



## **Is the Internationalization of Higher Education at Risk? Covid-19 Pandemic and Online Learning of International Students**

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Any university that wishes to be recognized in terms of the internationalization of higher education needs to take the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity for development as we live in a world of uncertainties. This study focused on examining the challenges faced by international students studying online because they cannot travel to their host countries to study due to the Covid-19 pandemic to propose some recommendations to improve the learning experiences of international students in case of emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic. An exploratory case study research design was used, adopting the qualitative methodology. The study's sample population consisted of 48 international students in two universities in China. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide. The data collected was analyzed thematically. The study found that most international students studying online face the following major challenges; poor internet connection, limited class participation, and inability to finish research projects on time. As far as the internationalization of higher education is concerned, students may not fully acquire the international experience that comes with higher education internationalization if they continue to study online. Moreover, the study found that the following strategies can be implemented to enhance online teaching and learning during a pandemic, such as Covid-19; Good internet connections, communication with students, training lecturers on how to carry out online teaching, and monitoring students studying online.

**Keywords:** online teaching and learning, covid-19 pandemic, international students, internationalization of higher education, higher education research

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is common for students to move to other countries for educational purposes every year, but unfortunately, due to COVID 19 pandemic, many students are stuck in their

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countries. COVID-19 has a negative impact on international student mobility; it has greatly affected the enrollment of international students (Marinoni et al., 2020; Mok et al., 2020). Students who travel to their home countries cannot return to the host institutions. Most students' exchanges with some countries were canceled. The global pandemic (COVID 19) has affected the educational system greatly. The pandemic led to the closure of universities around the world (Murphy, 2020; Yang, 2020). Many universities shut their campuses and shifted to online teaching; however, some weaknesses resulted from the inability of some lecturers to use online teaching tools (Yang, 2020; Al Soub, 2021). This study aimed to examine the challenges faced by international students studying online to propose some implications to improve the learning experiences of international students in case other global pandemics such as the Covid-19 pandemic arises.

### **Research problem and Questions**

International students play an essential role in intercultural learning and an increased understanding of global issues (Andrade, 2006; Rui, 2014; Ding, 2016). Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, students' mobility has been greatly disrupted. Some universities offer online and offline lessons since most international students cannot travel to their host institutions, but the problem is, are those students studying online actually learning? Is online study effective? Some of these students are from countries where electricity and internet connections are sometimes unstable, so they cannot effectively follow classes online. In some higher education institutions where students are from different continents, not every student has access to the internet, making it difficult to provide equal learning opportunities to all the students (Marinoni et al., 2020). Lecturers are facing many challenges in delivering online and offline lessons simultaneously. Some lecturers have inadequate knowledge regarding online teaching; they find it challenging to coordinate online and offline teaching simultaneously. Sometimes lecturers fail to engage students studying online in class discussions (Marinoni et al., 2020). This means students learning online may end up acquiring little from these online studies. It is therefore vital to examine the challenges faced by international students studying online because they cannot travel to their host countries to study due to the COVID-19 pandemic to make some suggestions to improve the learning experiences of international students in case of other emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic as we live in a world of uncertainty. There is a need to find out what COVID-19 has taught us about the internationalization of higher education and turn the crises into an opportunity for development. The study was guided by the following research questions (1) What do international students studying online at home country perceive as challenges to online teaching and learning? (2) What do international students perceive as strategies that can be implemented to enhance online teaching and learning during a pandemic such as COVID-19?

### **Context**

This study was carried out in two universities in China. The universities are located in Central China and Northeast China. The names of the universities cannot be mentioned due to ethical issues. China is one of the countries in Asia that has attracted many

international students (Yang, 2020). The Chinese Government has put much effort into attracting international students. Before the outbreak of Covid-19, most Chinese universities were committed to enhancing international students learning experiences by organizing extra-curricular activities which help to expose students to the Chinese culture and an international experience. Unfortunately, due to the outbreak of Covid-19, many international students went back to their home countries due to fear of isolation and pressure from parents. Most universities worldwide adopted online teaching and learning, and Chinese universities were not exempted. Online teaching and learning is the only feasible approach to teaching and learning amid a pandemic. However, students may not acquire the international experience that comes with international education through online teaching and learning. Universities in China have stable electricity and a good internet connection; however, most international students are from developing countries (Yang, 2020) with poor electricity and internet connections. Since most of these students went back to their home countries due to Covid-19, it may not be easy to ensure effective online teaching and learning and provide them with international education experience. Hence the need to find out the challenges they face to propose appropriate recommendations for improvement.

