

Factors Affecting International Students' Perception of Their Academic Learning Experiences in One University in Changchun

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Abstract

The study investigated factors affecting international students' perception of their academic learning experiences in one university in Changchun. Using a descriptive survey research design involving a quantitative study approach, the researchers investigated the factors affecting the learning experiences of international students. Random sampling technique was used to select 87 participants for the study from four schools in the university including education, life sciences, chemistry and economics to participate in the study. One-way ANOVA and correlation analysis were employed to analyze the data collected from the participants. The findings revealed that students' perception of learning and their academic self-perception affected their perception of their learning experiences in the selected university. The study also found that the ages of respondents and their continents of origin had positive relationship with the perceptions of students' learning experiences in the university.

Keywords: Perception, Academic, Learning experiences, etc.

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education constitutes one of the lifelong educational objectives globally. This desired goal of education has granted students across the world, opportunities to seek higher education in any country of choice worldwide. Although the desire to attain internationalized higher education emerged in the 18th century, the 21st century records an unprecedented increase in international students globally. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported an increase of international students from 2.1 million in 2000 to 4.3 million in 2011 (OECD, 2013a; Anthony et al., 2002).

According to Xiaojiong (2016), whereas the United States and United Kingdom were the main destinations of international students, recently, the Singapore, Malaysia and Japan have joined the race of receiving international students. The international student market began to expand as China and other countries through transformed national policies began the enrollment of international students in domestic universities. China recorded the first international students in Chinese educational system in 1950 following the admission of 33 East European (from socialist countries) students. Categorically, China received 128,000 international students from socialist and developing countries following the adoption and reformation of policies from 1950 to 1978 which had been on the rise till date (Lei, 2014; Xiaojiong, 2016).

According to Xue and Saagyum (2018: 57), the China leads the Asian continent followed by India and Malaysia in terms of receiving international students. The authors indicated that from a British Council report in 2002, about 55% of international students were chose their destinations in Asia with majority in China. In 2014, educational reports showed an incredible increase of international students in China to almost 380,000, recording almost three times of the students received from 1950 to 1978. According to Open Doors (2006), the USA has recorded a tremendous decline of international students by 2.4% in 2003-2004 and 1.3% in 2004-2005 respectively. This certifies that not all destinations in recent years record the increase of international students unlike China. Meanwhile, China currently receives international students from more than 200 nations worldwide. This categorized China as one of the major destination nations of international students in recent years (Zhao, 2011).

Research in international education confirmed that promoting abroad study aims at developing globally responsible people, promote international comprehension of concepts, knowledge, and perceptions on global phenomena. It targets reach out to developing intercultural relationship among people globally. This may include; cultural awareness, skills, and abilities. International students hereby hold some of these global targets as part of their learning perceptions; intercultural competencies and building of a global society of citizenry for global work (Roopa & Sarah, 2011; Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Trilokekar & Shubert, 2009; Bond & Lemasson, 1999; Dardorff, 2008; Dolby, 2007; Knight, 2000, 2004, 2008; Taraban et al., 2009; The AUCC, 2006; Trooboff et al., 2007).

Recoding increasing numbers of international students, destination countries of which China is one seek to readdress and emphasize international students' satisfaction with their academic environment. Several studies have been carried out in the related field; students' academic satisfaction, social adjustment, however there exist little or no literature evidence on the factors affecting the perception of international students' academic learning experiences (Schweitzer et al., 2011). International students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences have had little or no emphasis research focuses for the past centuries which researchers argued might have contributed to the decrease numbers of international students as recorded in some countries including the USA.

Trice and Yoo (2007) therefore indicated categorically that the perception of international students can be affiliated to cultural diversity (nationality) as well as the learning faculties, departments and programs pursued in their respective institutions. Other researchers attributed to the perceptions of international students' their learning experiences to acculturative stress and language proficiency factors (Cura & Isik, 2016). Such factors research indicates could include; social supports and networks, stress, and financial issues. Cultural differences, self-efficacy, racism, and gender issues were found to be associated with acculturative which affect the perceptions of international students' perceptions of their academic learning environment (Berry, 1987, 1997; Li et al., 2009; Misra et al., 2003; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Sumer et al., 2008; Ward & Kennedy, 1995; Ye, 2006)

Grounded on the preceded argument, the researchers adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the factors affecting the international students' perception of their academic learning experiences in one university in Changchun, China. The study was intended to find out;

- What factors affected the international students' perception of their academic learning experiences?

The findings of the study would assist host nations and institutions of international students as well as policy makers to address the factors that affect international students learning environment's perceptions. This would in turn assist students to develop positive attitudes towards their learning environment. The findings of the study would also serve as a reference material for those working with international students or in related fields.

