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University of Huddersfield
Teaching and Learning Conference 2012
Chinese Students' Experience

Dr. Yun Gao
September 2012

History background

1. Education system in China – Confucian framework
 - Effort focused conceptions of learning
 - Pragmatic orientations to learning
 - Acceptance of behavioural reform as an academic goal.

2. Socratic framework – Western-influenced approaches
 - Learning and knowledge progressed through questioning of held beliefs.

Learning experience

Stereotype for Chinese students:

Deep - surface learning

Independent – dependent learning

Changes after 1990s:

Official policy - Changed from 'teach books' to 'teach people'.

Students born after the 1990s expect effective teaching methods and quality.

Perspective of good students and teachers now

Diligent, respect teachers and peers - raise questions in class or comment on teachers' competencies could be considered as gestures of disrespect to the teachers.

Keen to play a more active role in their teaching and to provide a voice in the teaching and learning process.

Teachers have deep knowledge of the subject and present personality and competence.

Teachers can provide advice on wider life issues, speak to students about life and society. They have 'heart' , referring to the affective rather than cognitive.

The Study

Interpretive approach

Focus group discussion and personal interview

Sample

| | Number of Chinese students in the university Dec. 2010 | Participants 2011-12 |
|---------------|---|---------------------------------|
| PhD | 30 | 7 |
| Master degree | 77 | 13 |
| Undergraduate | 225 | 13 |
| Foundation | 27 | 6 |

First stage findings – negative images

- Communication - Few and less satisfactory levels of interaction, communication and cooperation with British students and local community.
- Quietness at classes and other events
- Constant challenge to course work
- Little external support awareness of and access to communication.
- A sense of isolation which is the negative result of their initial cultural disorientation

First stage findings

1. Get used to
 - Lack of active engagement (if this is the case from the beginning)
 - merely surviving and keeping themselves aloof and away from the crowd
 - taking a clear stance of enjoying the 'temporary stage of life'

Learning 'cultural shock'

1. Teaching and Learning style

Chinese: the notion of originality.

Western: the concept of argument/debate - hone out ideas by subjecting them to challenge.

2. Critical thinking

Not to challenge the ideas with critical thinking, but trying to understand and embrace the meanings.

Learning activities relate not to higher thinking skills, but to self-improvement and pragmatic orientations to learning.

Learning 'cultural shock'

3. Assessment

Chinese: Result and correct answer to question from authority is important.

Western: Process and critical thinking is important. No one 'solve-all approach' to the issues .

4. Cultural Barrier of Communication

Chinese students: importance of right answers

British students: share opinion or express views

Common issues and difficulties

1. English ability

Takes longer to make substantial improvement comparing to international students from other countries.

A large number of one year Master course dissertations by Chinese students need proof reading.

2. Unintentional plagiarism

Lack of understanding of copy right issues and know little about correct reference system

3. Critical thinking

Confuse the meaning of the term as personal attack

Understanding changes in China comparing to 10 years ago

- Increased Chinese undergraduate students study in the UK
- Skills and knowledge required for China's local markets
- Skills and knowledge for multinational corporations

Learning experience – positive images

Motivation

Academic – pursuit of qualifications

Economic – scholarships, economic returns from study

Social and cultural – experience of western societies

Political - enhancement of political status and power

The emphasis shifts before and after enrolments.

Gain degree

Explore the advanced education system in the UK

Achieve cognitive shift after independent learning and social experience away from home

Achievements

Become independent

..Wu's words:

“At home in China my only task was to study as my parents would manage other things for me. Here in the university, I need to find my own accommodation, shopping, cooking, housework, and studying. Without my parents watch me by my side, I am learning to arrange things myself .”

Achievements

Become internationalised.

Xiao's words:

“Widening the horizon.... Experienced totally different education system, and meet people from different cultures and different groups... My English improved a lot. I become internationalised.”

Achievements

Self - improvements

Li's words:

“I can adjust myself to suit the new environment much better now. A person needs to improve himself/herself constantly, otherwise he/she would stay in one place without any progress.”

Learning experience

Cohort difference

- Postgraduate students: maturity and resourceful, more problems with research methods in research.
- Students studying science subjects – helped by their “science language” in addition to English
- Students studying social science subjects – difficulties to understand the social and cultural context which Western theories developed within

Social experience

1. Cultural difference of awareness

Awareness of issues in communication and interpersonal skills, and understand the expectations and standards which prevail at a Western university

2. Personal background

Academic preparedness, and work experience influence learning propensity

Difference between generations before and after the 1990s

3. Social difficulties in the UK

Isolated group – share information and rely on close cycle of Chinese friend

Lack of awareness of student services

Suggestions

1. Induction programme paying particular attention to practical needs

Introduction of difference between the education systems, such as plagiarism, critical thinking and even communication and interpersonal skills.

2. Increase awareness of support services

Key contact and first stop support

Suggestions

3. Staff awareness of culture difference of Chinese students

Staff development session to highlight the difference and suitable teaching methods

Provide guidance on how to research and write an effective report.

Skills to give the feedback to students' work

Questions to discuss:

Do you find similar or different teaching and learning problems with international students you are teaching?

Do you find similar or different teaching and learning problems with international students you are teaching?

What methods have you used to help students to overcome their problems?