

Chapter 9

Transnational Education: Perspectives of Academics



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9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the perceptions and experiences of participating Chinese and Australian academics in the delivery of the dual degree 2 + 2 program. Findings will inform on how the internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) has shaped the practices of academics' and influenced perceptions of the academic identity.

The driving forces of globalisation and internationalisation of HE has seen a shift in the work and therefore the identity of academics from traditional teaching and research roles. Turner and Robson (2009, p15) have stated that “*basic conceptions of the meanings of internationalisation within academic working practices help to illuminate the diversity of its impact on identity, orientation and experience, set as they are in a wide variety of local and particular contexts*”. Data for this chapter consists of semi-structured interviews and explores the experiences of these participants in the dual degree.

Cross border movement of academics has become increasingly common (Chen 2017; Knight 2015; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). The changing phases of the HE global landscape in which academics operate have become more complex as student cohorts are becoming more diverse. Different arrangements for delivering programs, onshore, offshore, online have also increased in diversity. Naidoo (2009) asserted that universities are a driving force for national economic development and a means for building capacity through human capital development. Nations around the world have considered the quality of HE a way to improve competitiveness and one aspect of this is global reputation. The response to globalisation has given rise to business and entrepreneurial universities (Clark 1997) and academic capitalism

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(Slaughter and Leslie 1997) as universities continue to commodify HE and drive profit through international partnership for international students.

This chapter will contribute to this section of the book by providing insights into academic experiences in the delivery of the joint dual degree discussed in Chaps. 7–10. The findings include Chinese and Australian academics. The inherent challenges and issues faced by the academics in the collaboration of a transnational educational 2 + 2 program have been discussed. Critical reflections and insights from this discussion can inform policy and practices that can assist governance bodies, executive managers and academics involved in this project in the future. Academics are often situated at the crossroad between complexity and transformational change in the HE environment and are faced with challenges such as additional workload to cater with larger number of diverse group of students as well as working in unfamiliar environments and across languages (de Zilwa 2010; Sutrisno 2014; Zhu 2016).

When HEI is heavily reliant on international student enrolment for revenue, academic job security can be impacted with changes in global financial markets, disasters; natural or man-made and even trade wars. The maelstrom of globalisation as a driving force for the global economy and knowledge have constrained academic freedom and autonomy to be innovative alongside pressure for accountability for the quality of student experiences (Chen 2017; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005; Williams 2018; Zhu 2016). de Zilwa (2010, p.3) described globalisation as a '*double-edged sword*'.

This chapter examined major themes of academic experiences of the 2 + 2 dual degree between the Chinese and an Australian university. This is a qualitative research. Interviews were conducted with 8 academics from the Chinese university and 5 Australian academics. The participants selected had taught at least one cohort students at the Chinese university or the Australian university or had taught both locations.

The guiding research questions were:

- (i) What were the perceptions of the participating academics to their experiences in the engagement and delivery 2 + 2 dual degree program?
- (ii) What understanding of internationalisation of HE did these participants have and did they have ideas about implications for the 2 + 2 dual degree program?

9.2 Literature

The rapid change advanced by globalisation to drive the knowledge economy has positioned the academic profession at the centre of internationalisation processes. Academics have had to orientate themselves to the change academia (Marginson et al. 2011). As higher education institutions (HEIs) undergo radical changes in the TNHE space, often the role and responsibility of academic staff will

be expanded. There are expectations from academics to deliver the desired educational outcomes when HEI become more entrepreneurial. Alongside the massification of HE, there are other emerging requirements that need to be fulfilled, such as meeting the needs of local and global communities. Knowledge production is a main focus in joint or brand alliances of international partnerships (Naidoo and Hollebeek 2015) and has resulted in creating new identities for academics (Koo and Pang 2016). Central to the development of human capital and economic growth, internationalisation of HE has become a key driver to be included in strategic action plans issued by governments. Commonly having objectives aiming to enhance their competitiveness, capacity, innovation and productivity through excellence in education (Chen 2017; Koo and Pang 2016; Marginson and Sawir 2006). There will be expected additional responsibility for academics to be agents of change in the internationalisation platform to account for the implementation and delivery of teaching in the joint programs and at the same time to building research networks for income.

Academics are increasingly faced with the challenges of classroom diversity, often large numbers of international students and at times different types of curriculum in different locations. Professional training for academics requires new teaching practices to deal with and meet the diverse needs of international students with differentiated learning styles (Chen 2017; Li and Wang 2015; Wang 2018). Strategies are required to develop in teaching methods that will enhance and promote intercultural competences and inclusive practices in order to deliver the desired outcomes for the program (Leask 2015; Wang 2018).

Leask (2015, p. 3) contended,

Internationalisation of curriculum is situated at the intersection of policy and practice in universities and the cause of fascination, frustration, confusion, and fulfilment for students, academic staff, and university managers.

In examining the interview data for this chapter, findings support the above quote as the Australian academics indicated there had been frustrations, confusions and key challenges when they were asked to teach at the Chinese university.

According to Leask (2015), there are consequences of disengagement by the students when academic staff lack the knowledge and skills needed for an internationalised curriculum in the joint program. In her 2009 publication, Leask distinguished the product as the differences between an internationalised curriculum and the process as the internationalisation of curriculum. Her definition of

Internationalization of the curriculum is the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program study (p. 209).