### **Literature review**

#### ***Internationalization of higher education***

The concept of “internationalization” is relatively new (Wit, & Altbach, 2020). It is seen as a critical element in the development of higher education. The internationalization of higher education refers to the specific policies and initiatives of countries and institutions in response to globalization (Cantwell & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009; Altbach, 2015; Wei, 2020). On the other hand, globalization refers to the economic, political, and societal forces pushing higher education toward greater international involvement, in which internationalization of higher education is one of those involvements (Altbach, 2006; Cantwell & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009). Internationalization refers to an educational vision to provide the world with an education that meets current needs and addresses challenges brought about by globalization, interdependence, and multiculturalism (Gacel-Ávila, 2005). Knight (2004) defines the internationalization of higher education as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into university education. This definition shows that intercultural experience is one of the objectives of internationalization of higher education; the question here is; how will students gain cultural experience without physical interactions? The internationalization of higher education prepares students for life and work in an intercultural and globalizing world. According to Jiang (2008), the internationalization of higher education would lose its basic meaning if institutions fail to integrate intercultural dimensions into their missions.

Internationalization has political, economic, social, cultural, and academic rationales and these rationales differ from one country to another, leading to different approaches and policies (Wihlborg & Robson, 2018; Wit & Altbach, 2020). For example, the United States promotes internationalization to maintain and expand its influence and knowledge of other cultures, languages, and systems, which is political (Jiang, 2008). In

Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, the economic rationale is evident; the internationalization of higher education has contributed to developing professional and skilled human resources. Besides, international students bring direct economic benefits to universities in these countries by paying huge sums of money as school fees (Jiang, 2008). The academic rationale is to improve the quality of higher education by enhancing the international dimension of teaching, research, and community service. The cultural rationale is to improve intercultural understanding and communication, that is, to equip students with knowledge and skill in intercultural relations and communications (Jiang, 2008).

Generally, the internationalization of higher education aims to create a social, economic, and cultural environment that is beneficial for all countries in the world. Specifically, international education is aimed at equipping students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to actively and fully participate in the global world; secondly, internationalization is seen as a force for social transformation of the world; however, many countries see international education as a means to enhance economic growth (Stier, 2004, Wei, 2020). This is supported by Jiang (2008), who stated that the internationalization of higher education is dominated by economic motives which focus on generating income from international students. Students' mobility as an aspect of internationalization has received greater attention than "internationalization at home," which depends only on the written curriculum; since many countries are focusing on economic gains mobility aspect of internationalization has become more dominant (Wit & Altbach, 2020).

The internationalization of higher education is expanding, but the quality is questionable (Wit & Altbach, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has led to several challenges as far as the internationalization of higher education is concerned. In many countries, as the situation got worst, fear and panic set in, and international students started leaving one by one; many students moved back to their home countries (Van de Velde et al., 2021). It is pertinent to point out that face-to-face learning cannot be compared with online learning. In physical classrooms, students can interact with one another. Through these interactions, they exchange cultural values, which is one of the objectives of the internationalization of higher education. Furthermore, with regards to one of the objectives of internationalization of higher education which talks about exposing students to the global society, face to face classes are preferable because, through interactions with the environment and local people from diverse backgrounds, students will have a broad perspective of what is happening in the world.

### ***Covid-19 Pandemic***

Covid-19 refers to the coronavirus disease that started in 2019. It is linked to severe acute respiratory syndrome (Toquero, 2020; Boonroungrut et al., 2022), making it a threat to human life. The virus can be transmitted from one person to another through droplets or by touching an infected surface. The virus affected over 294 thousand people in 187 countries within 90 days of its official identification (World Health Organization, 2020). Due to the fast spread of the virus from one country to another, the World Health Organization declared it a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (Murphy,

2020; Hindun et al., 2021). The public health sector could not control the spread of this virus, and as such, it affected 188 countries around the world, disrupting the daily activities of almost 1.6 billion (Gouedard, Pont & Viennet, 2020). Due to the deadly nature of this virus, all sectors worldwide were affected, and the educational sector was not an exception. Schools were shut down in almost every part of the world as a measure to prevent the spread of the virus (Murphy, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). Businesses were closed down, and social distancing and wearing o masks were enforced. Cities and transportation were shut down; people were quarantined at home; however, the number of confirmed cases and deaths continues to rise globally with all these measures.

