Factors Associated with the Academic Performance of International Students in Northeast Normal University

Xue Han[1*]   Saagyum Philip Dare[2]
1. Associate Professor, School of Psychology, Northeast Normal University
2. Faculty of Education, Northeast Normal University No. 5268 Renmin Street Changchun, P.R. China

Abstract
The study investigated the factors associated with the academic performance of international students in Northeast Normal University. The researcher used a descriptive survey research design to investigate the phenomenon. A random sampling technique was used to select 100 participants from the international student population to participate in the study. They included students from 4 Faculties of Study; education, chemistry, life sciences and the Chinese faculty.Frequency distribution tables and One-Way ANOVA were used to analyze the data collected from the respondents. It was found that academic performances of international students were associated with learning facilities, age, faculties and students' degrees of study. The researcher hereby recommended that host nations and institutions of international students should focus on developing appropriate learning facilities for international students and that the various Faculties of Study should address the academic needs of international students appropriately within various disciplines.
Keywords: Factors, Associated, Academic, Performance.

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education has attracted increasing numbers of students worldwide. This globalization of education has brought together students of diverse continents, regions, and countries. The United States preceded the developed countries followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand in terms of receiving international students on yearly accounts within the past 20 years (Li et al. 2009). The British Council in collaboration with Universities of UK and IDP Education Australia in a study found that the number of international students will rise from 2.1 million in 2003 to 5.8 million by 2020. According to the study, about 45% of the perceived international students representing 2.6 million of the total population may decide to study in native English-Speaking countries (Anthony et al. 2002).

In Asia, led by China, India and Malaysia predominately constitute the destinations of international students according to the British Council report. The continent (Asia) was found to accommodate about 55% of the international students where majority most likely chose their destination of study in China (Anthony et al. 2002). The demand for higher education among international students worldwide has become a common phenomenon among all nations. Conspired of the situation in description, improving international student's study experiences is the major objective of all nations and universities of which academic performance is constituted (Li et al. 2009). In that, universities and nations attempt to ameliorate all the factors that often are associated with the performances of international students in various institutions.

Head (1990) within the past 2 decades and half argued factors associated with academic performances of international students was one of the least researched areas in international higher education. He therefore suggested further researches should be carried out in the related area to identify the predictors of international students' performances. As such, Yorke (1991) in a followed-up study in 1991 found that diverse indicators of students' performances overseas evolved in consideration to the program quality. However, McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) in their study categorized these predictors into; *academic*, *psychosocial*, *cognitive*, and *demographic*. The researchers found that factors such as teaching pedagogy, curriculum content, learning facilities often are associated with the performances of international students. They indicated also psychological and social needs of students, personality characteristics; nationalities, age, gender, programs offered as some of the key factors were associated with academic performances of international students (McKenzie and Schweitzer, 2001).

International students' academic performance is of awkward concern to host institutions and nations with respect to international standards. As international students' academic performances are often assessed in terms of students' alliances to the institutions' academic standards, professors and institutions emphasize the need to attain higher grades among international students (Yunke and Heather, 2009). Harnett et al. (2003) suggested that, instead of institutions stressing on international students achieving higher academic standards in terms of performances, they often should assess the factors that are associated with their academic successes. Grounded on this basis, the researcher investigated the factors associated with the performances of international students in the Northeast Normal University by employing a descriptive survey research design involving a quantitative method approach. The study was intended to find out;

- What factors are associated with the performance of international students?

The findings of the study would guide host nations; institutions and policy makers of international education to focus on improving the factors associated with the performances of international students drawing on academic policy making standards. In addition, the study outcomes could serve as a podium of reference for other researchers and future ones in related fields of study. The findings of the study would contribute to literature in international students' academic successes in the context of Northeast Normal University.

Data and Research Methods

The researcher employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the factors that were associated with the performance of international students in the Northeast Normal University through a quantitative approach. From a targeted population of 300 international students in the Changchun-based institution who pursued diverse programs at the time of the study, the researcher selected 100 students (sample) randomly from the 4 faculties to participate in the study. The respondents constituted of 32 students from the Faculty of Education, Chemistry (12), Life Sciences (20) and 36 students from the Chinese Faculty. Among the 100 participants were 55 males and 45 females. To justify the comparison of the factors associated with international students' academic performance from the diverse faculties/schools, Chinese Language which is a ***common course*** pursued by all the students was considered.

The questionnaire used to collect the data was adopted from Betsy et al. (2010). It was modified however to meet the needs of the current study in the Northeast Normal University. Questionnaire was made of close-ended and open-ended formats well-structured to gather data from the four faculties (Education, Chemistry, Life Sciences and Chinese). They were prepared in mainly the English Language using a five-point Likert scale. The scale measured factors associated with the performance of international students ***(Strongly Agree; 1, Agree; 2, Do not Know; 3, Disagree; 4 and Strongly Disagree; 5).*** Following the closed-ended questions were open-ended questions which required of participants to answer.

The questionnaire constituted three main parts. The first part sought to gather demographic data of the respondents including; Gender, Age, Nationality, their respective Faculties and Majors. This aspect was also made up of the respondents' length of stay in China and their respective Degrees of Study. The second part of the questionnaire was based on factors that are associated with the performance of international students which had items related to Learning Facilities, Learning Strategies, Communication and Teaching Pedagogy. This indicated that the second aspect of the questionnaire was made of four subheads. The final and third questionnaire session sought to gather information mainly on the performance of students as well as their majors and common courses pursued by respective participants.

Out of 173 questionnaires distributed randomly among the faculties in consideration, 100 were correctly responded to and returned. In that, 100 responses were used for the data analysis. The researcher used frequency distribution tables to tabulate the demographic information of respondents. These included sum and percentages of the participants. On the other hand, One Way ANOVA and Independent t-test were involved in the data analysis process.

Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender: Among 100 respondents, 55(55%) participants of the sample were males while 45% (45 respondents) of the respondents were females**.**

Age: 49 (49%) respondents were within the age ranges of 26-30 years, 39 (39%) participants; 21-39 years and 10 participants representing 10% of the sample were between 31-35 years whereas 2 (2%) respondents were between 36 - 40 years old.

Region: The regions were categorized according to the data available. It included 46 (46%) respondents who Asians, 42 (42%) Africans and 7 (7%) from Europe while 5 (5%) respondents were Americans.

Degrees of Study: 36 (36%) respondents of the sample pursued their Masters and Chinese language programs. However, 26% (26 respondents) were in their Doctorial programmes while only 2 (2%) in Advanced Studies programs.

Faculties of Study: 36 (36%) respondents were from the Chinese Faculty, 32 (32%) from the Faculty of Education, 20 (20%) respondents; Life Sciences and the Chemistry faculty, 12 (12%).

Length of Stay in China: It was revealed that, 44 (44%) respondents have stayed less than a year in China at the time of the study, 36 (36%) participants had stayed for 1-2 years where those who stayed for 2-3 years were 12 (12%) respondents as 4 (4%) respondents had been in China for 3-4 years and above 4 years respectively.

Relative Scores of Respondents (academic performance): It was realized that, 30 (30%) of the participants attained scores within the range of 70 – 79, 27 (27%) of the sample population also earned scores within the range of 80 and 89 and 24 (24%) of the sample had grades within 90 – 100 range. However, 19% of the sample scored grades within 60 – 69 range.

Results of Statistical Data Analysis
The analysis of the data revealed a statistically significant difference among learning facilities and the performance of international students in the Northeast Normal University [F (3, 99) = 5.238, p = .002] (See table 3.0). However, other variables (learning strategies, communication and teaching pedagogy) when compared with students' performances in the ANOVA analysis illustrated statistically insignificant differences. The analysis of the data also revealed that, there was a statistical significant difference among the ages of students and their academic performances [F (3, 99) = 3.348, p = .022]. In addition, the results showed that there existed a statistical significant difference among faculties (schools and departments) and the performances of international students of the Northeast Normal University [F (3, 99) = 3.608, p = .016].

On the aspect of student's degrees of study, the data showed there was a statistically significant difference among students' degrees of study and their academic performances [F (3, 99) = 3.790, p = .013]. However, the One-Way ANOVA results of the Region (Africa, Asia, Europe, America) and Stay duration (less than 1 year, 1 - 2 years, 2 - 3 years, 3 - 4 years and Above 4 years) of students were found not to have any statistical significant differences among students and their performances (scores) in the Northeast Normal University. Finally, the Independent Samples t-test conducted on the gender of students and their academic performances revealed no statistical significance.

Discussion of Findings
The study revealed that that international students' performances in the Northeast Normal University were associated with factors including; *learning facilities*, *age of students*, *their respective faculties* and the *relative degrees* (Masters, PhD, Advanced Studies and Chinese language) at the time of the study respectively. This was evidenced by statistical significant differences that were observed among the variables. This implies that, the academic successes of the international students of Northeast Normal University depended on the effective accessibility and use of learning facilities; classroom infrastructure, research materials and books as well as the multimedia equipment among others. These factors covered in the survey were discovered to associatively predict students' academic performances in the Northeast Normal University.

The age, faculties and various degrees of studies were found significantly associative of international students' performances in the Northeast Normal University according to the analysis of the findings. This indicates that, respective age ranges of students in relation to their faculties of study; Education, Chemistry, Life Sciences and Chinese had significant influences on their academic performances. On the other hand, the degrees of study students pursued in their respective faculties of study connoted the performances of international students in the university. Among them included the PhD, Masters, Advanced Studies and the Language Studies. The findings indicated that, these varied levels of study among the international students determined their performances.

These findings corresponded with Zenebe (2015) who found significant impact of learning facilities on Government Secondary schools in Asella, Ethiopia. Irfan and Shabana, (2012) who conducted similar research in Pakistan found also learning facilities to significantly influence the performances of students. McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) found similar factors including; learning facilities, age of students, their respective faculties and the relative degrees to affect the performances of students.

On the other hand, the study illustrated that, the faculties of which students were affiliated differ from and among one another with respect to their academic performances in the Northeast Normal University. This was revealed by significant statistical differences found in the post hoc analysis in ANOVA analysis conducted to find out how students' faculties of study can be associated with their academic performances in the university. This implies that, the respective faculties (schools and departments) including the Education, Life Sciences, Chemistry and Chinese in the university have significant effects on what performances international students can attain at their various learning levels irrespective of the common course chosen. This meant that, the various faculties of study (schools and departments) under which international students study regardless of similar degrees, programs and durations of study varied significantly with regards to students' academic performances at various levels.

Conclusion
The study revealed that the academic performances of international students of Northeast Normal University were associated with learning facilities, ages, their respective faculties (schools and departments) and degrees (Masters, PhD, Advanced Studies and Chinese Language) of study. However, it was realized that gender, regions of respondents and their length of stay in China had no significant association with their academic performances. On the other hand, learning strategies, communication and teaching pedagogy were found to exhibit insignificant relationship with the performances of international students in the Northeast Normal University. In a nutshell, from the study; gender, regions of respondents and their length of stay in China as well as learning strategies, communication process and teaching pedagogy were not associated with the performances of international

students in the Northeast Normal University.

Recommendations

- Host nations and institutions of international students should focus on developing learning facilities and educating international students on their usage.
- Faculties should address the academic needs of international students appropriately within various disciplines.

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