each other

The push-pull model proposed by Wen and Hu points out that although the reputation of educational quality and economic development of China are the main "pulls", the recognition as the "push" of contemporary China has failed to be an effective attraction [10]. This provides a theoretical framework for this study to analyze one of the most important and deep motivations of student mobility: recognition defenses against each other. Just as it is mentioned above in the cultural divides part, there are misunderstandings between the two sides. Because of this, cognitive defenses against each other come into being.

For instance, there is a declining willingness to learn languages learning. Interviews with Colombian and Mexican universities confirm that lack of fluency in a second language is seen by managers as one of the biggest barriers to internationalization [11]. Without such a useful and basic communication function, the information exchange in the international education area naturally becomes quite difficult. And this kind of barrier is just caused by the refusal to communicate from cognitive defenses.

Another example is systematic critical reflection. The research by Chen and Xue highlights that heterogeneity in Sino-Latin American people-to-people information exchange often leads to "mutual misinterpretation" [12]. Some Spanish-speaking Latin American media, frequently influenced by some negative narratives, tend to perpetuate stereotypes about China. This situation not only demonstrates the cognitive defenses but also reveals insufficient transparency in several channels of information exchange.

At the same time, another important thing that should also be included is that cooperation path dependence comes from cognitive defenses. A study of Mexico reveals a long-term dependence on South-South Cooperation [13]. Spanish-speaking Latin America trusts economic cooperation more than international cooperation in higher education, so it turns to depend on talking about cooperation through a path without cognitive defenses, which has proven to be safe.

3. Analysis of causes from an information exchange perspective

3.1. Asymmetry of information exchange

Information exchange asymmetry refers to the imbalance in the quantity, quality, or power of information held by all participants in communication, resulting in one participant in a position of information superiority or control. Through those problems above, such a cause could be found.

Based on in-depth interviews with Confucius Institute teachers in many countries, Yan Yaping and Xing Jingjing systematically sort out some teaching problems of international Chinese education in Latin America caused by asymmetry [14]. First, those resources of teachers are asymmetric, which include a shortage, instability, and a language barrier. Secondly, problems of teaching materials are also asymmetric, which include insufficient localization and a lack of digital resources. The last is about teaching methods, which are too traditional and have less interaction. In this area, these situations usually happen more in Spanish-speaking Latin America since China has been operating Confucius Institutes for many years. This is just typical information asymmetry.

Meanwhile, Wu Chunxiang proposes that the core is to cultivate teachers who are multilingual with an international perspective that breaks asymmetry [15]. Actually, developing bicultural teaching materials from the perspective of regional research and development is also crucial.

Learner Behavior Study caused by asymmetry is also a good practice topic. A comparative study of Chilean and Spanish secondary school students has shown this [16]. It finds that Chilean students exhibited stronger extrinsic motivation, relatively poor classroom discipline, and limited learning outcomes. Spanish students were more intrinsically motivated and learned more effectively. This reveals the teaching challenges posed by learners' behaviour factors, since their behaviour habits are learned by such asymmetric causes above.

3.2. Deviations of information exchange

Deviations of information exchange mean the intentional or unintentional distortion, filtering, omission, or misunderstanding of information during communication, resulting in inconsistency between the transmission content and the original intention.

China's perception of Latin America is a useful research direction. The research of Zhao, Wang, and Guan indicates that Chinese netizens' perceptions of Latin America are often shaped by Western media frameworks [17].

There are a couple of reviews about the relationship structure and foundation, whose absence could also cause deviations in information exchange. Wang asserts that there is a missing link,

implying a lack of humanistic connection [2]. The loss of connecting naturally affects the accuracy of decision-making and communication effectiveness. Lu focuses on the two-way nature of infrastructure cooperation [1]. On one hand, she acknowledges China's role in alleviating Latin America's infrastructure financing gap through developmental finance, such as patient capital. On the other hand, she highlights the constraints imposed by institutional barriers, such as policy fluctuations and cultural differences, or geopolitical risks on the cooperation, such as U.S. intervention. Such problems typically come from deviations.

