

Challenges Facing International Students in the China: Pedagogical Considerations in Higher Education

Jiyagatai Phd

International collage of Education, Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, China

Abstract

International students are important source of diversity on Chinese university campuses. Non-Native Chinese speaker international students attending college and universities in the China often encounter difficulties in adjusting to their new environment. In addition, most students their instruction language is Chinese often struggle with academic language while learning the content and conceptual structure of various graduate level disciplines. This study identified challenges experienced by Non native Chinese speaker students at a top ranking university in the Inner Mongolia province located in the north of country. This study used an interpretive phenomenological method. Qualitative data were collected from in-depth focus groups interviews and survey. The finding of this study informed about unique challenges forced by the international students. This phenomenological study identified, how Chinese culture influence on the international students [Mongolian, Russian, Pakistani Kazakhstani, Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani and afriacan], enrolled in the Chinese university and challenges facing during the study. Research question guided this study. What culture factors impact [Mongolian, Russian, Pakistani Kazakhstani, Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani and African] international students? A pedagogical framework and recommendations needs for professional practice address the culture and academic needs of this particular student population in higher education that can be created to improve international students' transition and success.

Keywords: culture challenges, international students, higher education in China,

Introduction

With the development of China, international students' education in China grows like mushrooms shoots after a spring rain. More and more international students are rushing into China to learn Chinese and its culture. International students in the People Republic of China often encounter difficulties in adjusting their new but different culture environment. International students come to China with different worldviews, different culture, and different linguistics backgrounds. International students make up a significant proportion of students in China, higher education and have received increasing attention in the past years. The increase in international student's enrollment has changed the demographics of student's population on many Chinese campuses and challenged Chinese Education authority to rethink students learning and teaching in higher education. International students, particularly those who enrolled in master and doctoral programs are important contributions in many fields of study, such as management sciences, engineering, biology, science, medicine, and information technology. They are not only contribute to research activities in these field, but also serves as teaching assistant for various undergraduate courses and laboratory sections. Many students experience linguistic and cultural challenges different from those of those of local students. They often struggle with academic language in Chinese. Furthermore to interact socially with Chinese peers, instructor, and local community members, international students have to personally adjust to local Chinese culture.

The number of international students in the people republic of china in 2016-2017 reached an all the time high of 442,773 (中华人民共和国教育部官网, 2017), reflecting an 11% increase in student enrollment in various graduate level disciplines.

According to statistics, in 2016 a total of 205 countries and regions from 442,773 various foreign students in 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities of 829 colleges and universities, research institutes and other teaching institutions to learn, than in 2015 increased by 45,138 people , The growth rate of 11.35% (the below data are excluding Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan regions).

Table- International student in China

Continent	Total number	%	Increase/Decrease previous Year	Year-on-year change
Asia	264,976	59.84%	24,822	10.34%
Europe	71,319	16.11%	4,573	6.85%
Africa	61,594	13.91%	11,802	23.70%
America	38,077	8.60%	3,143	9.00%
Oceania	6,807	1.54%	798	13.28%

International students in China ranked by country, 70,540 Korean, 23,838 From The United States, 23,044 from Thailand , 18,644 in Thailand, 18,626 from Pakistan, 18,717 from India, 17,971 from Russia, 14,714 from Indonesia, 13,996 from Kazakhstan, 13,595 from Japan, 10,639 from Vietnam, 10,414 from France, people,

from Laos 9,907 , from Mongolia 8,508, from Germany 8,145, Malaysia 6,880 people(中华人民共和国教育部官网, 2017).

In particular, Mongolian, Russian, African, students represent 80% of the international population in Inner Mongolia University. The study is based on the theory of the Education, Psychology and International Communication. The interviews are carried out from different perspectives to explore the main factors that contribute the adjustment process of international students from different countries in China socially and individually(孙风格, 2012). It takes the following factors of international students from different countries into the considerations, like natural environment, social life, language barrier, and social interaction, and academic situation, psychological pressure among 742 international students from Mongolian, Russian, and Pakistani Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Literature Review

Many international students face cultural and linguistic challenges different from those of domestic students (Arkoudis, 2006). International students constitute an increasingly relevant and important source of diversity on university or school campuses. Attending a school enrolling substantial numbers of foreign students may advantage domestic students in the marketplace, to the extent that the experience increases their culturally sensitivities and skills in working with people from different backgrounds and culture(Calleja, 2000; Carnevale, 1999).