With the expansion to include the mobility programs, Leask (2009, p. 209) added,

An internationalized curriculum will engage students with internationally informed research and cultural and linguistic diversity and purposefully develop their international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals and citizens.

The growth of international education market has opened many opportunities for partnership and joint degree program delivery across borders amidst the emergence of discourses of the commodification of HE and the rise of entrepreneurship. Turner and Robson (2008, p. 5) reported that “*internationalisation has been characterised as both an energizing catalyst for international knowledge-sharing and a negative neo-liberal ideology force, transporting the worst corporate managerialism into academic life*”. Universities have to devise ways to integrate a global dimension to the delivery of programs in their response to the needs of a diverse groups of international students (Chen 2017; Knight 2015; Wang 2018; Zheng 2008, 2009).

9.3 The Research

This study utilised a qualitative and interpretative research methodology to examine the perceptions of the participants in both Chinese and Australian universities. The interview questions were categorised into background, information of the 2 + 2 program, preparation for early childhood education and care (ECEC) teachers, internationalisation and the future. Data was collected by conducting through semi-structured interviews with additional open-ended questions. This allowed the interviewer to probe and explore individual academic perceptions. Interview duration was approximately one hour and at times extended to one and a half hours according to the response of individual participants. The interviews were undertaken by two Australian researchers. The invited participants had taught into courses of the 2 + 2 program. The Chinese academics were those who taught into the program for the first two years of study in the Chinese university. The Australian academics were those who had either taught into the 2 + 2 program in both China and Australia or at the Australian university.

Participant consent was given for the interviews to be recorded and notes were taken during each interview. The data collected was transcribed and the notes were encoded for analysis. All the Chinese academics spoke in Mandarin except for one who was the program manager and also an academic. The transcribed data in Chinese was translated to English. The results of the interviews were organised into themes and also aligned with the major themes of the overall study. Pseudonyms were given to each participant.

Voices of the academics from the Chinese and Australian universities were cited. The research questions addressed in this chapter were:

- (i) What were the perceptions of the participating academics to their experiences in the engagement and delivery 2 + 2 dual degree program?
- (ii) What understanding of internationalisation of HE did these participants have and did they have ideas about implications for the 2 + 2 dual degree program?

The emerging themes arising from the research questions are presented in this chapter:

- (i) Engagement in the delivery of the 2 + 2 dual degree program
 - (a) Curriculum, pedagogy, differentiation and challenges
 - (b) Placement of professional experience
- (ii) Internationalisation of the program and implications of 2 + 2 program

9.4 Participants

The interview questions were categorised to collect comprehensive information aligned to the research questions and major themes:

Table 9.1 The Participants: academics from the Chinese and Australian universities

Pseudonym	Country	Qualification	Teaching HE experience	Courses taught
Cao	China	PhD	21	Pedagogy of early childhood education, development of early childhood education, law and policy of early childhood education
Chong	China	PhD	11	Philosophy, pedagogy, research methods
Lu	China	PhD	7	Curriculum design, pedagogy
Moh	China	PhD	5	Curriculum instruction, educational psychology
Rem	China	PhD	5	Art education
Song	China	Master	25	Practicum, curriculum, health and hygiene
Wen	China	Master/PhD candidate	20	Management language and literature
Wong	China	PhD	14	Play, play environments, family education
Alina	Australia	PhD	8	Inclusive education, language and literature, music and movement
Ana	Australia	Master	5	Child development, theory and practice birth – 2 and 2–8, children and society, STEM, maths, assessment, reflective practice, professional issues
Elaine ^a	Australia	Master/PhD candidate	8	Management, EC curriculum, professional issues
Jillian ^a	Australia	Master/Doctoral candidate	5	Child development, language and literacy, STEM, orientation to teaching
Rebecca ^a	Australia	Master/PhD candidate	3	Issue and context, theory and practice 2 to 8, Math

^adenotes lecturers who have taught in the degree in both Australia and China

9.4.1 Background of Participant

- (a) Highest level of education, previous position/job, number of years at the HEI, position held, research interests, course (s) taught/coordinated and other roles undertaken (eg, practicum coordination or visit).

(1) Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Teacher Preparation in Australia & China

- (a) Understanding of early childhood teacher preparation in their country and teaching experience,
 (b) Understanding of comparative approaches to ECEC
 (c) Assessment strategies used for the 2 + 2 program

(2) Information of the 2 + 2 Program and Partnership

- (a) Understanding of what the 2 + 2 double degree program entails
 (b) Level of involvement in 2 + 2 program
 (c) Expectations of the 2 + 2 program (Australian and Chinese perspectives)
 (d) Challenges and key concerns
 (e) Differences in teaching at Australian HEI and Chinese HEI

(3) Understanding of Internationalisation, Internationalised Curriculum and their Focuses

- (a) Internationalisation and curriculum
 (b) Benefits of the 2 + 2
 (c) Areas of improvement
 (d) Student experience
 (e) Sustainability and future of the dual degree 2 + 2 program

9.5 Findings

Background information indicated that all the academics had relevant qualifications and substantial teaching experience to engage in the delivery of the program. The data reported that the Chinese academics had more years of teaching experience (eg., 25, 17, 14 and 11 years) with higher qualifications than the Australian academics. From the interview conducted, all Chinese academics, except Song, reported that they had overseas training and attended study abroad programs. The HEI destinations for the study were mainly the USA and UK. The duration for the overseas professional development ranged from a minimum six months to a maximum of two years. Those that undertook overseas training said that it had helped them to support the students who were enrolled in the 2 + 2 program. The experience gained from their study abroad programs enabled them to understand the importance of cultural understanding and the type of challenges that the students would face in terms of communication and cultural difference. Three Chinese academics commented that they had never been to Australia and may not be able to support the students in some areas due to their lack of knowledge of Australia as a destination for study.

