Academic experience of Chinese foundation students in a UK University

A new opportunity with great challenge



Jinhua Mathias

Durham University

A case study to look at foundation students' experiences in 3 domains

(1) General adjustment (managing daily life);

(2) Interaction adjustment (relating effectively to host nationals and other international students);

(3) Academic adjustment (adapting a new way of learning and assessment).

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Methodology

- Investigation through focus group.
- 10 interviews.
- Total of 11 students participated, including 2 science students and 9 economics or business students.
- Sample covered a wide range ability.

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How did they reflect on their first year of academic experience?

Foundation year experience

"It is a big change in learning experience, difficult to adjust in a short time, luckily I got a foundation year to adapt to it."

"I feel comfortable to make daily conversation in English, was very nervous when was in China, also made international friends through group work."

Experience of independent living and study

"I am more independent now, not only in managing daily life but also in academic study, I think more independently , not like in China where I just relied on teacher."

"It is important that I have learned how to cook."

Development of critical thinking

"I wanted to answer questions but was very nervous and worried about the teacher would say 'you are wrong', but I realised there was no correct or wrong answer to that question. Here people take more attention to your thinking process."

"The teaching is more interesting here, it is more like research, you have to find out yourself. You don't spend as much time on study (being in lessons) as in high school (in China) , but you use more your brain , spend more time thinking ."

Learning how to write an essay

"After key skills I learned how to write an essay, it was a new learning experience from not understanding how to write an essay to know how."

"When I compared my first essay to the last one and I could see I made a lot progress."

What were their main concerns?

Time management

“I would like group work with international students. Here the Chinese students do the work at the last minutes, that means I have to do all the work.”

“ Normally an essay is set up several weeks before the deadline. I felt there were plenty time, did not notice that the time past by, so have to rush to write it in the last few days.”

The challenge of independent learning

“Some times I want to study but there is nothing to study for.”

“In China once a lesson is finished you start to practice the given exercises. Here teachers teach a topic then leave it to you, but the topic has many contents so I don’t know what to revise”

Cultural outlooks

"I feel I can't involve in the discussion, not familiar with English culture, don't understand the discussion topic"

"It is all bout English history, even for the topic about World War Two, it was discussed from English point of view, I have no knowledge of it."

"We Chinese sit together, home students together, the teacher asks questions and answered by home students, discussion was between home students and the teacher, the teacher is nicer to them"

"I did not get to know many English students in class. They look older, don't know if there is any common interests…"

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