

Enhancing Chinese direct entrants' cross-cultural transition: A two-phase study

Dr. Jing Luo; Dr. Crystal Tsay; Dr. Yang Yang

1. Introduction

Recruitment of international students has become a strategic priority for many UK higher education institutions (UKHEIs). More international students enter UKHEI through particular entry requirements as direct entrants. The fast growth in international Direct Entry (DE) students in UKHEIs has been an exciting yet sometimes difficult story, which poses many challenges to the whole sector. At the authors' university, there were over 400 Chinese direct entry students in 2018-19. 95% of them studied in the Business Faculty. Apart from acculturative stress and depression experienced by some due to cultural differences (Wei et al., 2012; Zhu et al., 2008), many of them encounter academic challenges such as inadequate learning strategies, lower academic achievement, and poor integration into UKHEIs (Wang et al., 2012; Phakiti et al., 2013), particularly belief about knowledge and the process of teaching and learning (Kember, 2001; Biggs, 1996).

Many international DEs experience 'learning shock' (Griffith et al., 2005), acute frustration, confusion, and anxiety, as a result of differences between the UK and their home educational systems (Bradshaw, 2004). In this research paper, an evidence-informed intervention (i.e. a programme of extra-curricular workshops) is reported and evaluated. The design of this pedagogical intervention was informed by a typical journey of international sojourners, who usually go through four stages of cross-cultural adjustment (Figure 1, adapted from Oberg, 1960) and the results of an interview study conducted by the authors in 2018.

2. Methodology

Snowling and Hulme (2011) argue that any well-founded educational intervention must be based on a sound theory of the causes of a particular form of learning challenge, which in turn must be based on an understanding of how a given challenge is perceived and experienced by students. In our study, we have designed our intervention based on the Oberg (1960) 's cross-cultural adjustment framework in consideration of the results of an interview study we conducted with the targeted students.

Our research design is two-phased. In phase 1 (January-May 2018), we conducted 21 individual interviews with Chinese Direct Entry students (CDE) to identify their study and life challenges in the UK and how they coped. Table 1 shows a summary of learning challenges, including self-understanding, time management skills, the ability to work in teams, and positive attitudes and proactive behaviour towards support and network building. These identified specific needs for the intervention on development of psychological capital (i.e. confidence, resilience, hope, optimism) and social networks.

Table 1 Common challenges for CDE students

Challenge 1: Am I capable of that standard?

Many students, despite fulfilling the entry requirements, still questioned their ability to progress academically and finish the undergraduate degree.

Challenge 2: Unrealistic academic expectations

Most students were used to passive learning in the Chinese education system, expecting that teachers tell them what to learn, how to learn, and when to prepare for assessments. They have not acquainted adequate learning strategies for independent learning.

Challenge 3: Working in culturally-diverse teams

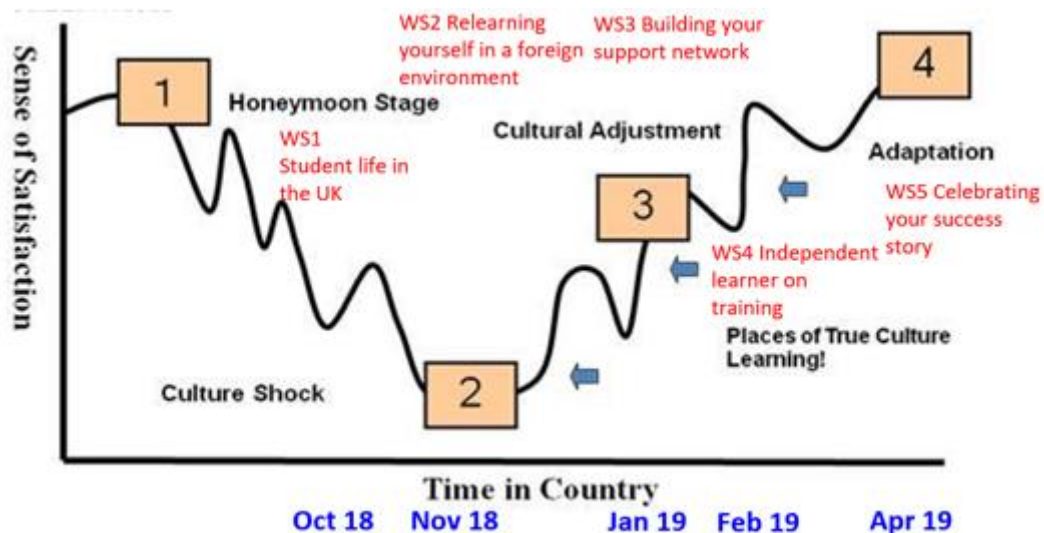
Many CDEs are not familiar with teamwork because it's almost absent in the Chinese education system. Language barriers and the harmony-oriented culture made team work more challenging.