The next section discusses the findings for the emerging first theme:

(I) Engagement in the Delivery of the 2 + 2 Program

(a) Curriculum, pedagogy, differentiation and challenges

As in the literature of internationalised curriculum cited in Leask (2015), academics need to understand the joint curriculum in order to engage and support international students in teaching and learning across the two contexts. When the participants were asked about their knowledge and understanding of the 2 + 2 program, findings demonstrated that both the Australian and Chinese academics had limited knowledge about the program except one for Chinese academic, Cao, who stated that she knew the 2 + 2 very well given she was the one who had developed and implemented the 2 + 2 program.

Some of the voices from the academics were captured:

Song:

I know such a program exists and I think it meets students' demand..... nothing more

Moh:

Yes, I know a bit. Because there are only two such programs and our university think highly of it. The president of the university.....mentioned it. I heard that it's pretty good. In our school of education, it has been mentioned a lot.

Moh's comment that the program was "*mentioned a lot*" but he had limited understanding could mean that academics were not involved in the development or design of the curriculum.

Cao:

I am the one who applied and implemented the program. So, I am afraid nobody is more familiar with this project than I am in our school and in the university. Also, the three courses I teach are part of the curriculum in the 2 + 2 program.

Wen and Chong reported that they basically understood that the 2 + 2 meant students study their first two years in China and last two years in Australia. Wen further commented that she understood that some Australian academics will come to their university to teach.

Chong stated that there was also a 4 + 0 program in which the students stay for four years and do not go abroad. He said students were confused on which to choose, either 2 + 2 or 4 + 0.

Similarly, all the Australian academics reported a lack of understanding of the 2 + 2 and the curriculum. Below, some of the voices from the Australian academics:

Alina:

I don't think I know enough in terms of how it's technically organised... it's like the students do two years of training in China and two years of training and learning in our (Australia) setting....I don't have much insight exactly what they've done in their previous two years and what they are really building on.....no insight of the exact model.

Ana, Jillian and Elaine stated that they understood that there was an agreement but gave similar comments to the Chinese academics about their limited understanding of the curriculum and courses to be taught. Elaine and Rebecca stated that

Australian academics will be deployed to teach in China for some courses and the students will receive two degrees to allow them to teach in Australia and China. Rebecca, Jillian and Elaine were academics from the Australian university who had taught in China and Australia.

The inclusion of a curriculum from a different context in the 2 + 2 made it difficult for the academics to understand students' previous studies and what knowledge they were building on. In addition, the barriers of communication because of language differences made it difficult for academics to share their ideas of the curriculum. Only one Chinese academic was confident to be interviewed in English. Cao stated that though she had spent a number of years at Georgia university in USA, she lacked the practice to speak English and so she had lost her English. As for the Australian academics, they did not have any idea of the first two years curriculum as the material was taught in Chinese and they had no knowledge of the early childhood degree requirements in China. Leask (2015) contended in her research about internationalisation of curriculum in joint programs that when there is a lack of clarity of the curriculum, or when the academic lack the skills to deliver the joint program, they are most likely to be disengaged and challenging and will take a narrow focus on the material they present. To attain the student outcomes and objectives of the international dual degree program for the collaboration between the two universities, "*a clear framework to underpin work in the area of internationalization seems necessary*" for international engagement "*to be translated into institutional policy and practices*" (Turner and Robson 2008, p. 5).

All the Chinese academics informed the interviewers that the university issued a statement that they should change all their assessment components to include more participation and to move away from tests and examinations. At the same time there was a shift to weighting of 60% for participation and 40% for examination. Although the examination component still existed Academics were given the choice to design their assessments for participation on ways they wish to adopt.

The interviewees indicated that they had all included "attendance" as part of the participation component. This was to prevent absenteeism. Academic Wen responded that "Attendance is another strategy".

Chong explained how he included attendance into the 60% assessment component for participation,

I think it's a good change. Attendance is vital. I check if everybody attends the class for at least 6 times. If they are absent for 3 times, they will receive 0. So, attendance is vital... Then I ask them to write at least one paper (essay). They can express their thoughts and opinions on certain issues. Then class participation and discussion. Personally, I pay more attention to who can raise a question, who can notice a problem related to the class lesson.

Another academic Wong used the same strategy of attendance and incorporated 6–7 tasks when students attend. If they are absent, they do not get any marks. Academic Song used the attendance too towards participation mark, but he faced a challenge for the "attendance" participation activity.

