

How Do Chinese Students Adapt to Live Overseas?

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Abstract: In today's society, more and more students choose to study abroad. This paper focuses on illustrating that why Chinese students cannot adapt new environment easily from two main aspects which are academic achievement and social experience. In academic achievement section, this paper explains students' motivations, education background, culture, and language proficiency. Since many Chinese students come to American to obtain higher education, academic achievement is the essential part of this paper. In social experience, there are two aspects: different culture and English problems.

Keywords: Chinese Students; Live Overseas; Different culture and English problems

Publication date: November, 2020

Publication online: 30 November, 2020

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1 Introduction

It has been reported that the total number of Chinese students studying abroad is 1.42 million until end of 2011 (Zhong, 2012). According to International students in universities "The desire to increase opportunities for higher education for students from abroad is motivated by numerous factors; the most obvious being economic", (Andrade, 2006, p 131). There is another report that Chinese students contributed 4.6 billion dollars to the United States of America economic in last year, 2011 (Wang, 2011). These data show that an increasing number of students choose go abroad to gain higher education. There are many problems that students cannot adapt to their overseas life. This paper focuses on illustrating that why Chinese students cannot adapt new environment easily from two main aspects which

are academic achievement and social experience. In academic achievement section, this paper explains students' motivations, education background, culture, and language proficiency. Since many Chinese students come to American to obtain higher education, academic achievement is the essential part of this paper. In social experience, there are two aspects: different culture and English problems.

2 Academic achievement

At the very beginning, when I thought that why Chinese students cannot adapt overseas' study, the reason maybe is different cultures which cause Chinese students cannot study well at beginning of studying aboard. However, after I finished my surveys and interviews, I found that that culture is one of reasons. There are many other elements influence Chinese students' study, such as motivations, education backgrounds, and language proficiency. All of them play very important roles.

3 Motivation

When students have plenty of motivations to study, they will spend more time, energy on their study. Because of that, when I began my interview, my first question is that why you come to America to get your higher education. All of my research subjects' answers are getting my degree and experiencing a new and different life. Expect one research subject, his answer is playing and experiencing a different life. But when I continuous ask their specific study plan and their study goals, they could not answer my questions. Then I found that they do not have a clear goal. They just know that they have to get a degree for their family, or they want to have a good job with a degree. According to our text book: "much of

human behaviors is directed toward particular goals,” (Ormrod, 2001, P379). From interviews, almost ninety percent of research subjects have performance goals. Although they go to library to study, many of them just finish their assignments from professors. After Chinese students finished assignments, they do not study any more about their academic knowledge. Assignments are everything for Chinese students, because Chinese education background which I will illustrate in this paper.

There is another question that I ask my research subjects. What are your purpose in your academic achievements? The research subjects’ answers are striking similar, which are getting my degree and practicing my English. From interview, Chinese students do have goals when they study, but their goals not for themselves, but for their families or for a job. This is the reason that Chinese students do not have motivations on their academic achievements. Their majors are not their interest which is very crucial for students’ studying. Why do they choose their major? Because their family’s choose it for them, or this major can help them find a good, and gain higher salary job. When I mentioned about their interests, all of research subjects said that there is another story. If students have performance goals, instead of mastery goals. According to Ormrod (2001), there are so many differences between performance goals and mastery goals. For instance, performance goals prefer to “exhibit less self-regulation”, “evaluate their own performance in terms of how they compare with others”, “are often quite anxious about tests and other assessments”, and etc. (p 381). In survey, there is a question about when students communicate with their professors, what is their topic normally. All of Chinese students choose assignments. They care about their scores, tests, and assessments, because they need to have good scores for their families. Chinese students’ study is not for themselves, not for their interests, but for external elements. Without interests, and motivations, students cannot study well.

In order to obtain successful academic achievement, the first step does not enhance their language, or obtain academic knowledge, students should find the reason why they study. According to the metacognition, students should think and ask themselves questions: What do they want to learn? What do they want to be? All of questions are so important for a student. Only do students know the

goals of learning, they will have enough motivation to study. Then studying can be effectively and successfully. As educators, we do not only teach their knowledge, but also we should help students to find their motivations and interests. We also need to make students to realize that study is for themselves, not for other people or their family.

4 Education Background

Education background influences Chinese students. In survey, there is a question about education background. How much do you think your education background influences your study in America? Eight Chinese students choose the answer, influences me a lot. Two Chinese students choose the answer, some. In the interviews, I ask some of students that why do they think education background influences you a lot? They told me that their study habits and time management do not suit for American study style. According to the article, Academic success and the international student: Research and Recommendations, there is a section about planning students’ study and recreation time, (Able, 2002, p14). “Bolstering Carroll’s model are findings by Moore (1994) of positive association between time management practices and academic success,” (Abel, 2002, p 15). So time management do play a very significant role in academic success. The author, Able, also gives some suggestions about how to manage time, for example: “have specific goals set for your study time and allot more than enough time to accomplish those goals,” (2002, p 15). In order to obtain academic success, Chinese students need to learn how to manage their time by themselves.

