Article

Organizational Effectiveness in Online Teaching: China and Australia Compared

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Abstract: This paper investigates the organizational effectiveness of online teaching in a Chinese public middle school during the COVID-19 pandemic, using Haileybury Pangea, an Australian private online school, as a comparative benchmark. Drawing on the McKinsey 7S framework and the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model, the study systematically examines multiple dimensions of organizational performance, including strategic orientation, operational systems, teacher professional development, student engagement, and institutional culture. The analysis reveals that the Chinese public school demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in transitioning to online instruction; however, its efforts were constrained by fragmented digital platforms, insufficient teacher training, and a rigid hierarchical culture that limited pedagogical innovation. In contrast, Haileybury Pangea leveraged an integrated digital ecosystem, data-driven instructional design, and distributed leadership to cultivate a student-centred and sustainable online learning environment. The comparative findings underscore the critical importance of aligning vision-driven strategy with systemic infrastructure and fostering a culture of openness and experimentation. Based on these insights, the study offers actionable recommendations for enhancing China's public education system, including strengthening teacher autonomy, improving platform interoperability, promoting continuous professional development, and encouraging innovative teaching practices to sustain high-quality, resilient online learning.

Keywords: online teaching; organizational effectiveness; McKinsey 7S; Input-Process-Output; China; Australia; comparative education

1. Introduction

In recent years, and particularly following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, online education has undergone unprecedented growth worldwide. This rapid shift not only highlights the transformative potential of digital learning but also exposes the structural vulnerabilities of educational systems across different countries, particularly in terms of technological infrastructure, organizational strategy, and long-term preparedness (OECD, *AI and the Future of Skills* report, 2021). While many private schools were able to swiftly transition to remote teaching thanks to pre-existing digital ecosystems and flexible management structures, public schools-especially those in resource-constrained contexts-frequently encountered significant challenges, including insufficient readiness, reactive emergency measures, and the absence of coherent long-term planning [1].

Drawing on my personal experience as an online teacher in a Chinese public middle school, this paper critically examines the organizational effectiveness of remote teaching in this context. In addition, as a current master's student in education in Australia, I adopt a dual perspective-both practitioner and researcher-which enables a nuanced analysis that integrates practical insights with theoretical frameworks. To identify potential pathways for improvement, this study employs Haileybury Pangea, an Australian private online school, as a comparative case.

The primary aim of this paper is to systematically evaluate the organizational effectiveness of online teaching in the Chinese public school using the McKinsey 7S model in conjunction with the Input-Process-Output (I-P-O) framework. By analysing strategy, systems, teacher development, student engagement, and organizational culture, the study seeks to identify both strengths and limitations in the current model. Furthermore, through a comparative analysis with Haileybury Pangea, the paper explores evidence-based strategies for fostering adaptive, sustainable, and student-centred online education in China's public education system, providing insights that may inform both policy and practice.

2. Organizational Background and Overview of Online Teaching Practice

2.1. School Context and Online Teaching Implementation

This study focuses on a public junior high school in eastern China (hereinafter referred to as "X City No. 1 Middle School"), which currently enrolls approximately 2,500 students and employs more than 120 faculty and staff. In response to the epidemic prevention and control policies, the school transitioned entirely to online teaching during the spring semester of 2022. During this period, as an English teacher, I was deeply involved in the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the remote teaching process, providing firsthand insights into the school's platform selection, instructional organization, and teacher-student adaptation.

The school primarily relies on DingTalk for administrative functions such as notifications, homework assignments, and attendance, while Tencent Conference serves as the primary platform for live instruction. However, these platforms operate independently, lacking data interoperability and functional integration. Consequently, teachers must manually compile attendance records, track homework submissions, and assess classroom participation, which is both time-consuming and inefficient. Additionally, classroom scheduling closely mirrors the traditional offline timetable, with limited adaptation or reconstruction for the online environment. For instance, in my English classes, although average attendance reaches approximately 85%, student engagement remains low. Many students habitually keep their cameras and microphones off, resulting in minimal interaction, and homework completion rates fluctuate significantly due to the absence of a systematic monitoring mechanism.

2.2. Challenges Faced by Teachers and Students

Teachers at X City No. 1 Middle School encountered multiple challenges in adapting to online teaching. Most had not received formal or systematic training for remote instruction and lacked proficiency in using digital tools for interactive teaching or data-driven evaluation [2]. The limited professional development opportunities provided by the school mainly focused on technical operation, without addressing pedagogical strategies or instructional design [1].