Song said,

It's very hard to assess the undergraduates because we have a very big class size, over one hundred, and too many contents to include in the course. I asked a few questions and a few students reply. It's very difficult to use participation as an assessment strategy...

An Australian academic Rebecca, learned about the Chinese university's assessment strategy while teaching there, she commented,

I think one of my big learning curves was coming in and discovering how different their assessment was as well.... different assessment strategies.... have written formal essays or occasionally a test. A lot of blanking on this but technical things where they have to do something of actually act something out....there are many methods and ways that students can do their assessments.

Australian academic Elaine commented about the assessment task she gave to the students when they were at year 3 level in Australia. She said,

..... it was almost like when we get them straight from year 12 (high school) and not been spoon fed... They've had not had to be independent learners before, and they struggle with that..... first they were like, "Yeah no exams!!"....they go "Oh you know, we only have to come to university for 3 hours weekly for this one course"....at the beginning they think it's really easy but when the assignments come, they don't realise how much time it takes to actually read, think and find information (research).... So, I think they struggled with that to start with.

Inputs by academic staff from both institutions of the joint program were relevant and significant for the development of strategies to achieve successful outcomes of student learning. It seemed that academics from both sides had no opportunity to collaborate in relation to curriculum, shared discussion or learning about different pedagogical approaches and contents. From the statement made by Elaine about the struggles faced by the students during their year three level at the Australian university, a key concern was that there was not much support to help these students transit smoothly into the new curriculum or the different context (Ng and Nyland 2016; Wang 2009; Zhu 2016). Leadership of internationalisation need to support staff in their continuous efforts of development, design, assessing and implementing initiative and curriculum. Opportunity for staff exchange and communication need to be created as well as development for staff to integrate the curriculum from both contexts.

Having unclear guidelines of change, for example, the issues confronted by the Chinese academics when the university changed the weightings of the assessment component to include participation, makes practice difficult. The shift to move away from examinations to more participation was adopted to support what the Chinese thought was Western practice. There was no exchange of ideas about assessment and the Australian university did not attempt to change practices. Finding indicated that the shift from years of examinations to include student participation in the Chinese university required collegial efforts in the assessment designs as most of the Chinese academics' interpretation of participation differed from the academics of the Australian university as viewed by Rebecca. Attendance can be a big problem in the Australian context so a discussion around participation

and attendance could have been valuable. From critical perspective of assessments to build competencies requires “*transformative and intercultural and intrapersonal learning that is generated by internationalised experiences*” (Robson 2017, p. 371).

In particular, in a program such as the 2 + 2, teaching and assessment activities need to include a wide range of different cultural contexts of learning. For example, seeking examples from a comparative education approach or case studies with diversity from different places rather than a single one case study near home will help students to acknowledge diversity and also to prevent students “*to retreat into cultural silos*” (Leask 2015; p. 100). When there are opportunities for students to gain multicultural/international perspectives for rich learning, intellectual engagement through learning and assessments will enable students to re-think their “*situatedness in the world*” and the “*political meaning of intercultural experiences*” (Rizvi 2009, p. 264–265). Even if the students had not encountered diversity in the first two years of study the act of going overseas, living and studying in a multicultural environment provided many opportunities.

Three of the Chinese academics reported that they do use a comparative approach to teach in the 2 + 2 program. Song stated that he had never been overseas, like the rest of the academics, but he introduced information from books he read. However, those who went overseas spoke about showing videos of other countries and Moh stated that “*it will broaden their horizon, they can see a lot of cases...*”. The other Chinese academics used the same statement, “*broaden their horizon*”.

The Australian academics, Jillian, Rebecca and Elaine went to the Chinese university to deliver some courses in intensive mode to meet the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) ‘foreign component’ teaching requirement for the first two years of the 2 + 2 program. Jillian lamented that the lesson was delivered in an intensive mode across two weeks for one course and three weeks for two courses. The students found that adapting to the three-hour block of intensive teaching challenging for them as they were used to have 15 min break for each 45 min lesson. The bell will ring to alert everyone about the 15 min break. She stated she later understood why the 3-h was long for the students after she realised about their overloading and cramping of courses in the first two years to meet the double degree requirements. She commented that at times, she only had six students attending as opposed to the first day of 45 students given this course did not account for marks or participation but simply to meet the MoE requirements. This is an example of the Australian academic not showing awareness. One of the researchers had previously taught at the university and on the first day when the bell rang asked what it meant. The students had a break every 15 min as they were used to.

Rebecca reported that she realised that she had no understanding of what the prior knowledge level of the students had. She was surprised that the students did not have any ideas about observation methods and the purpose of child observation. Hence, she quickly adopted a teaching strategy to support the students and it required “*tact I went right back to the start. I think that definitely worked better. But it’s interesting coming and not realising the context already of what they’ve done before*”.

Elaine claimed that due to lack of clarity about the curriculum and information of prior learning that students had, made it complex to know how to address requirements of joint accreditation. She said,

When I went (China) for the first time, I knew nothing. I kinda think now when I look back, I knew absolutely nothing. I kinda just went “Right I’m going to teach” ... I’m still learning about what they do....So, I’m still getting my head around that.