They often struggle with academic language in Chinese while also learning the content and conceptual structures of various levels. Differences in writing styles, Linguistically and culturally driven logical thinking, and appropriately formulating thought into writing structures may vary widely and play a significant role in students' academic and interpersonal experiences(Flaitz, 1991 & 2005). Furthermore, to interact socially with Chinese peers, instructors, and local community members, international students have to adjust to Chinese culture and learning expectations. Some Asian cultures instructors have absolute authority and are not to be challenged by students (Ariza, 2010). This is very different in other countries, especially in America, Russian, Africa, and so on. Although students often employ strategies for overcoming cultural, linguistic and academic challenges, these culturally influenced strategies are not always understood nor valued by instructors and peers (Arkoudis, 2006). In addition, Asian students tend to adopt spontaneous collaborative approaches in researching and writing assignments. Studies suggest that the enrollment of international students who had the Confucian cultural values that is highly influenced by their group work. (Ariza, 2010; Gatfield, 1994; Gay, 2000; Tang, 1996).

Given the increasing global diversity in international student demographics in education, it becomes more critical for instructors to understand international students' cultural academic and linguistic challenges in order to facilitate effective teaching and learning for all students. To create positive learning environments that prepare all international students to interact and engage with others different from themselves, instructors must address cross-cultural and linguistic dimensions within the student.

Method

This qualitative phenomenological study identified culture and linguistic challenges experienced by a group of international students from Mongolia, Russia, and Pakistan. That research focuses on "describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon, and allows researcher to integrate "their own experience and context and situation that have influenced their experience. The phenomenological qualitative analysis about "how" and "What" international students experience in China duration their studies.

Since globalization is increasingly important, the phenomenological qualitative analysis about "what" "why" "where" and "how" international students experience in their higher education learning environments will be instrumental for future curriculum design and research.

The phenomenological approach allows a small group of participants, voices to be heard while providing researchers in depth understanding of the experiences shared by these students. This qualitative approach is supported; who clarifies that by limiting participants to a smaller number, more in depth reflection is encouraged by participants by the survey. The report was developed for the by the survey of number of students, and senior students designed the survey to measure the degree to which student participate in the educational practices.

The following assumptions provided a foundation for this research, international students influence culture and encounter linguistic challenges in context that are different from their natives countries, international students may not have developed effective strategic for dealing with culture and linguistic challenges in context that are different from their native countries.

Considerations include the following:

- A-How do instructors understand and address cultural and linguistic challenges within the classroom?
- B-How do instructors create a sense of community within their diversely populated classrooms?
- C-How do instructors provide and create culturally and linguistically inclusive teaching and learning

environments that are relevant and stimulating to international graduate students?
D-Chinese language, prior knowledge of the Chinese language, and proficiency Levels of language have an influential impact on their learning, thinking, and performance?
E- Chinese language may place a heavy burden, to understand lectures, especially when professors speak fast or use slang or idioms with which you are not familiar?
F-Study participants often found it difficult to participate in classroom discussions for a variety of reasons?
G- Culture in China is really different from what you experienced in your country?
H- Are you comfortable with developing social relationships on campus or in the classroom?
I-do you have limited opportunities to interact socially with domestic students?
J-Cultural awareness effectively reaches out and engages in rigorous, meaningful, culturally responsive and inclusive.
K-are you looking for rigorous and intellectually challenging academic environment?
L- Is culture difference is hindrance in relation to time, space, and social interactions as well as their expectations for knowing, and learning.

Participants

This study was initiated at University of 30,305, students in Hohhot City, Inner Mongolia University. 19257 undergraduates, 6580 graduate students, school base undergraduate 12287 students, 6392 graduate students, and more than 800 international students(内蒙古大学官方网站, 2017).