The outbreak of Covid-19 affected over 97% of students worldwide (Hindun et al., 2021; Boonroungrut et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected international students' mental health and learning (Van de Velde et al., 2021). Most universities face difficulties operating online classes due to inadequate technical infrastructure and competencies (Marinoni et al., 2020). The outbreak of the COVID-19 led to the reorganization of academic activities in many higher education institutions; students' internships and thesis writing were affected (Van de Velde et al.,2021). Most Students from low socio-economic backgrounds do not have access to online learning platforms (Boonroungrut et al., 2022). Many schools experience problems with online studies because they are not prepared (Bonk, 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Mantasiah et al., 2021). Mantasiah et al. (2021) found that students felt bored and stressed with online learning due to too many assignments and unclear instructions from teachers. Covid-19 pandemic affected students' mental health; some students need physical and mental support to effectively engage in online learning (Boonroungrut et al.,2022). Online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic is ineffective due to teachers' lack of experience in online teaching and lack of social interactions between teachers and students (Ma et al., 2021). It is thus necessary for every university that wishes to enhance the learning experiences of its international students to think of appropriate strategies that can expose students to the international community. The closure of schools affected learning and teaching because online teaching and learning became the only option in which universities, students, and teachers were not prepared for it (Hindun et al., 2021; Mantasiah et al., 2021).

Most students acquire sustainable knowledge and skills outside classrooms in an international setting. Through daily interactions and discussions with peers and teachers, it is easier to form research teams and develop good academic relationships with other students (Wang & DeLaquil, 2020). With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, these daily interactions have greatly reduced. This means that the experiences students acquired while studying on campuses cannot be compared with their online studies experiences. On-campus interactions promote students' social development, which is needed in this global society. As a result of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, people who could not travel to attend international conferences, research, and teaching and learning, have been greatly affected, university partnerships have been affected, especially in African institutions (Marinoni et al., 2020). Scientific research in some institutions stopped because researchers could not access laboratories. Some

universities, especially in low and middle-income countries, could not suddenly move teaching online because of lack of infrastructure and limited access to the internet (Marinoni et al., 2020). Complex technological infrastructure and the diversity of students make it difficult for teachers to effectively carry out online teaching (Wohlfart et al., 2021).

Many universities are developing strategies to continue online teaching, but the issue is that practical exercises requiring laboratory equipment's acids and chemicals cannot be carried out online. Online studies provided during the lockdown period are limited to the theoretical parts of the curriculum; in creative disciplines such as arts, music, and design, students cannot perform well when working from home because of limited access to the required equipment (Marinoni et al., 2020). Marinoni et al. (2020) found that a different pedagogy is required to effectively carry out online studies in which most universities were not prepared. This means that there is a need to innovate the curriculum as well as teaching strategies. Moreover, most universities do not have management structures to equip teachers with the necessary skills to carry out online studies effectively.

## **METHOD**

An exploratory case study research design was used, adopting the qualitative methodology. It is essential to point out that qualitative researchers collect and analyze data to describe events, situations, and people without using numbers; qualitative studies are characterized by what, how, and why questions, these questions require the collection of qualitative data rather than quantitative data to answer the research questions (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Barnham, 2015). The study population was made up of international postgraduate students in two universities in China. Due to ethical considerations, the names of the universities are not allowed to be mentioned. The justification for choosing international students is that the study is directly related to them; they are best positioned to reveal the challenges they face and what can be done to enhance online learning amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The study's sample population consisted of 48 international postgraduate students who could not travel to their campuses due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 28 females and 20 males, 24 participants from each university. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. Only international students who cannot return to their host institutions were included in the study. These students are from Social Sciences and Sciences.