Furthermore, teachers had little flexibility in course scheduling and evaluation methods. Teaching progress and assessment criteria were predominantly dictated by higher-level education authorities, reflecting a top-down management approach. While this centralized control facilitated rapid adaptation during the emergency, it simultaneously constrained teachers' autonomy, innovation, and pedagogical creativity. Students, on the other hand, faced difficulties in maintaining engagement and self-regulated learning in a relatively passive online environment, exacerbated by a lack of personalized support and interactive instructional design [3].

2.3. Comparative Case: Haileybury Pangea and Implications

In contrast, Haileybury Pangea, an online branch of the Australian private school Haileybury, demonstrates a more systematic and forward-looking model of remote teach-

ing. Leveraging a self-developed digital platform integrated with Canvas, the school enables students to progress at their own pace while providing teachers with real-time learning analytics to guide instructional adjustments. In addition, Haileybury Pangea employs a House Mentor system, which offers each student both academic guidance and psychological support, fostering a holistic and student-centred learning environment.

Significant differences also exist in educational philosophy and resource allocation. Whereas X City No. 1 Middle School relies on government-deployed platforms with limited functionality and minimal systemic collaboration among teachers, Haileybury Pangea enjoys high resource autonomy, emphasizes continuous collaboration between the educational technology team and teachers, and prioritizes personalized learning paths, learner autonomy, and data-informed evaluation.

This comparison not only highlights gaps in technological infrastructure and organizational strategy but also provides a concrete basis for evaluating organizational effectiveness in the Chinese public school context. In particular, enhancing platform integration and empowering teacher initiative under resource constraints emerges as a central challenge for promoting sustainable digital transformation in China's public education system [4].

3. Organizational Effectiveness Analysis Framework

To systematically evaluate the organizational effectiveness of X City No. 1 Middle School in the context of online teaching, this study adopts the McKinsey 7S Framework as its primary theoretical lens. The 7S model posits that organizational performance relies on the alignment and mutual reinforcement of seven interdependent elements: strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style (leadership), staff, and skills [5]. These elements are divided into "hard" factors-strategy, structure, and systems-which are more tangible and easier to influence through formal interventions, and "soft" factors-shared values, leadership style, staff, and professional skills-which shape organizational culture and human capital, often determining the sustainability of reforms [6].

Compared with traditional evaluation methods that primarily focus on measurable outcomes, such as student performance or completion rates, the 7S model offers a holistic perspective that simultaneously addresses structural design, operational mechanisms, and cultural dynamics. This makes it particularly well-suited for examining educational organizations, where both policy-driven structures and human-centered pedagogical practices interact to shape teaching effectiveness. In the context of this study, the framework allows for a nuanced assessment of how strategy formulation, digital platform integration, teacher competence, and school culture collectively influence the effectiveness of online teaching [7].

In addition, this study integrates the Input-Process-Output (I-P-O) framework as a complementary analytical tool. While the 7S model captures organizational and cultural dimensions, the I-P-O framework provides a process-oriented perspective by examining how inputs (e.g., teaching resources, teacher skills, digital infrastructure) are transformed through organizational processes (e.g., course design, teaching delivery, student engagement) to generate outputs (e.g., learning outcomes, engagement levels, teacher satisfaction). Combining these two frameworks enables a comprehensive evaluation that accounts for both structural-culture alignment and process efficiency, offering actionable insights for improvement.

Furthermore, the framework supports the comparative analysis between X City No. 1 Middle School and Haileybury Pangea by providing a consistent set of evaluation dimensions. For example, differences in strategy formulation, digital ecosystem integration, and leadership distribution can be systematically identified and analyzed. By linking organizational structures, human resource capacities, and pedagogical processes, this dual-framework approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the factors that drive or con-

strain online teaching effectiveness, and informs context-specific recommendations for enhancing resilience, innovation, and student-centered learning in China's public education system.

4. Analysis of organizational effectiveness by dimension

4.1. Strategy and Vision

At the strategic level of online education, X City No. 1 Middle School exhibited a predominantly reactive and short-term approach. The decision to implement remote teaching was primarily driven by the urgent need to maintain instructional continuity in response to the sudden COVID-19 outbreak, rather than by a deliberate effort to innovate pedagogical methods or transform organizational structures. In practice, teachers were largely excluded from the formulation of remote teaching plans, and the school lacked a clearly articulated medium- or long-term vision for online education, as well as structured pathways for teacher professional growth in the digital environment. While this short-term, compliance-focused strategy allowed for rapid implementation, it failed to provide a guiding framework for instructional innovation and undermined the school's capacity to adapt to ongoing technological and pedagogical changes.