About more than 800 international students from three different countries [Mongolian, Russian, Pakistani, Kazakhstani, Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani and African] voluntarily participated as a convenience sample in the focus group survey. All participants had been in China for at least more than two years when they participated in this survey. The university student report was developed for the survey of degree dissertating, an annual survey of final year students designed to measure the degree to which students how influence the above assumptions.

Procedure

Students who are exposed to and engaged in varying experiences and interactions are more likely to develop different and deeper types of competence, including cultural, linguistic, and academic. By using a learner-centered approach designed to promote and facilitate deep understanding, instructors create an inclusive context while facilitating processes, resources, and content. Students, on the other hand, are encouraged to articulate their own goals for learning and are actively engaged in the learning process. They construct knowledge, synthesize information, develop essential questions, and work collaboratively with others. In doing so, “learners make sense of course material and develop a deeper understanding than they would if they passively listened to a lecture”(Huba, 2000)

The survey was designed using the Objective, Reflective, Interpretative, and Decisional [ORID] methodology, The ORID method began with a series of objective questions in which students provided relevant background knowledge information: home languages, majors, and educational experiences. At the reflective level, questions brought forth personal and often emotional reactions to the topic of discussion. At the interpretative level, meaning, values, and significance of the topic were revealed. Finally, at the decisional level, questions brought the conversation to a close, allowing respondents to draw conclusions about the topic of their discussion.

Focus group interview

The focus group interview obtains contextual data from a group of individuals who share commonalities (Frey, 1993). (Krueger, 2009) indicated that small focus groups, with four to eight participants, are more comfortable and less threatening. In depth insights can be accomplished with small focus groups because participants have more opportunities to express and share their experiences and challenges related to the topic studied.

The interview for this study was conducted in Chinese, Mongolian, Russian, English, Urdu, Arabic and Indian lasted approximately two hours.

Participants’ responses were voluntary. They were not required to answer questions unless comfortable doing so. The interview was also videotaped with audio, which allowed both visual review of physical responses meaningful body language and aural review of discussions.

Analysis and interpretation of data

The process of analyzing responses consisted of identifying “significant statements,” sentences, or quotes that conveyed participants’ experiences from the survey. The significant statements, sentences, or quotes were then categorized under key cultural, linguistic themes, and coded, for analysis. Conclusions were then drawn based on:

1) The individual and collective responses of the participants relevant to the identified cultural and linguistic

themes,

- 2) The relationship of student responses to the themes formulated through the literature review for this study, and
- 3) The identification of additional themes that emerged through the discussion with participants. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities; however, references to their native countries or native languages were included in the coding charts and written documentation of the study.

The data in this study used were gathered in spring 2017. The final sample of first year and senior students was randomly selected by Inner Mongolia University, International research Center for survey. the survey was administered from late February through early end of march using web based, paper survey and face to face interview. The over average adjusted response was 39%. Center did not provide incentives for survey completion. The large sample scale afforded a rare opportunity to learn about the experience of a group of students who typically comprise a very small percentage of the body on the university campus. Almost all 91% of the 000 department had international students' respondents.

Table- Participants information

Student/Institutional Characteristics		International Student Number	International Student %
Age			
	18 or younger	379	51
	19-24	234	31
	25-30	94	12
	30-35	35	4
Sex			
	Male	404	54
	Female	338	45
Class Rank			
	Freshman	179	24
	Senior	563	75
Ethnicity			
	Mongolian	477	64
	Russian	163	21
	White	23	3
	Other Asian	79	10
Place of Residence			
	Off Campus	34	4
	On Campus	708	95
Major			
	Management	269	36
	Science	196	26
	Literature	192	25
	Arts	69	9
	Music	16	2
Total		742	100

Analytic strategy

Center employed the 5 measure of student engagement and 3 measures of selected student self reported outcomes using combinations of different items. Some measure represents academic challenges, collaboration learning, interaction with faculty, campus environment, diversity experience, socializing, and gains in general education.

Table A contains the items from The Inner Mongolia University survey that contributed to the different scales with their internal reliabilities.

During the research dependent variables are the 12 engagement scales. The independent variable is international student status type. Control variables included student's sex, race/ethnicity, major, residential status, enrollment status, age.

We analyzed the data separately for first-year and senior students because other research indicated that these two groups have distinctly different behavioral patterns.