Elaine lamented about the challenges of understanding the curriculum of the 2 + 2 as not having knowledge of their prior learning and the sequencing of courses in terms of pre-requisites. Her frustrations were expressed:

I mean we (Australian university) have our course guide that we’re supposed to teach from our course guide, from what is accredited and this is the course we are going to teach..... well I’m just going to teach that for two weeks, whether or not they are going to understand it, I can’t do that. It’s hard, so I get there and then I plan a certain amount but then it’s kind of, get there, see how they are going, look at their faces then think “is it going? what do they need” then we try and adapt it to that... still meet the course outcomes while I’m there.

Elaine asked the students for their Chinese curriculum, course learning outcomes and all the standards but they could not tell her. She stated that the students were in the same boat as her as “*they’ve got as much stuff as we’ve got*”.

Given the need to meet the dual degree accreditation of the Australian and Chinese requirements during the first two years, a large number of courses that students undertook had created challenges about the sequence of the courses. This resulted a heavily overloaded timetable. The foreign teaching component for all students (including those not in the 2 + 2 but from the 4 + 0) as required by the Chinese MoE were reported by Jillian, Elaine and Rebecca who taught in China. This overload was commented upon by Elaine,

I was there last time, they layered all of my sessions on top of their normal timetable.... some days we had, you know I was still teaching at 9:40pm at night, and half of those students were asleep or trying to stay awake, and I could sing and danced at that time of the night and it wouldn’t matter. And so I think the quality of what they could possibly take in at that time of night over those two weeks, it’s hard to not feel like I’m wasting my time and wasting theirs.

Rebecca asserted that she tried to include interesting activities such as group interactions as strategy to keep these students interested but was hindered by the furniture in the room. The non-movable long table and chairs hindered her planned activity to promote interactions. She had 40 students for the first day as someone from the university came to check on the attendance on the first day. There was a day she had only 8 students.

Chinese academics, Ren, Wong, Chong and Song agreed that to accomplish the student outcomes successfully for the 2 + 2 dual degree components, students need to undertake sufficient and relevant learning for the context and the overload was not helpful. Chong felt that as they had too many courses to study in the first two years, in addition the English preparation for entry requirements to the Australian university, they “are also not well prepared in terms of the core courses...this is a main concern”.

Ren said,

First, they have too many courses. They are required to take many courses (in the first two years) due to their overseas study plan and English courses take up a lot of their time. They are heavy loaded....

All the Chinese academics reported the biggest challenge for the students would be English and they were also worried about the cultural adjustment to the differences in the Australian system.

Song commented,

Our system pays a lot of attention to knowledge and teachers are responsible for delivering systematic knowledge to students through lecturing and helping them understand. I suppose Australian system is different and may emphasize more on student-initiated learning. Therefore, learning methods may be different. Chinese students may get used to listening and expect their teachers to lecture after decades of schooling.

The complications of overloading the students due to an attempt to meet all MoE and Australian requirements of the dual degree award from both jurisdictions have created tensions and challenges for academics and students. In the 2 + 2 program, there was an assumption that quality assurance is controlled by meeting the accreditation criteria stipulated by the Chinese MoE and the Australia Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Findings indicated that joint programs need to have concerted efforts, consulted with collegially from relevant academics and expertise will support student learning outcomes. Zheng (2009) reported that international joint programs approved by the Chinese MoE have less flexibility to change or make amendments to the curriculum design and mapping. The Australian content was also externally approved and could not be changed. The 2 + 2 was an approved program from the Chinese MoE and it was complex given there were a number of courses that were not contextually relevant and added on requirements of foreign component teaching within the 2 + 2 further complicated the understanding and delivery of curriculum to meet the outcomes. This created an additional load for students (Zheng 2009; Ng and Nyland 2018). The findings indicated there were concerns in the intensified learning delivery mode during the first two years which was not ideal for student outcomes and motivation of learning. Intensives have become common in Australia, or even block mode teaching, is a sign of global forces and universities trying to meet demands, cater for as many students as possible with minimal numbers of teaching staff is a phenomenon faced by the Australian and Chinese academics.

Marketisation and changing policy for collaborative articulation programs have consequences for the intrinsic value of education. Zheng (2009, p.51) reported that "marketisation of higher education must be balanced by safeguarding the quality of education" and he asserted that Chinese universities often have the "us and them attitude" and not a functional approach to address issue, hence the "response is not complete". As Australian universities have been contented to chase the dollar and have allowed their own standards to be threatened by grade creep and alternative entry arrangements to programs, it would appear there are issues for all partners in these international associations.

(b) Placement of professional experience

In the 2 + 2 program, the students have to fulfil a total of 80 days placement requirements across the 4 years early childhood education undergraduate program as specified by the Australian governance body, ACECQA. The students had completed 40 days placement in the Chinese context, assessed as equivalent to 20 days by ACECQA and therefore needed 60 days of placement in the Australian context. Given that the students entered placement at year 3 level in Australia, a level of knowledge on technical issues, like child observations was required. Findings indicated that the students faced challenges when they entered into placement in early years settings in Australia as their theoretical and technical knowledge did not meld easily with the Australian program. This was a problem with mixing two four-year programs together. As Australia also has a graduate diploma program of one year that covers Australian requirements utilising that program, at least partially, may have created a better mix.