For Chinese students, managing their time is not only one difficulty for their study, but also changing their thinking way. Students who get higher education are at least eighty years old people. They were influenced in a long time by Chinese educational way. If they want to change their thinking ways, students need spend a long time on it. For example, Chinese students do not like to participate in class. The one reason is that they are afraid of punishment, as students who give a wrong answer are punished by their teachers in some schools in China. To adapt to this relatively free and open learning environment for Chinese students, they still have a long way.

5 Culture

According to the article, International Students in English-Speaking University, some researchers cite that the reason for lack of participation is not language, but culture, (Andrade, 2006). As an international student, culture absolutely is a big problem. In surveys, those questions focuses on the situation that how Chinese students communicate with their professors. Many researcher subjects do not like to communicate with professors. The main reason is that they feel afraid of their professors, because, in China, professors are always serious and strict. It makes Chinese students feel that communicating with professors is difficult. They would better ask their classmates rather than their professors. In surveys, the first question is: "When you have academic problems, who do you think is easier to communicate with?" All of research subjects chose A Classmates. Though when Chinese students meet problems on their academic field, they are not willing to ask their professors which is the best way to deal with their problems. Chinese students also do not like participating in class, as they afraid of losing face when they give wrong answers. The idea of saving face is deeply rooted in Asian culture. This is one aspect of cultural problem, and a main problem which can influence Chinese students' academic achievement.

Every Chinese students has their own cultural identity. According to Wlodkowski, the individual has their own socialization, such as race & ethnicity, class, gender, region, religion, and family. Depending on characteristics of Chinese people, the family constitutes an important factor which influence them a lot. Chinese people are affected by the golden mean. The golden mean teaches people that when they cope with problems, they do not want to be the outstanding one, or the worse one. They would like to be in the middle. So people like to keep silent, even though they know how to deal with problems. They want to hear other people' s idea first. On the one hand, Chinese students are shy, and they are fair about that if they give a wrong answer, they left a bad impression to their professors. On the other hand, the golden mean influences Chinese students.

6 Language proficiency

According to International students in English-

speaking universities, there are many factors which can affect international student's achievement. One of the main difficulties is English proficiency. Because of that, students participate less, therefore it makes comprehension and communication more difficult, (Andrade, 2006). Chinese students treat language as the most difficult problem which they cannot conquer easily for a long time. In survey, there is a research subject who has been in America for three years. Since he comes USF (University of South Florida) three years, his English is supposed to have a big reward. Unfortunately, his English does not have much progress. Not surprisingly, Chinese students do not have an English environment, although they are in America. They like to stay with Chinese people and speak Chinese. They do not practice their English actively. Chinese students speak English when they have to speak. As educators, we know the truth that practice makes perfect. There is another question in survey. What is the major problem affecting students' communication with professors? All of my research subjects' answer is language. But when I ask them that can you evaluate that how much time do you speak English a day. The answer is "not more than ten percent per day". If they do not try to practice their English, this problem cannot be solved. In order to enhance English proficiency, students have to speak, read, and write. That is the only way they can do.

7 Social experience

Chinese students also feel the most difficult part is building a social network. According to Preparing international students for a successful social experience in higher education, students experience loneliness and unfamiliarity with American customs and values (Lucina, 2002). Why do Chinese students not easily become a part of the American social fabric? Two elements are affecting Chinese students, which are English problems and different culture.

8 English

In America, native speakers do not have the patience to listen to a foreigner whose English is not good. Americans also do not want to practice English with foreigners. When Chinese students want to build their social network or try to be a part of the American social fabric, it is a impassible mission without a good English ability. This is a very awkward

situation, since Chinese students do not have chances to promote their English without communicating with native speakers. The less they practice English, the worse their English is. In order to promote Chinese students, Andrade suggests that offering more support programming in her article (2006). At one university, each international students can choose a volunteer who are native speaker and have passion on communicating with foreigners. Now in INTO USF, we have this program which is very helpful.

9 Culture

To build a social network, culture plays a crucial role when Chinese students make friends with America. First, the concept of friendship is totally different between Chinese and American students. In China, people always say that Chinese cannot easily be friends. However, when they treat people as friends, they are serious. On the contrary, American can be friends with other people, but friendship does not last long time in most cases. Second, Chinese students' personality is so shy, and they are afraid of that other people may dislike them. Since making American friends is a difficulty for Chinese students, they feel loneliness and homesick.

10 Conclusion

When Chinese students want to obtain higher education in America, they have to face facts which are different from their imaginations. Studying in America is absolutely more difficult than studying in China. Students need to face the academic

achievement and social experience which are both difficult for any Chinese student. Since Chinese students have less motivation, different education background, culture, and English proficiency, they also have to build their social network with poor English and culture diversity in an unsafe environment. Educators should give more time to students, in order to make them quickly to adapt to live overseas. As educators, we should respect our students' culture and their different backgrounds. Talking to international students is not only a good way to understand their culture and backgrounds, but also can help them improve their English. Since every international student who lives and studies overseas is difficult, educators can give them more supports to their students.

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