Findings

Most of the participating International students indicated positive experiences at the university while also acknowledging various challenges and influence toward culture. Initially, we focused on giving voice to

international students experiencing cultural and linguistic challenges. In the process of analyzing participants' responses, we discovered that their voices not only informed the purpose of the study and questions to be addressed, but also contained intersecting and complimentary insights and experiences, thus strengthening the overarching themes. As a result, in addition to linguistic and cultural themes, a third theme, instructional and academic challenges, emerged from student responses.

Participants "home language" prior knowledge of Chinese language and proficiency level of social and academic language have an influential impact on their learning, thinking and performance In China higher education context. Linguistic differences between home languages and the Chinese language may place a heavy burden on students to understand lectures, especially when instructor speak fast or use idiom with which students are not familiars.

Study participants often found it difficult to participate in classroom discussion for a variety of reason. They had to be able to follow the conversation contextually and with understanding, while also attempting to contribute orally to the discussion. At times, they felt inadequate expressing themselves to the point of feeling "stupid."

Participates shared their frustrations

"Chinese is the challenge. I sometime feel uncomfortable in the class, but if we can speak our home languages, we don't feel so stupid."

"Listening and speaking skills in Chinese are difficult for me to participate in activities".

"I feel anxious when speaking Chinese in front of other students. I have difficulty participating in class discussions with classmates."

Some of Mongolian students also reflected that prior to participating in a Chinese preparation program on campus; they had never actually spoken Chinese although they had studied it before.

"International students spend a lot of time reading."

"Some of Russian students shared "reading in Chinese is challenging" for them.

Pakistani students shared "Culture in China is really different from what we experienced in our country; here people do more things individually."

Indian students shared that "the relationship between students and instructors in their native country was somewhat distant, formal, and serious. Consequently, it was difficult for them to approach instructors for help: socially, linguistically, and academically. Fortunately for them, here they asked their instructors for assistance, they found them easy to approach."

"I feel left out in summer and during spring holidays because there are not many native speakers on campus.

American student shared "On campus, just a few of the Chinese students will talk with you, accept you. It is a limited conversation. Americans always like to talk about the sports games. They have no kind of American football in country. They do not have the knowledge to talk about it.

Participants in this study indicated the tendency to read academic texts slowly in order to better understand content. They needed more time for reading and writing.,

Since International student based their expectations for social relationships on their home cultures, they were not always comfortable with developing social relationship on campus or in the classroom.

The prevailing social relationships international students faced in education included those with instructors and staff, native Chinese-speaking peers, and community members.

Most participants indicated limited opportunities to interact socially with domestic and local students, in the classroom and outside the classroom. A linguistic disadvantage manifests from the students' perceptions about limited opportunities to practice social language skills with native Chinese.

Through the above examples, students shared their actual experiences with social interactions, reflecting cultural differences, academics issues, from what they knew previously about their native cultures, had anticipated for their present environment, or wanted to experience.

The independent result indicates that international Russian students scored are higher than their Mongolian and Pakistani students on level of sort out the challenges, active, and collaborative learning. Students from Africa reported making more progress in personal and social development, general education, and job reported skills. Mongolian students spent more time relaxing and less satisfied in studies compared with Russian student.

Discussion and Recommendation

The findings from this research indicate that African international students in china are more engaged in some area than Russian, Mongolian and Pakistani students in the university, and less engaged in other areas. Students from Africa also reported greater gains across the board in personal and social development and language education.

The challenges and differences impacting on international students and the instructors who serve them have the potential to impact academic achievement for students. These linguistic challenges and cultural challenges

also represent opportunities to change pedagogical practices, design high quality instruction, enhance student learning, and promote higher levels of rigor for students.

The framework highlighted through the findings from this study provides insights to instructors interested in working more effectively with international students. It may represent a paradigm shift from traditional approaches to instruction in higher education, but there is strong evidence supporting learner-centered, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical practices. These approaches require instructors to actively engage with learners in co-construction of knowledge, demonstrate cultural responsiveness, and develop linguistic awareness. In addition, these changes may require intentional efforts and critical reflection by the higher education community when addressing the common phenomena: cultural, linguistic, academic and other challenges experienced international students.