In contrast, Haileybury Pangea, the online branch of an Australian private school, approaches digital education as a strategic starting point rather than an emergency response. The school has developed a comprehensive, fully integrated platform and a long-term digital vision centred on personalized learning. Its teaching system emphasizes student-led, data-informed, and globally collaborative learning experiences. Every aspect of the platform-from curriculum design to assessment analytics-is deliberately aligned with long-term strategic goals, ensuring sustainability and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

As Channon and Caldart highlight, "the core of organizational change is not short-term efficiency, but value-driven vision shaping" [8]. The absence of such a forward-looking strategy in X City No. 1 Middle School is a key underlying factor contributing to subsequent institutional, capacity, and cultural challenges. Specifically, the lack of strategic direction constrains the development of teaching innovation, diminishes motivation for cross-departmental collaboration, and prevents the formation of shared goals among educators engaged in online teaching. This analysis suggests that strategic vision is not merely aspirational but essential for guiding sustainable pedagogical innovation and fostering an adaptive organizational culture in the context of digital learning.

4.2. Systems & Infrastructure

X City No. 1 Middle School primarily relies on DingTalk and Tencent Conference for online teaching. However, these platforms function independently, with minimal integration, which severely limits data tracking, instructional feedback, and systemic coherence [9]. Teachers are required to manually record student attendance, track homework submissions, and summarize classroom interactions. This repetitive administrative burden not only reduces efficiency but also hinders the formation of a comprehensive, data-driven understanding of students' overall learning progress. The disjointed platform structure thus restricts the school's capacity for timely instructional adjustments and targeted interventions, highlighting a lack of integrated, teaching-centered thinking in system design.

In contrast, Haileybury Pangea implements a unified digital teaching ecosystem that integrates course management, performance evaluation, behavioural tracking, and interactive feedback. The platform generates real-time learning analytics, enabling teachers to monitor student engagement, assess individual learning paths, and adjust instructional strategies promptly. Beyond facilitating routine teaching tasks, the system functions as a core decision-support tool, enhancing teachers' ability to deliver adaptive, data-informed pedagogy.

As Li and Wang [10] argue, an effective educational technology system should be operable, feedback-oriented, and data-readable, transforming technology from a simple auxiliary tool into a foundational infrastructure that strengthens organizational intelligence. Fundamentally, the contrast between the two schools lies not merely in technological choice but in the underlying institutional design philosophy: X City No. 1 Middle School reflects an emergency-driven configuration prioritizing minimum functional implementation, while Haileybury Pangea embodies a strategic, long-term deployment aimed at continuous optimization of teaching and learning.

Moreover, the systemic limitations of the Chinese public school illustrate the broader challenges facing many resource-constrained educational institutions during rapid digital transformation. Without a coherent integration of platforms, data, and instructional processes, even highly motivated teachers struggle to achieve precise pedagogical interventions, which in turn limits student engagement and learning outcomes. This analysis underscores the critical role of infrastructure as an enabler of adaptive, evidence-based teaching and highlights the importance of systemic planning in sustaining effective online education.

4.3. Staff Capability & Professional Development

Although teachers at X City No. 1 Middle School demonstrated considerable adaptability and were able to quickly transition to online teaching, significant deficiencies exist in the overall teacher development mechanism. Most professional development initiatives were narrowly focused on technical skills, such as platform operation, rather than addressing core pedagogical competencies, including online instructional strategies, curriculum redesign, and interactive course design. As a result, teachers were often left to navigate the complexities of online teaching individually, without structured opportunities for peer support, collaborative problem-solving, or the internal sharing of best practices. This isolation has hindered the accumulation of organizational knowledge and the systematic improvement of teaching capabilities.

By contrast, Haileybury Pangea implements a comprehensive teacher professional development framework. This includes periodic teaching seminars, workshops on data literacy, and training in instructional design for digital environments. The school also fosters an internal collaboration mechanism, encouraging teachers to engage in curriculum co-construction, share feedback on platform functionalities, and participate in the iterative refinement of instructional resources. In this context, teachers are recognized not merely as content deliverers but as active collaborators and co-creators in curriculum design and platform optimization.

As noted by, teacher effectiveness is the engine of educational change, rather than a passive executor of top-down directives [11]. When supported by systematic professional development and collaborative structures, teachers can achieve continuous professional growth and cultivate learning capabilities within the organization [1]. In the case of X City No. 1 Middle School, while teachers have demonstrated short-term adaptability, their long-term professional development is constrained by the absence of institutional support, collaborative culture, and structured mechanisms for capacity-building. This limitation not only affects individual teacher growth but also undermines the school's ability to sustain innovative and effective online teaching practices over time.

Overall, this dimension underscores the critical role of institutionalized professional development and teacher empowerment in enhancing organizational effectiveness. Without systematic support, even highly adaptable teachers cannot fully leverage digital platforms or implement pedagogically sophisticated online instruction, limiting the potential impact of online education initiatives.