In qualitative research, the researcher needs to analyze the phenomenon in-depth; thus, interviewing 48 international students is appropriate. In scientific research, it is impossible to study all the members of the population. Collecting qualitative data and analyzing it requires much time, and the addition of each individual lengthens that time (Creswell, 2012). The participants were from Asia and Africa. These two continents were purposefully selected because most international students where the study was carried out are from Africa and Asia.

A semi-structured interview guide was appropriate for data collection because it gave the researcher the chance to ask follow-up questions during the interview; besides, it

helped the researcher not to lose focus because there was a set of pre-determined questions. Moreover, an interview provides valuable information when the researchers cannot directly observe the participants, and they permit participants to describe detailed information (Creswell, 2012). Some of the interview questions include; (1) What are the challenges you are facing studying online? (2) What is your view about online teaching and learning? (3) What are the major problems you have faced with online learning? (4) In your opinion, what can be done to improve online teaching and learning? (5) What can be done to give students the chance to have an international experience while studying at home? A one-on-one interview was conducted; each interview was recorded. All the interviews were done by phone. All the interviews were carried out in English because the participants were fluent in English. Using an interview as a data collection method was advantageous because some questions that were not clear to the interviewees were explained in the course of the interview. Furthermore, in the course of the interview, the researcher used probes to get additional information. Each interview session lasted for 45-60 minutes. The researchers followed research ethics guidelines to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. The confidentiality of the respondents was ensured. The participants were informed about the nature of the research at the beginning of each interview. The interviewer also informed the respondent about the study's objectives.

The qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Thematic analysis is often used in many fields to analyze qualitative data; it focuses on identifying themes in the qualitative data collected. The six steps of analyzing qualitative data by Creswell (2012) were used. Firstly, the data was organized and transcribed; after transcription, the data was coded. During the coding process, the researchers read through text data, divided the text into segments of information, labeled the information segments with codes, reduced overlap and redundancy of codes; similar codes were grouped into categories that helped develop themes.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The following themes were carefully developed according to the research questions.

### **Challenges faced by international students studying online**

#### ***Poor internet connection***

A majority of the participants revealed that they sometimes face difficulties following online classes due to lack of electricity and poor internet connectivity. These are some words from some respondents;

My internet connection is often off and on, sometimes it cuts within the course of the class, and I am not happy; also, electricity is always on and off, making it difficult to learn online. There is poor internet connection everywhere in my country; since the online studies started; I have not really learned much (Student #12)

Internet subscriptions are costly in my country; sometimes, I do not have money to subscribe to a high-speed data bundle. I just have to manage (Student #2)

Online studies consume a lot of data; sometimes, my data finish when classes are going on, and I need to walk for about 60 minutes to buy another internet bundle, it is terrible (Student #40)

Some international students are from developing countries where electricity and internet connections are not stable, thus, making online learning difficult. Most Students from low socio-economic backgrounds do not have access to online learning platforms (Boonrourut et al., 2022). Marinoni et al. (2020) stated that, with online studies, students who do not have access to online communication tools and the internet would be at a disadvantage, and higher education infrastructures without the adequate technical infrastructure to ensure effective distance learning experienced will face a lot of difficulties as far as online teaching and learning is concerned. Students from low and medium-income countries may not have the same learning experience as students from first-class countries. This means that it is difficult for all the students to have equal learning opportunities with online teaching and learning. Due to poor internet connectivity, students might miss educational opportunities in rural areas (Wang et al., 2020). This reveals a significant disparity in learning experiences between international students in their host countries and those who went home.

#### ***Limited class participation***

More than half of the respondents revealed that they participate less in online classes, and the classes are sometimes boring. Besides, a moderate proportion of the respondents revealed that they are gradually losing interest in their studies because they learn very little from online classes due to their inability to concentrate. These are some sentiments from some students;

I do not know what is happening; I do not engage in class discussions compared to when I was physically present. Online learning is not effective (student #1)

I feel like most teachers pay more attention to physically present students in class; I hardly contribute to class discussions. The workload is also too much. Gradually I am losing interest in my studies. I just hope things can get better soon (student #25)

I feel abandoned; I regret traveling back home; my classmates who stayed back can now attend classes physically while I am here suffering (student # 9)