Compared with Russian and African and White students, Mongolian and Asian international students were less engaged in academic work, used technology more frequently, and participated more frequently in diversity-related activities. African International students also reported greater gains in the personal and social development domain. They were not, however, as engaged in active and collaborative learning and community service and -- like freshman international students -- were less satisfied with their overall campus experience. The one striking difference between freshman and senior international students was that seniors were comparable to their Chinese counterparts in the amount of time they spent relaxing and socializing.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow address issues shared by study participants and reflected in the conceptual framework regarding cultural issues and linguistic issues needs of international students. Many instructors and graduate students, the use of this conceptual framework with its accompanying recommendations represents a significant departure from expected and commonly used instructional strategies.

Linguistic Strategies

Language is one of the most important barriers that international students identified in this research. Instructors who understand this and instructionally address the varying levels of students' language proficiency are better prepared to provide equitable access to instruction for international students. The following strategies can assist them in thinking about course design and delivery of instruction.

Scaffold student learning

International graduate students bring different levels of Chinese language proficiency to the university classrooms. Some students converse well but do not have the same academic language proficiency as native/local speakers to fully participate in all aspects of instruction: reading materials, academic content writing, research project and interactive activities either in class or online web surfing. Others may have academic language proficiency in reading and writing but do not yet have the capacity to fully understand spoken language. International students' Chinese proficiency affects how fast and how well they read write and understand. "When dealing with international students, instructors need to think International students are different. Chinese is one of barriers for them. Instructors should try to be more helpful. They need extra help.

Instructional strategies that international student learning include: organizing class activities and academic interactions among learners and themselves in a way that enhances linguistic and cultural contexts for all students. Instructors should carefully select reading, writing materials, should design appropriate assignments and assessments materials, and should use a variety of resources such as visuals, texts, audios, videos, to support student learning in the classroom. Realizing that international students, need more time to process information, instructor expectations for timed reading and writing may need to be adjusted. Instructors who intentionally employ scaffolding strategies are able to facilitate and further develop all students academic Chinese relevant to the content area.

Increase linguistic awareness

Language plays an important role in learning, instructors should be aware of varying linguistic patterns among international students. Instructors should avoid culturally embedded terms idiom and examples as well as slang, when explaining vocabulary and concepts in class. If used, these expressions should be introduced to the entire class to assure a common understanding by all students, including the local and international students. When delivering instruction in class, instructors should keep the following in mind with relation to their language:

[A] Simplify complex language;

[B] Keep it relevant to the content;

[C] Explicitly define culturally-embedded terms and expressions and

[D] Maintain a good rate of speech, paced so as to be comprehensible. In addition, key concepts may need to be reviewed to ensure students' understanding.

Cultural Strategies

An international student comes to the universities with different prior knowledge, different experiences, and with different backgrounds, which affect how they learn and think in the university. Consequently, instructors should use a variety of instructional strategies to address different learning styles and preferences that make sure student success.

Culture as an instructional asset

Instructors need to be aware of students' different prior experiences and incorporate them in plans for teaching and learning. These strategies can be used to accomplish their goals: cooperative learning in which students work together in groups interdependently in small collaborative groups designed to accomplish a specific task or activity; joint learning in which students take turns being the instructor or professor and explain their tasks and understanding to each other; group discussions; and, comparisons of different perspectives. Additionally, these strategies allow students to express their point of views while exploring commonalities, differences, and applications to course content. Other instructional activities such as bringing in guest speakers with international, national or other cultural experience, fostering discussions that explore different perspectives, and encouraging all students to explore the curriculum from an international viewpoint, use cultures as assets in the learning procedure and help prepare all local and international students for participation in a global society.