The Chinese academics in the interviews reported how they tried to prepare the students for their placements. For example,

Cao:

Our students have many opportunities to observe in schools/kindergartens and have two practicums: one for 40 days in kindergarten to meet the 2+2 requirements, another for 2 months. Teachers always take students to schools/kindergartens to observe the teaching practices, play videos in the class, and discuss teaching-related cases studies

Findings indicated that not all the Chinese academics interviewed were involved in the supervision of students for the ECEC practicum. Moh reported that he only supervised students enrolled in the general education major but not those in the preschool sector.

Wong:

Every year, there are certain kindergartens cooperate with us. There are some really good kindergartens that are very far from our universities. Considering the financial issue (cost), we usually send students to kindergartens nearby. I teach children's play so I bring my students to kindergarten and observe what happened in practice regarding play. We have assignments that require student to do observation. I think this is one way to fit in the structure of the degree.

Song:

The undergraduate students are required to conduct a four-week practicum in the kindergarten.... they are expected to teach, organize activities, manage the class, and instruct children's daily routine and play. They usually do their practicum at the best kindergartens of the region. Our university is the leading institution in the field of education in our region. We have a great influence on regional kindergartens because many kindergarten teachers and directors have been trained at our university. Therefore, local kindergartens are very supportive for the students' practicum.

It was noted that the statements made by Song and Wong did not necessarily line up as Wong stated the good kindergartens were too far but due to cost, they allocated the students to nearby kindergartens. The quality of the nearby kindergartens was not commented upon.

Wen:

....practice opportunities can be added into courses, such as kindergarten observation, watching kindergarten-related video, and introducing my working experiences at kindergarten. In addition, the students have a few weeks placement in the kindergarten.

Moh:

I have supervised internship for more than 10 cohorts of undergraduate students. I've also done teacher training, consultation and lecturing for kindergartens, professional conferences and professional forums and have participated in curriculum development of kindergartens.

Chong:

In many courses, the practical element is very rare. As teachers, we try our best to fit these experiences into our class. If we want to improve students' practical experience, that take up too much time and energya lot of barriers restrict the practical experience for students.

Chong shared how rare the practicum component was in many courses. This is a similar picture to Australia where only selected courses have a practical component.

The prior learning from stage 1 (first two years) at the Chinese university is significant for the 2 + 2 students and should be designed to ensure continuity and a smooth transition to stage 2 of their program at year 3 level in Australia. Therefore, it is important for joint program to help academics from both countries to gain understanding of the curriculum, cultural understanding and pedagogies as well expectations of desired outcomes of the 2 + 2 program.

Comments made by the Australian academics suggest challenges in transitioning the students into year 3 level placement in an early childhood setting.

Elaine:

...they did however many days in a kindergarten setting over in China, like 20 days.

I'm not sure that that really gave them much experience it didn't really help them much for their first placement here. It was really like their first placement here ever. It was very hard for them, they couldn't get their head around that this is education and this is learningthey didn't have much understanding of play based learning.

Alina:

Placement...complex... there are a lot of unknown "territories"needs strong foundationsbecause they have such different social cultural context. They're doing two different degrees..... doing different kinds of placement (China and Australia). That's really tricky because it's so intense, there's not much time for different pace of learning and passive learning. There's a lot of spoon feeding.

Elaine:

I'm not sure the placement (in China) was the best designed way to do it, but that's the way it went. I actually visiting quite a few of them here (Australia). They were used to being with their group but was individual at a centre (Australia). There was a lot of criticism from the centres about their language and their skills, they expected a higher skill level than they had for year three students with a higher understanding. Um..so that was probably pretty hard for them....lot of the mentor reported back that there was no understanding about aller-

gies and not to use the same spoon for vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Things like that which they don't really have in China.

Ana:

...in China, you know that they've got 4 to 500 children in one centre.... Whereas, our centre can be much lower numbers and very different environmentthey saw the diversity here, of children, compared to China, which would be more mono culture.

Elaine:

I went to visit them ... at a preschool placement (Australia), some of them had the 3 to 5 kind of room, and a long day care, some of them had just sessional kinder. They were still getting their head around the differences in the settings that we have.....the babies round, and most of them didn't enjoy it..... So, they were frightened to pick them (babies or toddlers) up..... that took a while.

An issue in comparing the Chinese and Australian academic reports here is the different focus and some attitudinal emphasis emerging. All the Australian academics mentioned the Chinese placement, some in judgmental language although they had not experienced these centres. The Chinese all described their actions within their own environment and did not comment on Australia. As mentioned earlier a more genuine partnership where academics could share their work and ideas may have led to more collaborative comments.

(II) Internationalisation of the Program and Implications for the Academics

The Chinese academics were asked about their understanding of internationalisation and the implications for the 2 + 2 program,

Moh stated that the Chinese university paid a lot of attention to internationalisation of curriculum. From his understanding, the internationalisation of curriculum should be in three parts, first, to include important theories not only from China but also from other countries. Second, to include various research methods from different countries across borders and last, to use cases from other countries such as America.

Cao stated that the university has two strategic focuses, internationalisation and informationalisation. Song referred to internationalisation as working on a project to internationalise education. He stated that nothing has been "concrete" and they are still exploring the topic.