I cannot concentrate on online learning; I often find myself doing another thing while the class is going on. I find it challenging to sit on a laptop for 3 hours; it is sometimes boring; I sometimes sleep while the class is going on (student #2)

There is limited teacher-student interaction and student-student interactions, affecting students' acquisition of sustainable knowledge and skills. This means that universities need to think of how to motivate international students who are studying online. Online learning is limited when it comes to practical activities; this may be one of the reasons why students feel like they do not adequately participate in class discussions. According to a report from the OEDC, online studies provided during the lockdown period are limited to the theoretical parts of the curriculum (Marinoni et al., 2020). Online studies require positive verbal reinforcement (Mantasiah et al., 2021). Some students are



gradually losing concentration in their studies. This is supported by Bao (2020), who stated that students often have a low concentration in online learning. Mantasiah et al. (2021) found that students felt bored and stressed with online learning due to too many assignments and unclear instructions from teachers. Online learning increased students' workload as lecturers tried to compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction (Lee et al., 2021). Since lecturers have less control over online teaching than classroom teaching, students are more likely to "skip the class" (Bao, 2020; Mantasiah et al., 2021). Many higher education institutions face attendance challenges and higher absenteeism (Gouedard, Pont & Viennet, 2020). The higher absenteeism may be because students are not satisfied with online learning. This might be because a different pedagogy is required to effectively carry out online studies in which most universities were unprepared (Marinoni et al. 2020). Some teachers find it difficult to integrate digital devices into the curriculum (Boonroungrut et al., 2022). According to Bao (2020), online courses require elaborate lesson plans, video content, audio, video teaching materials, and technical support teams. The knowledge and skills of instructors in online teaching and learning determine students' satisfaction with online learning, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Gopal et al., 2021). In an online class, classroom management is complex as teachers cannot use classroom management techniques such as body language and facial expressions. Since some of the students' complaint about lack of concentration, it is essential that in designing online lessons, teachers need to take into consideration the characteristics of the learners to ensure that the length of the lesson matches with the academic readiness and online learning behavior characteristics of students (Bao, 2020). Infrastructural factors, cultural factors, inadequate skills to operate digital tools have limited students' engagement in online learning (Khlaif et al., 2021). It is also vital for schools to consider strategies like positive reinforcement; since some students are bored with school from home, teachers need to develop strategies to make online learning enjoyable to increase students' concentration. Positive reinforcement can be in the form of a present, award, or oral and written compliments (Mantasiah et al., 2021).

#### **Inability to finish research projects on time**

A majority of the students revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly disrupted their studies. Some students mentioned that they are not sure of graduating in time because their research projects require them to be in the laboratory at least three times a week, but due to the Covid-19, there cannot go back to their various campuses. These are some words from some students;

I wonder when I will go back to campus, my research project requires me to be in the laboratory at least three times a week, but I cannot do anything now; I am not even sure of graduating (student # 46)

I was supposed to graduate last year, but I was not able to finish my research projects because I could not go to the laboratory; this year, I am not even sure of graduating because I do not know when the travel restrictions will be lifted (student # 17)

Universities engaged in the internationalization of higher education need to formulate policies addressing how students can manage their projects in case of other global emergencies such as the Covid-19 pandemic. When the Covid-19 pandemic worsened, most international students left their host institutions (Van de Velde et al., 2021); now, they cannot return due to global restrictions on traveling. The pandemic has a great impact on international students' mobility and recruitment. The outbreak of the Covid-19 affected many academic activities in higher education institutions; students' internships and thesis writing were affected (Van de Velde et al., 2021). Marinoni et al. (2020) found out that 95% of higher education institutions have been impacted in Europe, 91% in America, 85% in Asia and the Pacific, and 78% in Africa. Furthermore, most of the respondents mentioned that some of their courses require practical which cannot be carried out online. Unfortunately, students who left their institution in 2019 cannot return as of January 2022. A majority of students have been waiting anxiously for an announcement to return to their various campuses.