Understand student's cultural backgrounds and expectations

Instructors and professor should attempt to bridge cultural differences that may unintentionally hinder international students' learning in higher education. These differences include but are not limited to students' cultural expectations in relation to time, space, and social interactions and their expectations for knowing, teaching, and learning. Professors should specifically and clearly communicate their expectations involving office hours, making appointments, grading procedures, asking for help with assignments and clarifications, class content, and test preparation strategies. By taking the time to be clear and explicit with expectations, professor can address feelings of uncertainty in students and additionally build community and trust. Instructors and staff should be friendly and open when talking with the students. Instructors should make sure that classroom activities include social interactions among students. Strategies of Cooperative learning and other types of group work facilitate the development of social relationships among students. In addition, students should be encouraged to take advantage of resources available on university, as these opportunities expand their circle of social relationships, whether they are seeking assistance from the library or a tutoring center, working out at the gym, or attending a social event on school.

Academic Strategies

The effectiveness of a lesson lies with instructional delivery in terms of student engagement, interaction with the content, student understanding of the content, and the performance of student. With the various linguistic and cultural backgrounds of international students, instructors should be culturally responsive to students and focus on "teaching content in and through Chinese to ensure learning is meaningful to all.

Provide clear directions and course expectations

Because of varied prior schooling and linguistic backgrounds, international students need clear and detailed directions in order to successfully employ with various academic tasks and procedures. The syllabus should be very specific with detailed contents about the design of the course, textbooks, and expectations as to how and where to submit assignments, and expected outcomes for students participating in the course. In addition, class activities and assignments should be clearly designed with detailed instructions.

Scaffold course rigor through pedagogical methods and strategies.

To maintain rigorous content and high standards professor and instructors should use strategies that engage all students. For international students, cooperative learning is particularly effective and essential as it engages students in intellectually and culturally inclusive learning experiences, while expanding their language and social skills. Cooperative learning grouping should reflect differences in student learning skills as well as their diversity. These strategies create and provide a context for international and native Chinese-speaking students to share and discuss content from their various perspectives.

Employ Learner-Centred Instruction

Learning is a social activity involving interactive, dynamic, collaborative processes and social interactions between professor and students as well as among students. A learner centered approach offers a structure within which instructors adapt instruction, assessment, and interaction between students. It represents a considerable cultural shift within education. Using this approach, academic rigor is not only expected, it is also supported. The

instructor facilitates learning processes and creates equitable access to resources and academic content. At the same time, all the international students have the chance to further develop their academic skills in thinking, writing, listening, speaking, and problem solving, while deepening their content knowledge. Within this context, international students are encouraged and guided to construct knowledge, synthesize information, and develop essential questions, work collaboratively with others, and actively engage in the learning process.

Mere exposure to learning contexts is not enough to support international students' academic success. By facilitating student engagement among peers, native Chinese-speakers of Chinese and international students, instructors set the stage for deeper levels of learning and increased academic competencies for students. The employment of learner-centered scaffolding by the professor not only ensures that the student understanding of content, it also supports and develops students' proficiency in academic Chinese.

Conclusion

The framework shows through the findings from this research provides insights to instructors and professor interested in working more effectively with international students. It may represent a paradigm shift from traditional approaches to instruction in higher education, but there is strong indication supporting learner centered, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical practices. All these approaches require professor instructors to actively engage with learners in co-construction of knowledge, demonstrate cultural responsiveness, and develop linguistic knowledge and awareness. In addition, these changes may require intentional efforts and critical reflection by the higher education community when addressing the common phenomena: cultural, linguistic, and academic challenges experienced by Inner Mongolia University international students.

Instructor and academic and student affairs administrator can use the result of research study to better understand, advice, and assist international students in making a successful transition to campus life in the China and finding ways to encourage them to get involved in arrange of educational activities that help them attain their educational goals in a satisfying manner. In addition, institutions and Universities with large numbers of international students should systematically assess the experiences of various groups of international students, such as Asian, Mongolian, and African Students to be sure that they are investing an appropriate amount of time and energy in educationally purposeful activities.

In order to create culturally and linguistically inclusive teaching and learning environments, Instructors and professors may need further support and training workshops. Supporting professors and instructors as they develop or refine practices within the framework will benefit and promote the entire education learning community. Instructors' implementation of the recommended framework will not only broaden the scope of domestic and local students to include a global perspective, it will also help international students better understand the differences and similarities between their cultural and backgrounds and those of other students and professor with whom they interact. In general, the suggested framework promotes learning for all and enhances the experience for everyone involved in this framework.

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