Challenge 4: Help-seeking is a shame

Most students thought it is inappropriate or there is a failure attached to seeking support.

Therefore in the second phase (October 2018- April 2019), we designed a series of workshops (between October 2018 and April 2019) based on the Oberg (1960) 's cross-cultural adjustment framework model (Figure 1) and a scaffolding approach (Van de Pol, et al., 2010), which moves from instructor responsibility, joint responsibility, to student responsibility. The workshop delivery was populated by dynamic, experiential learning activities, which provide a practical way to help students acquire skills to develop psychological capital and social network (Figure 1). An overview of the workshops can be found in Table 2.

Figure1 Stages of cross-cultural adjustment



Adapted from Oberg (1960)

To evaluate the effectiveness of our intervention, we collected qualitative student feedback throughout the duration of workshops. We also measured students' psychological capital by using scales of academic self-efficacy (Solberg et al., 1993), hope (Snyder et al., 1996), and cross-cultural adjustment (Black & Stephens, 1989).

3. Results

Results reported in this paper are the outcomes of the research phase 2. We started our first workshop a few weeks after student arrival (the honeymoon stage) in the UK, and we had second, third and fourth workshops to help students have a smooth transition from honeymoon stage to culture shock stage and cultural adjustment stage. Finally students can reflect and celebrate their success together in the final workshop at the adaptation stage.

Table 2 Dynamic development workshops

Workshop 1: Student life in the UK (October 2018)		
Execution	Student Activity	Learning outcomes
Common challenges faced by Chinese learners	Teacher- student/Lecture-style Mixing small group activities	Understand acculturative stress and stress-management techniques
Stress & time management practices	Mixing small group activities	
Workshop 2: Relearning your life in a foreign environment (November 2018)		
Execution	Student Activity	Learning outcomes
Communication skills	Teacher- student/Lecture-style Mixing small group activities	Develop behavioural strategies for successful adaptation to UK & UKHE
Awkward moment in life	Small group activity	
The Johari window(Scenario discussion)	Mixing small group activities	
Overcoming communication barriers experience sharing	Mixing small group activities	
Workshop 3: Building your support networks (January 2019)		
Execution	Student Activity	Learning outcomes
Catch-ball game	Mixed small group activities	Develop social networks through experiential learning exercises; Self-awareness through reflection
Speed networking	Pair activity	
Timeline exercise & reflection	Teacher-student; Individual activity	
Workshop 4: Independent learner on training (February 2019)		
Execution	Student Activity	Learning outcomes
How to make great presentations the Pecha Kucha way	Teacher- student/Lecture-style	Develop competencies for effective communications ; Build up professionalism
Say STOP Activity	Small group activities	
Workshop 5: Celebrating your life story (April 2019)		
Execution	Student Activity	Learning outcomes
Postgraduate study experience sharing	Student-led/lecture-style	Presentation skills; Develop academic self-efficacy
Vlog presentation	Student-led/lecture-style	
Exam revision preparation	Teacher-student/lecture-style	
What you've learned	Student-led	

In terms of workshop delivery and evaluations, both qualitative feedback and quantitative feedback showed positive results. In Table 3, it is evident that the workshops address students' perceived challenges. Furthermore, in Table 4, our quantitative data suggest an improvement on students' academic self-efficacy, hope and cross-cultural adjustment.