#### **Strategies to enhance the learning experience of international students in case of a pandemic such as the Covid -19**

##### ***Good internet connections***

A majority of the students revealed that they need a good internet connection to engage in online studies effectively. The following quotes illustrate these points;

I find it difficult to follow online classes because of poor internet connections effectively; I need a good internet connection. My internet connection sometimes disconnects during the lecture. (Student# 24)

I think with a good internet connection, I will be able to attend my classes without disruptions, although sometimes there is no electricity. I wish for Covid-19 to end soon so that things can become normal (Student # 38)

My country needs to improve its internet speed; I cannot effectively study online. One day, I was answering a question in class, and my internet disconnected; I felt so bad because the lecturer my feel I deliberately stopped talking, which may affect my final score (Student # 6)

This finding revealed that any country interested in higher education internationalization needs to establish high-speed wireless broadband internet to prepare for global pandemics such as the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a need for collaboration between host countries and students' home countries. Host countries and students' home countries can collaborate to ensure high-speed wireless broadband internet availability to facilitate online teaching and learning. Online learning requires a good internet connection and other communication tools; students cannot effectively follow online lessons without a good internet connection. Students from low socio-economic families may not have the necessary tools and equipment for online learning (Kundu & Bej, 2021; Boonroungrut et al., 2022). As a result of the poor internet connectivity in some countries and the sudden switch to online studies without the necessary preparations, the internet may disappoint at any time; as a result of this, it is necessary for students to prepare plan "B" before the start of every class. Institutions are also facing some internet

challenges; it is also pertinent for institutions to prepare plan” B” or even “C” in case plan “A” fails (Bao, 2020).

### **Communication with students**

A majority of the participants revealed that universities need to provide constant encouragement and support to students studying online. Some of the respondents revealed that they feel so happy when their lecturers contact them and ask how they are doing and about their online studies. These are some words from some students;

When I learned that I could not travel back to my host institution, I felt so bad, but I felt better with the constant discussions with my teachers. Most of my teachers’ care about me, they do not only ask me about academics, but they also ask about other aspects of my life, such as my health which makes me feel better (Student #48)

I felt depressed when I heard about the traveling restrictions because I am supposed to graduate in 2020, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I could not finish my research project; thanks to my teacher, who provided a counselor for me to talk with it helped me to overthink about not being able to graduate (Student # 7)

Universities involved in the internationalization of higher education need to establish communication strategies beforehand to ensure that they can maintain effective communication with the students in case of any other emergency such as the Covid-19. Some students abandon their programs due to the lack of communication with the university administrators. This shows that universities need to communicate often with students studying online to discover their challenges and proposed solutions. Universities need to provide information to students about everything related to the Covid-19 pandemic, such as how to keep being healthy and honest reasons while they cannot travel back to school. These types of discussions will give them hope. As a result of the lockdown, some students faced mental health issues, such as anxiety and isolation; this means there is a need to support students holistically rather than focusing only on academics (Marinoni et al., 2020; Van de Velde et al., 2021; Boonroungrut et al., 2022). Universities need to ensure effective communication due to the lack of peer-to-peer interaction. Students face difficulties communicating with their classmates and making new friends, which means the support they receive from peers while on campus is missing, hence the need for lecturers and university administrations to communicate with students often (Lee et al., 2021). Wang and DeLaquil, (2020) stated that peer support and faculty mentorship for students during the Covid-19 period is crucial. Students need support from teachers, peers, and parents to cope during the pandemic period. Furthermore, online engagement activities will also be beneficial for all international students as it gives them the chance to interact with their classmates.

### **Training lecturers on how to carry out online teaching**

A majority of the participants revealed a need to train lecturers to carry out online teaching effectively. Examples of students’ perceptions on providing training programs for lecturers is presented below;

I think there is a need to train lecturers on how to operate an online classroom. Some of my teachers always failed to engage students in class discussions, making the online classes boring (student t# 19)

I sometimes feel some lecturers do not have time for students studying online; some lecturers do not even ask if we are following the lessons or not. There is no adequate class interaction which makes me sleep most of the time while classes are going on; lecturers need training on online teaching. (Student # 44)