4.4. Student Engagement and Outcomes

Although attendance in online classes at X City No. 1 Middle School is relatively high-averaging approximately 85% for English courses-actual student engagement remains low. Most students keep their microphones and cameras off, seldom participate in class discussions, and frequently delay or fail to submit assignments. The digital platforms in use lack the capacity to monitor students' attention or provide timely interactive guidance, limiting teachers' ability to respond to individual learning needs. As Chen [1] notes, student engagement in online learning is influenced by multiple factors, including individual learning characteristics, teacher competence, course design, online learning environment, and the quality of instructional processes. These factors interact dynamically to shape students' motivation, participation, and learning outcomes.

In contrast, Haileybury Pangea provides comprehensive support for student learning across both academic and psychological dimensions through its integrated digital platform and the House Mentor system. Each student has a personalized learning profile, and the platform automatically generates their learning trajectory, allowing teachers to adjust instructional strategies in real time. In addition, mentors conduct regular one-on-one sessions that address both academic progress and emotional well-being, helping to identify potential learning difficulties or psychological risks. This approach fosters a strong sense of being seen, which is rare in online learning environments, and strengthens students' intrinsic motivation and engagement.

Hao pointed out that students that students' emotional connection and recognition are critical factors influencing continuity and effectiveness in online learning [12]. In the absence of sufficient technical infrastructure and institutional support, X City No. 1 Middle School is unable to provide individualized monitoring or meaningful interaction for every student. Consequently, many students experience a sense of alienation and diminished motivation, which undermines the effectiveness of online education and limits learning outcomes.

Overall, the comparison highlights that student engagement is not merely a function of attendance but depends on integrated system design, teacher capacity, and strategic support structures. Without these, even high participation rates may mask low-quality engagement, emphasizing the need for holistic approaches that align strategy, systems, staff capability, and student support to sustain effective online learning.

4.5. Organizational Culture and Leadership

The organizational culture at X City No. 1 Middle School emphasizes order and norms, with teaching management oriented toward execution. During the transition to online teaching, most teachers passively accepted task assignments and had limited autonomy in instructional design, platform use, or curriculum adjustments. Within this cultural atmosphere, teachers tend to focus on "completing requirements" rather than actively exploring innovative teaching methods or optimizing online interactive structures. Reform initiatives are primarily driven by top-down instructions, with limited bottom-up feedback or experimental mechanisms, often resulting in innovative measures becoming formalities. This execution-oriented culture is closely related to the bureaucratic structure and collectivist values that have long shaped the Chinese educational system [3]. In a school organization with a clear hierarchy and emphasis on stability, teachers are typically regarded as policy implementers rather than active participants in change. The high recognition of authority and order, influenced by Confucian culture, also encourages centralized control and standardization, limiting institutional support for teacher trial-and-error and reflective practices [13].

In contrast, Haileybury Pangea promotes a distributed leadership culture with teachers at its core. The school encourages educators to suggest teaching optimizations, participate in course design and platform iteration, and assume consulting and co-construction

roles in decision-making. This leadership style emphasizes trust and collaboration, positioning teachers not only as executors but also as promoters of system improvement. Such a culture enhances the organization's learning capacity and adaptability.

A learning organization should continuously stimulate learning momentum, collective reflection, and systematic growth among its members [8]. However, under the current hierarchical management and risk-averse orientation, X City No. 1 Middle School has yet to establish an organizational atmosphere that tolerates experimentation and encourages innovation. The absence of institutionalized feedback channels and diversified pilot mechanisms makes the school highly dependent on external policies to drive reforms, making it difficult to cultivate an internal culture of continuous improvement.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the five dimensions of organizational effectiveness reveals that X City No. 1 Middle School has demonstrated a degree of resilience in implementing remote teaching, particularly in terms of teachers' rapid adaptation and strong sense of professional responsibility. Nevertheless, the school's overall organizational effectiveness exhibits clear limitations, including structural fragmentation, strategic ambiguity, and cultural rigidity. The lack of integration between digital teaching platforms, limited use of learning data, insufficient institutional support for professional development, and a management culture that discourages experimentation and innovation have collectively constrained the school's ability to achieve sustained improvements in online teaching quality.

These findings highlight that organizational resilience alone is insufficient to ensure effective online education. For sustained improvement, schools require coordinated strategies, integrated systems, empowered teaching staff, supportive learning culture, and robust student engagement mechanisms. In the context of resource-constrained public schools, targeted reforms in platform integration, teacher capacity-building, and cultural openness are essential to foster adaptive, student-centered, and sustainable online learning environments.

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