Wen linked the term to internationalisation of curriculum. She believed that,

to broaden students' horizon, although we may not teach in English, internationalization of curriculum can be achieved through adding teaching contents and ideas for other countries and through international comparison.

Chong reported that his university stresses internationalisation by sending a lot of teachers overseas as visiting scholars or visiting professors. He said,

...second, internationalise the teachers, then internationalise through foreign text books. Three, the university encourages us to teach some courses in English and encourage us to introduce some textbooks written in English

Chong's statement about internationalisation was supported by (Wang 2009, p. 58) who suggested the following activities would encourage internationalisation: (1) study abroad, sending students, scholars and faculty members for advanced study and research collaboration, (2) integrate the international dimension through the use of foreign textbooks and development of English programs and (3) cooperation with foreign tertiary education institutions in transnational programs. Internationalisation has become popular and universities have begun to develop strategic policies to strengthen such initiatives.

Wang (2009) cited Zhan's (2004) research on internationalisation experiences at Shandong university and reported that the expansion of internationalisation of HE was often included in the strategic plan at Shandong university. Internationalisation was expanded through activities such as, (1) teaching with internationalised curriculum, mode, and methods and using English as the medium of instruction, (2) research participation to be joint collaborations with international institutions, including establishing research centres with famous experts (Joseph Tobin and James Heckman are visiting professors at Chinese universities), (3) catering for overseas students, conducting international schools for foreign students in English, (4) employ more overseas professors, teachers with global experiences and strengthen international research and (5) improve international of management staff with an eye to adopting relevant international practices.

As for Wong, she said,

I think internationalization of curriculum does not only mean we should know what do you think... but also that we should let you know what we think. For example, in our culture it is very difficult for teachers to manage a big group. So, the best form of internationalization is that we get to know each other.

For the Australian academics the participants did not answer the question so directly and seemed to largely equate the idea of internationalisation of the curriculum with the university enrolling international students. Jillian expressed a desire to be culturally sensitive and regretted there was no more sharing but she was talking about content within the curriculum.

...today saying to them 'it doesn't have to just be English rhymes, you can use your rhymes from your culture'. And I say this is an example that children should be able to hear their own languages. But I don't think we include their way, their curriculum and their understanding enough, it's very Australian centric.

Alina also thought in terms of the students themselves and the courses they were experiencing. She saw the international student market as business and then commented on the implications of diversity among the student cohort. She acknowledged that "*I try to go beyond just to bring in the aspects of where the students come from*".

Ah well to be honest from what I have experienced in terms of the statistics of how many students that come from international background and they're classified as international students, meaning they have to have a certain English proficiency, meaning they have to attend 80% classes and all that and have face to face more than not, there's a very—significant number of them for international background. And I think there is a lot of online

information that is flowing about international students..... I thought even just the fact that we have that as a professional development it is telling that we are aiming to attract more international students. So I'm not sure..... that was a business aspect.

Ana suspected there might be more to the question.

Is that what you think that question is about? And...internationalisation of curriculum.... My expectations would be that it really does help unite at a global level in a way as a profession where work global level, being advocates for young children. So, it connects us at a worldwide, global level about children and you can think about things like united nations umm.....To me that suggests that they are looking outside their own country in looking at other approaches and that is a good thing as we are coming together to discuss the other approaches for children around early childhood,

Rebecca had taught in China and had done professional experience (PX) in China as an undergraduate as well as being involved with the 2 + 2 students in Australia. When asked about internationalisation she queried:

Do we actually have an emphasis on internationalisation for curriculum here [Australia]?

She did add that she thought it was important to consider internationalisation in the context of “other countries and thinking about how early childhood is done in other countries”.

These responses to the question of internationalisation suggest the Chinese academics have been informed of their university's plans about as part of the strategic plan of the university. The Australian group were aware of the push for international students, knew it was a business plan and mainly restricted their comments to ideas of diversity. Despite these varying views of internationalisation there were significant implications for academics at both universities. There were complications of the delivery, curriculum, the demands in meeting the program accreditation of two different jurisdictions, worries about overloading the students and lack of knowledge of teaching and content in the partner university. An important function of internationalisation in HE is to ensure that there is intercultural understanding and communication among academics and students (Robson 2017). There was little interaction with academics across the two institutions.

9.6 Critical Analysis

When discussing the double degree, the four Chinese academics, Chong, Moh, Ren and Lu thought the students would not be adequately equipped with relevant knowledge and understanding for the fulfilment of the program. They also thought it would be challenging for the students to transit smoothly to the partner institution without appropriate preparation. Chong said due to having to meeting education requirements in China, the students may not have enough understanding of “core courses” required in the Australian context. He said, “there are some disconnections ... their performance in Australia may be affected. I know a little about it ... study for two years in our university ... and then spend two years in your

university ... they get two degrees". He was referring to the number of core ECEC specialisation studied in the first two years in China and was concerned that the students may not be adequately prepared for Australia as they had to study general courses for the Chinese degree. The courses had a poor overlap as well as content courses like art and music are no longer emphasised in Australian tertiary programs but compulsory in China. From the Australian academic comments there was little knowledge of what the students were bringing. The Chinese academics did not feel confident of how they could prepare the students. Moh contended that since most of the Chinese academics knew little about Australian cultural context it was difficult to help the students for the new institution, "so, we may not sufficiently prepare our students for their oversea study given we don't have the knowledge ... there are not many opportunities for them to practice".