3.3. Decline in the willingness to exchange

The decline in information exchange willingness is the tendency of individuals or groups to actively reduce or avoid information sharing due to a lack of trust, risk perception, conflicts of interest, or environmental pressure. It often hinders the flow of cooperation and knowledge.

From the point of view of common problems, language is the most basic obstacle. Obviously, without effective communication, everything that follows will not progress. Regional cultural background, as a corresponding component of linguistic background, affects basic information exchange. As the support of the behavior patterns and principles of both ethnic groups, it also affects in-depth information exchange. But the low willingness to learn the language of each other's language, caused by language difficulty itself and mutual prejudice about language, could lead to the failure of information exchange.

4. Suggestions

One of the most important things in solving problems is analyzing them and demonstrating corresponding solutions from point to surface. So by clarifying how each problem can be solved from point to point, connecting the solutions that affect each other into a grand overall operation, some suggestions will be given.

Firstly, the language barrier is one of the most basic and common problems. As a result, the emphasis on second languages should be strengthened. International colleges are encouraged to offer more second language courses and related interesting activities, just like language corner, book club, film screening, and dramas. Various corresponding facilities and basic infrastructure setups should also keep up.

The next point is from the perspective of managers, it is necessary to obtain more bilingual resources. There is an objective lack of international education resources, with a series of problems caused by it, including the quality of students, dependence on cooperation paths, and the imbalance of international education between countries. So just as Ana and Wu Xiangchun believe, more and more bilingual teachers should be trained. Only when teachers have bilingual or even multilateral qualification can students with this kind of thinking and information exchange skills be cultivated. All of them need bilingual resources, so more and more bicultural teaching materials should be developed for regional research and development.

Thirdly, for regional cultural backgrounds, there are significant differences in the experiences and expectations of students from different source regions, so it is best to explain the relevant cultural background in advance. The solution to cultural divides is not short-term, but it is still desirable to persist in cultural propaganda. The government should focus not only on economic development and official status, but also on the soft cultural influence of foreign people. While in the real world, maybe cultural outreach through movies, novels, comic and other entertainment methods is a better way to promote cultural soft power, so as to strengthen information exchange.

In addition, another lack of international educational channels has exacerbated the imbalance in people-to-people exchanges, manifested in a loss of interdisciplinary talent and a narrow range of paths for public understanding. So what can primarily do is to take the initiative to go out and show an open and developing attitude to the international education market. It needs to actively develop its own existing educational channels and make full use of them. Actually, intergovernmental educational exchange agreement as well as credit transfer and recognition systems, are good examples. The institutional partnership framework is also recommended.

Anyway, from fragmented points to systematic surfaces, the suggestions can be summed up in two words: official and unofficial. The problems are mainly caused by the above two major aspects, such as official policies and private attitudes. So their following problems can be solved by corresponding suggestions. Only when the government and people of both sides work hard to break down cultural divides, improve relevant policies, as well as increase the willingness to exchange information, can the barriers to information exchange between them be eliminated.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, there are three kinds of problems, including cultural divides, educational policies differences, and cognitive defenses. And more specific aspects could be found from them. For example, national reputation in international public opinion as well as the influence of cultural soft power, educational policy issues, internationalization process, international student education market, educational resources and freedom, internationalization humanistic connecting and foundations, cooperation paths, stereotypes about China's understanding, language barriers, as well as the influence of regional cultural background.

As for the causes of so many problems, they can also be roughly divided into three parts, including asymmetry of information exchange, deviations of information exchange, as well as the decline in the willingness of information exchange. To search for suggestions, the theoretical significance of this study is mainly to analyze the models included in the above literature reviews, such as the "push-pull" model, to find out the underlying logic of the phenomena and problems described. It also puts the analysis of the obstacles to international education information exchange under a variety of classification frameworks, so that to obtain corresponding solutions and measures.

The practical significance of this paper is that it provides practitioners with a whole chain of reflection from concept to operation. In order to solve the barriers to the exchange of educational information between China and Spanish-speaking Latin America from the perspective of international education, short-term project thinking should be abandoned and be from point to surface, from short-term to long-term, and should strive to build a lasting international educational relationship that can withstand political and economic fluctuations and is rooted in academia and humanities.

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