Every university interested in the internationalization of higher education needs to establish professional development programs to equip lecturers with vital knowledge and skills on how to carry out online teaching effectively. Regular workshops can be organized to train lecturers on using online teaching tools (Al Soub et al., 2021). With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, many universities suddenly switch to online learning without any preparation. As a result, most lecturers do not know how to operate online learning effectively; some lecturers lack online teaching experience (Bao, 2020; Ma et al., 2012). As a result, they face difficulties engaging students in online lessons because they are unfamiliar with some online communication tools. This is supported by Yang (2020), who stated that due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, most universities shut their campuses and shifted to online teaching, but some weaknesses resulted from the inability of some lecturers to use online teaching tools. This shows that teachers' engagement in the new teaching method due to the Covid-19 pandemic may affect the quality of tertiary education (Wang et al., 2020). The poor performance of students in online learning impacts teachers' self-efficacy in operating online teaching and learning (Ma et al., 2021). Covid-19 pandemic has shown that there is a need for pedagogical innovations as far as online learning is concerned (Bonk, 2020; Lee et al., 2021)

### **Monitoring students studying online**

A majority of the respondents revealed that they do not think online learning is effective. With online learning, the teacher cannot know if all the students are following the class because students' cameras are often off. These are some words from some students

I do not think online learning is effective; my camera is always off, so I am free to do whatever I want when classes are going on; I just need to mute my microphone, and the teacher does not even notice. Online learning is boring (Student # 22)

I often do not feel like I am in class; it is difficult to learn with the children running around me. Sometimes the internet will just disconnect when the teacher is teaching, which makes it challenging to follow lessons (Student # 4) effectively

Universities that wish to be recognized in international education need to develop strategies to ensure effective teaching and learning in case of uncertainties, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It is necessary for universities to derive strategies to monitor students' studying online. Most students lack a good learning attitude, self-discipline, suitable learning materials, and good learning environments as far as online learning is concerned (Bao, 2020; Boonroungrut et al., 2022). To effectively engage the students studying online, the lecturer needs to ask the entire student to switch on their cameras. If the cameras are switched on, the students will be conscious that the teacher is watching

them. Furthermore, teachers should ask all students to take notes while the class is ongoing and summarize the entire session, which should be submitted five minutes before the class ends. Moreover, teachers can randomly ask students questions regarding the lesson of the day; more students can actively participate in class discussions. However, teachers should not be too strict; they should try as much as possible to create a conducive environment for learning.

### **Providing documentaries**

A moderate proportion of the population revealed that they might not fully experience the cultural exposure that comes with the internationalization of higher education. These are some words from some students

I was hoping to meet new friends and know more about their cultures, but this did not happen; the Covid- 19 pandemic started just three months after I traveled to my host country, and I had to go back home due to the pressure from my parents to come home. My parents are afraid to lose me; they will not allow me to go back to school even if the school asks us to come back. I wish my school could have organized online programs that we could participate in or provide videos of my university and some important places (Student# 18)

When I got admission I was delighted, I have always wanted to visit my host country, but unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I may not be able to fully know more about my host country because I am not sure of going back even when the traveling restrictions are lifted, my health is important (Student # 31)

I was so excited about interacting with students from other countries, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I might end up graduating online; I really wish there was a way for me to go back to school (Student # 21)

This reveals that any university hosting international students' needs to prepare some documentaries about the university and keep them in case of any emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Universities offering online studies should provide documentaries about the universities and some essential cultural features of the host institutions. This is very important because cultural exchange is one of the objectives of the internationalization of higher education. Although documentaries cannot fully expose students to an international experience that comes with the internationalization of higher education, they will enlighten the students. To enable students to gain from the intercultural experience that comes with the internationalization of higher education during this critical period, universities need to go beyond regular online classroom activities (Wang & DeLaquil, 2020). The internationalization of higher education prepares students for life and work in an intercultural and globalizing world. According to Jiang (2008), the internationalization of higher education would lose its basic meaning if institutions fail to integrate intercultural dimensions into their missions. This means that the objective of internationalization of higher education may not be effectively achieved with online studies. Internationalization of higher education is seen as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of university education (Knight, 2004). This shows that intercultural experience is one of the objectives of the internationalization of higher

education. Providing students with informative documentaries about their host countries will help them know more about their culture and way of life. The internationalization of higher education prepares students for life and work in an intercultural and globalizing world. Mok et al. (2020) found out that 84% of students in Mainland China and Hong Kong did not see any reason to study abroad after the pandemic. Lack of interest to study abroad after the pandemic shows how Covid-19 has affected international education.