Table 3 Reflection quotes from workshop participants

Perceived challenges before workshops	Student feedback after workshops
<u>Am I capable of that standard?</u>	<i>"These workshops have helped freshmen like me to integrate into English learning and life more quickly." "I found myself not alone. I shared many things in common with other Chinese students."</i>
<u>Unrealistic academic expectations</u>	<i>"It changed me a lot and I don't feel upset easily." "Workshops are a great way of learning. They helped me not only on learning, but also on emotional intelligence."</i>
<u>Working in culturally-diverse teams</u>	<i>"The most useful help is to enhance my confidence in cross-cultural communication." "(I'd like to have) more opportunities for cross-cultural communication."</i>
<u>Help-seeking is a shame</u>	<i>"January and February was a very difficult time for me and I could not get through without the teaching team." "I was upset and frustrated before I attended the workshop. Hope the workshop will go on in the next few years because it is useful and helpful."</i>

Table 4 students' psychological capital (Before and After)

Variable	Workshop 1 (Sep 2018) Responses: 32	Workshop 5 (April 2019) Responses: 10
V1. Academic self-efficacy	Mean=4.77 [s.d.=1.04]	Mean=5.59 [s.d.=0.75]
-Course efficacy	Mean=4.58 [s.d.=0.81]	Mean=5.34 [s.d.=0.99]
-Roommate efficacy	Mean=4.97 [s.d.=0.98]	Mean=5.69 [s.d.=1.10]
-Social efficacy	Mean=4.77 [s.d.=1.04]	Mean=5.75 [s.d.=0.52]
V2. Hope	Mean=5.69 [s.d.=0.81]	Mean=6.13 [s.d.=0.31]
V3. Cross-cultural adjustment	Mean=4.75 [s.d.=0.75]	Mean=5.39 [s.d.=0.76]
-General adjustment	Mean=4.77 [s.d.=0.80]	Mean=5.33 [s.d.=0.87]
-Interaction adjustment	Mean=4.48 [s.d.=0.99]	Mean=5.30 [s.d.=0.79]
-Work adjustment	Mean=5.08 [s.d.=0.60]	Mean=5.67 [s.d.=1.04]

4. Future Plan

To further measure how the approach affects development of psychological and social capital, we suggest a longitudinal study that tracks students over time. In addition, the support recipients can be not only Chinese DEs, but also other DEs, international students. We can refine our development workshops, aiming to create a learning environment where learners from different backgrounds can share their experiences, and vocalise their worries and concerns about study and life. We will establish a peer-assisted student support scheme for students, and develop a community network of support across the university.

Reference List

- Biggs, J. (1996). Enhancing teaching through constructive alignment. *Higher Education*, 32(3), 347-364.
- Black, J. S., & Stephens, G. K. (1989). The influence of the spouse on American expatriate adjustment and intent to stay in Pacific Rim overseas assignments. *Journal of Management*, 15(4), 529-544.
- Bradshaw, C. (2004). Student success in a pre-sessional course for postgraduate international students: implications for practice. *Investigations in University Teaching and Learning*, 2(1), 5-11.
- Griffiths, D.S., Winstanley, D., & Gabriel, Y. (2005). Learning shock: the trauma of return to formal learning. *Management Learning*, 36(3), 275-297.
- Kember, D. (2001). Beliefs about Knowledge and the Process of Teaching and Learning as a factor in Adjusting to Study in Higher Education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 26 (2), 205-221.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7, 177-182.
- Phakiti, A., Hirsh, D., & Woodrow, L. (2013). It's not only English: Effects of other individual factors on English language learning and academic learning of ESL international students in Australia. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 12(3), 239-258.
- Snowling, M., & Hulme, C. (2011). Evidence-Based Interventions for Reading and Language Difficulties: Creating a Virtuous Circle. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(1), 1-23.
- Snyder, C.R., Simpson, S., Ybasco, F., Borders, T., Babyak, M., & Higgins, R. (1996). Development and validation of the state hope scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(2), 321-335.
- Solberg, V. S., O'Brien, K., Villareal, P., Kennel, R., & Davis, B. (1993). Self-efficacy and Hispanic college students: Validation of the college self-efficacy instrument. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 15(1), 80-95.
- Van de Pol, J., Volman, M., & Beishuizen, J. (2010). Scaffolding in teacher-student interaction: A decade of research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 22(3), 271-296.
- Wang, Y., Harding, R. and Mai, L.-W. (2012) . Impact of cultural exposure on young Chinese students' adaptation in a UK business school. *Studies in Higher Education*, 37(5),621-639.

- Wei, M., Liao, K. Y. H., Heppner, P. P., Chao, R. C. L., & Ku, T. Y. (2012). Forbearance coping, identification with heritage culture, acculturative stress, and psychological distress among Chinese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 59*(1), 97-106.
- Zhu, C., Valcke, M., & Schellens, T. (2008). A cross-cultural study of Chinese and Flemish university students: do they differ in learning conceptions and approaches to learning? *Learning and Individual Differences, 18*(1), 120–127.