Data and Research Methods

The researchers adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the factors affecting international students' perception of their academic learning experiences in the university through a quantitative research approach. Among a population of about 750 international students who pursued diverse programs in the university at the time of the study, 87 students were randomly selected to participate in the study. The participants were constituted of students from the school of education (32), life sciences (29), economics (15), and chemistry (11). They were 49 males and 38 females.

The researchers used questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire was adopted from the Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure (DREEM). It was however modified to suit the conditions of present study. In that, the questionnaire was made of 50 items which were grouped into 5 categories on the perception of students; "*students' perception of learning; students' perception of teachers; students' academic self-perception; students' perception of atmosphere; students' social self-perception*". The questionnaire measured international students' perceptions of their learning academic environment on a point 5 rating Likert Scale (1= *Strongly disagree*; 2= *Disagree*; 3= *Unsure*; 4= *Agree*; 5= *Strongly agree*). Out of 115 questionnaires distributed, 87 were accurately filled out, returned and were considered for the analysis.

Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender: From the 87 respondents, 49 were males and 38 females.

Age: 59 respondents were within the age ranges of 20-29, 24 (30-39 years), and 4 between 40-49 years.

Continent: 43 participants were from Asia, 27; Africa and 17; Europe.

Degrees of Study: 44 students were in Masters programs while 43 were in their PhD programs.

School of Study: 32 students were from the schools of education, 29; life sciences, 15; economics, and 11; chemistry school

Length of Stay in China: 39 respondents had stayed in China from 2-3 years, 29 respondents within 0-1 year while 19 participants were in China within the ranges of 4-5 years respectively.

Results of Statistical Data Analysis

The data analysis revealed statistically significant differences among school related factors and students' perceptions of their academic learning environment in the university at the time of the study [F (3, 83) = 3.217, p = 0.027]. In terms of students' perceptions of teachers, the study revealed statistically insignificant differences. In addition, statistically, the results indicated significant differences among schools in relation to students' academic self-perception in the university at the time of the study [F (3, 83) = 3.259, p = .026]. On the other hand, the study revealed insignificant statistical differences among students' perceptions of their learning atmosphere and their social self-perception within their schools of study.

The findings of the study also revealed insignificant gender relationship with international students' perception of their academic learning experiences in an independent samples t-test. Meanwhile, an independent samples t-test revealed a significant relationship between gender of participants and their perception of teachers of teachers $t(85) = 2.0$, $p < 0.048$. A correlation analysis also showed a significant positive correlation between ages of respondents, their continents of origin and perceptions of their academic learning environment [(.411), .000 < $p = 0.01$].

Discussions of Findings

The study revealed that international students' perception of their academic learning environment was affected by their perceptions on learning and their academic self-perception in the university at the time of the study. This implies that how international students of the said university of which the study was conducted perceived their learning processes influenced their general perception scope of their academic learning experiences as revealed in the findings. This connotes that international students self-report about what they felt about their own learning experiences motivated their perceptions on their learning experiences in general. In addition, international students' self-reports on their academic self-perception of their personalities influenced their perceptions of their academic learning experiences. That is, students may have diverse values, cultures, and thus, how they perceived oneself in terms of their values and culture may have resulted to their perceptions on their academic learning experiences. Self-perception could be also in the form of ability, skills, and personal characteristics, all of which were imperative in defining why the international students of the university investigated on the perceptions of students' learning experiences demonstrated such attributes.

In addition, the study showed that international students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences could be relative to their ages and continents of origin. This indicates that the respondents' cultural orientations had key influences on why they perceived their academic learning experiences as such. This could also be attributed their ways of life, common institutional characteristics which may be different or similar to the current institution's. This correlatively was coordinated by age which played a significant factor. International students ages influenced their perceptions on their academic learning experiences.

This indicated that their levels of development, mentally, and socially affected how they thought about their academic experiences in the university. It is possible to assume that the respondents at certain age ranges in development may perceive their learning experiences quite different from the findings of the present study. This is to say that, at different age ranges, age may not influence the perceptions of the international students on their academic learning experiences. Finally, the study found that international students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences can be attributed to their gender. The findings revealed a gender inclination between students' perceptions of their academic learning environment and teachers. This means that the views students held for their teachers were determined their gender with regards to their learning experiences. If teachers were male or female, students of respective gender may have particular perceptions on how their academic learning experiences may be influenced.

Conclusion

The study investigated the international students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences. It was found that students' perceptions of their academic learning experiences were affected by their perceptions on learning and their academic self-perception. It was also revealed that ages of students and their continents of origin had positive relationships with their learning experiences university. However, their length of stay in China, gender, and respective schools of study had no influences on their perceptions of their academic learning experiences.

It was therefore recommended that host nations and institutions should invest in educating international students on their academic space around them besides orientations prior to their admission. Host nations and institution should also focus on reconsidering the ages of respondents admitted in various institutions with regards to their nationalities. That is, the current ages considered for admission might be have to be reviewed in light of the continents under consideration.

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