Intervention and Support to Improve English Proficiency and Cultural Re-adjustment for International Students

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Intercultural competencies

- Internationalising the curriculum involves providing students with global perspectives of their discipline and giving them a broader knowledge base for their future careers. They can be provided with a set of values and skills to operate in diverse cultural environments; skills often labelled ‘intercultural competencies’ or ‘cross-cultural capabilities’.
On-Going Research

• To establish whether Chinese learners can easily and successfully adapt learning practices when faced with new learning environments?
  • Contextualise the study
  • Consider “Culture Shock”
  • The traditional Chinese learning environment
  • Study links to our work on supporting international students
Context and Background

- In excess of a quarter of a million overseas students came into the United Kingdom in 2012
- There were also 307,100 students studying UK awards overseas on transnational programmes on UK overseas campuses and partner provision
  - [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2663/161/](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2663/161/)
- Knight (1994) poses the idea that "internationalisation is the process of integrating an international/inter-cultural and/or global dimension into the goals, functions, teaching, learning, research and services and delivery of higher education".
- Links to the earlier idea of intercultural competencies
Issues students meet

• All of international students will have to encounter a lack of the familiar as well as a new studying environment.

• Students attending universities in a culture different from their own have to contend with novel social and educational organisations, behaviours and expectations.

• In many cases the student may just have arrived in their new host country.
Culture Shock

- This can be seen in any newly arrived group of international students who will be battling unfamiliar weather, food, living environment, probably in their second language.
Culture Shock

- The term ‘culture shock’ was first employed by Oberg (1960), who lists six negative characteristics:
  1. Strain or stress relating to psychological adaptation
  2. A sense of loss or deprivation resulting from the removal of friends, status, role, and personal possessions
  3. Fear of rejection by or rejection of the new culture;
  4. Confusion in role definition
  5. Unexpected anxiety, disgust or indignation regarding cultural differences
  6. Feelings of helplessness, including confusion, frustration and depression.

- It is important for students that they learn how to cope in a short space of time in order to maximise their chances of learning effectively.
- Imagine the difficulties for Non-European students.
Situation reversed when working in China
Chinese Learners

• Ryan (2013) relates how Chinese learners are frequently viewed as being different in their approach to learning.

• She notes how some Western academics might view them using a deficit model, i.e. considering what the Chinese learner cannot do, rather than what they can do.

• There has been criticism of the view of deficit or “lacks.”

• Ryan notes that Ballard and Clanchy (1997) did warn about the dangers of stereotyping but the information that they presented seems to have been selectively used.
Chinese classrooms and the learning environment

• Classrooms in China appear as highly formal, teacher focused, strictly disciplined environments with (compared to the West) large numbers of pupils

• Primary and secondary school classes commonly have 50–60 pupils in them (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998)

• Students are not usually encouraged to ask questions and there is an emphasis on students acquiring knowledge (facts) from the teacher.
Research has shown

- A nervousness, or even a major concern about working in English ALL of the time
- Students may not want to speak out
- They may come from an learning environment where speaking out was discouraged
- One respondent noted that they had been taught grammar but they had a concern with actual pronunciation
English language proficiency

• For these benefits to continue, universities must become more knowledgeable about the adjustment issues these students face and implement appropriate support services.

• Factors that influence the adjustment and academic achievement of international students are primarily attributable to English language proficiency.
Successful support interventions and implications for practice

- Singular/plural noun confusion
- Subject-verb agreement confusion
- Verb tense confusion
- Not using the subjunctive mood
- Confusing prepositions
Singular/Plural noun confusion

• In Chinese, there aren't separate singular and plural forms for nouns; the context is used to distinguish between singular and plural.

• For instance, if someone said "one cat" in Chinese, cat is singular, but if someone said "many cat", cat is plural. There is no separate plural form cats in Chinese.

• When Chinese people speak or write English, they tend to forget to make nouns plural, resulting in awkward-sounding phrases like "we have three dog".
Subject-verb agreement confusion

• In Chinese, there is no such thing as verb conjugation to match with the corresponding subject.
• In English, we say "I like cheese", "he likes cheese", and "they like cheese".
• In Chinese, there aren't separate forms for like and likes, so one would simply say "he like cheese".
Verb tense confusion

- In Chinese, there is no such thing as verb conjugation to denote tenses; the context is used to distinguish between past, present, future, and all the other various tenses.
- For example, there is a single word in Chinese that means run. If you want to use the present tense, you simply say "I run".
- If you want the past tense, you have to say something like "yesterday I run", where yesterday provides the requisite context. And if you want the future tense, you have to say something like "tomorrow I run".
Chinese grammar does not differentiate the indicative and subjunctive mood, so native Chinese speakers often use the indicative mood when the subjunctive mood should be used.

This is confusing especially when the subjunctive mood should be used to express a hypothesis.
Confusing prepositions

- The correct use of prepositions (e.g., in, at, on, to, into) is often difficult for non-native English speakers to master.
- The use of prepositions is especially problematic for Chinese speakers because there isn't such a strong distinction between them in the Chinese language.
- To English speakers, "he got a job in Microsoft" sounds a bit off, but "he got a job at Microsoft" seems more natural-sounding. However, in Chinese, there is one word (technically, character) that sometimes means in and other times means at, depending on the context.
- See example hand-out adapted to support Chinese students
Helping students succeed

• How can we help our students succeed?
  • Meet international students soon after arrival and overtly begin the process of support
  • Encourage them to discuss their issues with relevant staff
    • (This has implications for staff development)
  • Encourage course teams to consider non-native English speakers when teaching, assessing and producing course materials
  • Do not consider ‘deficit’ issues with students but rather look at what they can achieve with support