### **IMPLICATIONS**

This study recommends that universities that wish to be recognized in terms of the internationalization of higher education need to take the Covid-19 pandemic as an opportunity for development as we live in a world of uncertainties. Any university hosting international students need to think of strategies to overcome deadly pandemics such as the Covid-19. For example, lecturers need to be trained on operating online teaching technologies; each university hosting international students can develop a program to equip lecturers with the knowledge and skills needed to operate modern instructional materials. Besides, every university needs to design a program to enhance lecturers' knowledge and skills in online teaching and learning, focusing on gaining and sustaining students' attention and engaging them in online learning. Also, it is crucial for universities that wish to be recognized in terms of the internationalization of higher education to develop an online curriculum in case of uncertainties, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also vital for policymakers to consider emergencies like the Covid-19 pandemic when designing internationalization policies. Most of the online teaching and learning challenges faced during the Covid-19 pandemic resulted from adopting a face-to-face classroom teaching and learning curriculum.

Moreover, this study recommends that students studying online should employ metacognitive regulation. School leaders can assist students by organizing seminars and workshops on developing metacognitive strategies. It is crucial for students to reflect on their learning since most of them revealed that they find it difficult to concentrate on online teaching and learning. By reflecting on their own learning, they can identify the reasons for lack of concentration. Identifying the reasons may help them to develop metacognitive strategies that can enhance learning. Also, universities need to communicate often with students studying online to find out what challenges they face and propose solutions. Besides, for universities offering both online and offline classes simultaneously, there is a need to have two sessions, one offline for students on campus and the online session for those in their home countries, to enhance student engagement. This may be stressful for lecturers; there is a need to motivate lecturers to effectively deliver online and offline lessons. Besides, it is necessary to provide training programs to lecturers who cannot effectively operate online teaching tools. In addition, there is a need for universities to provide constant encouragement and support to students studying online.

Furthermore, it is necessary for universities to derive strategies to monitor students' studying online. For example, to effectively engage the learners online, the lecturer should ask the entire student to switch on their camera; secondly, teachers should ask all

the students to make a summary of the entire session while the class is ongoing, which should be submitted 15 minutes before the class ends. It is vital for host countries to collaborate with students' home countries to provide high-speed wireless broadband internet. High-speed wireless broadband internet is essential during the Covid-19 pandemic and after the pandemic. Universities can provide documentaries about the universities and some essential cultural features to students. The Covid-19 pandemic may discourage students from traveling abroad for studies due to travel restrictions and health concerns, as students may not feel safe to travel back to their host institutions. For the internationalization of higher education to succeed in a post-Covid-19 world, there is a need to revise internationalization policies.

### **CONCLUSION**

As a result of the fatal nature of Covid-19, they could not have been any best solution to the continuation of education amid the pandemic rather than online learning, but unfortunately, many institutions were not prepared for the online studies. The objectives of internationalization of higher education may not be fully achieved with online learning. This study reveals that online teaching and learning in some universities during the Covid-19 pandemic is not effective. Common challenges of online study, especially in most developing countries, are; inadequate technical infrastructure, lack of online pedagogy, inadequate knowledge and skills in online teaching by some lecturers, and lack of communication tools needed for online studies by students in some countries. However, it is good to note that these challenges can be addressed with time, but one major setback to online teaching and learning is practical activities; online learning can be managed when it comes to the theoretical part of the course, but laboratory exercises cannot be carried out online. Students may not have the chemicals, acids, and equipment to carry out practical exercises at home. This calls on all academics to think of what will happen in pure sciences and other disciplines requiring practical exercises if students cannot return to their campuses. As far as the internationalization of higher education is concerned, students may not fully acquire the international experience that comes with higher education internationalization if they continue to study online. It is thus necessary for every university that wishes to enhance the learning experiences of its international students to consider the recommendations proposed by this study.

### **LIMITATIONS**

In any empirical paper, there are bound to be some limitations. This study was limited to two universities; as such, this study recommends that similar studies should be carried out in other universities, the situation other universities may be different.

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### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Not available due to ethical consideration

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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