Wen's comments were similar to Song, she said,

I think there are two main challenges. First, the students should have good language skills in order to communicate overseas. Second, there are culture differences. Our students are familiar with Chinese education system which features on cramming and emphasises on systematic theory teaching. I think Australian education system may be different and pay attention to students' participation and discussion in the class, not so much on systematic theory learning. Therefore, students may feel challenged in learning when there.

Rebecca strongly believed that gaining understanding of the culture, she would be able to support the students. She said,

.....while the students may say yes that could be something totally different to what we would be delivering in that area. Therefore, there might be *holes* in things. There might also be extra things but we might assume knowledge that isn't there.

Academics from both countries expressed a wish to make connections with their counterparts but there were no opportunities created for them to do so. As described in Chap. 7 a number of the Australian academics went to China to deliver courses in English, but this opportunity was not utilised. The Chinese academics said they did not know who came from Australia to teach and there was no introduction. The Australian academics said while they were in China, they never met other academics as their teaching programs were organised by an agent working between the two universities. The Australian academics were sometimes invited to a welcome dinner with the agent and the program manager. The Chinese program manager, Wong stated,

...the program is about teaching..... Some teachers are from your university came.... So, we should establish a good relationship. We should contact more often to share teaching resources and discuss common interests....

The other partnership that did not occur was the opportunity to establish a relationship for future research collaboration. As phrased by Rebecca, "*Very up in the air, very up in the air.... I think it would take a lot of work to really strengthen it, not necessarily the relationships but certainly the research side of things*".

All Australian and Chinese academics believed that the 2 + 2 dual degree program would provide better job prospects for the students. The Chinese academics said the program can sustain as the dual degree provide them with flexibility as they

can return to work in international schools or centres that pay good salaries. This needs to be investigated. At present most of the 2 + 2 students remaining in Australia have gone on to further study. If they are working in early childhood setting, they are mostly working to support their studies and are not employed as teachers. There are a few exceptions but as registration is onerous only those who wish to pursue a career of early childhood teacher have taken this road. We have little information on those who have returned to China. Chapter 3, in this volume suggests that the private sector in China is changing so the assumption these students would be employed in the high-end private sector, for example, international schools, may not be valid.

9.7 Conclusion

From the literature on internationalisation, there is often no universal approach to internationalisation or definition (Kirk et al. 2018; Leask 2009, 2015). In this study, prominent challenges identified centred around the requirements of the dual degree, lack of clarity about curriculum and the delivery of teaching given the different educational and cultural contexts. There was no involvement on the part of most of the academics in the mapping and design of courses and desired outcomes and without shared aims, “*disconnects*” will arise stemming from the lack of understanding in the conceptualisation of the 2 + 2 program (Kirk et al. 2018; Ng and Nyland 2018; Sutrisno 2014; Wu and Naidoo 2016).

This commitment leading to an organisational purpose is significant in achieving effective coordination, integration and a successful collaboration. This requires managerial support. Whenever there is an identified marketing strategy, such as the dual degree program, concerted efforts and consensus to empower the alliances between the international partners are needed (Wu and Naidoo 2016).

In a research conducted by Wu and Naidoo (2016, p. 1135), it was acknowledged that senior management needed to include academics as part of their responsibilities in recruitment activities and “*to address this disconnect if they are to maximise the likelihood of their international strategy being implemented successfully*”. Findings of this study indicated a lack of understanding and knowledge of the 2 + 2 program by the Chinese and Australian academics.

The intended and actual learning outcomes of the “*internationalised*” curriculum as contended by Leask (2015, p. 11) may differ as the “*development of these perspectives may or may not be supported and assessed*”. The desired outcomes of the 2 + 2 program aimed to meet the accreditation requirements of the Chinese MoE and the Australian regulatory body, ACECQA to allow the students to stay in Australia or return to China, as ECEC teachers. Amendments to the curriculum to ensure students had appropriate qualifications to meet the demands of the Chinese and Australian governments needed a “*process of contextualization and localization. It is not internationalization of the curriculum*” (Leask 2015, p. 12). This did not occur. As with many processes the staff who were to deliver the services were not part of the planning and organisation, this was done through university bodies

and the agent. The quality of academic exchanges is vital for the negotiation of social and transformative change in the area of internationalisation. Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 202) call for:

a new imaginery which recognizes all human beings need to think locally, nationally and globally—a form of cosmopolitan citizenship that emphasizes collective well being connected across local, national and global dimensions.

This chapter presented the engagement by the academics from the Chinese and Australian universities in the joint 2 + 2 program. To understand academic and student experiences in an international program, there is a need to review the drivers of internationalisation and how HEIs are motivated. Given the findings indicated a lack of clarity, information on curriculum, student prior learning and the characteristics of the joint dual degree program it reflects the need to include leadership and horizontal management processes to support the academic and student experiences. Internationalisation of HE has shaped the practices of academics and influenced perceptions of the academic identity. Findings have informed the need for policy development, practices and future collaborative international research.

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