



PECULIARITIES OF TEACHING CHINESE UNDERGRADUTE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A NON-LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITY

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Keywords

Cultural differences
Face-Saving Culture
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Customized approach
Intercultural awareness

Abstract

This article examines the trends and conditions for the effective teaching English to undergraduates and postgraduates from China in the system of higher technical education in the republic of Belarus. Teaching English to Chinese students is a unique experience that requires an understanding of both cultural differences and language issues. Chinese culture highly values group harmony and unity of views. One of the goals of the lesson is to create a supportive environment in which individual contributions are encouraged while maintaining group harmony. Traditional Chinese education places a strong emphasis on rote memorization and repetition. While this approach can be effective for certain types of learning, it is not always suitable for foreign language learning, where methods rely on critical thinking, problem-based and project-based learning. The Chinese language has significant differences from English, which creates a number of challenges when learning English. To address these issues, teachers should adopt customized teaching technologies and methods that are tailored to the needs of Chinese learners. Using visual aids such as pictures, videos, and diagrams can help bridge the gap between the two languages. Encouraging interactive activities such as role-playing, debates, and group work can promote active participation and overcome the tendency to be passive.

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1. Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has become an increasingly important phenomenon in the globalized world. China, as one of the largest sources of international students, plays a significant role in this process. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the internalization of education among Chinese students, focusing on key factors such as motivations, challenges, and outcomes.

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Expansion of the paradigm of academic mobility leads to the improvement of national educational systems and an increase in their contribution to the social, economic, and cultural development of the world community as a whole. The initial stage of education in a foreign language educational environment is the most difficult for Chinese students to adapt to the new regulations of life and study in Belarus. Chinese students experience some difficulties in adapting to the conditions of the Belarusian social and cultural environment. Students face problems of a universal nature related to education in a foreign language and changed living area, as well as specific problems caused by the ethnopsychological characteristics of representatives of the Chinese and Belarusian ethnocultures and the significant difference in the educational systems of the two countries (Bulygina, 2016).

Chinese students experience not only natural discomfort associated with a change in their usual environment and way of life, but also a change in the psychophysiological processes of the individual, such as perception, reproduction, thinking, emotions and will. The change in these processes occurs under the influence of numerous difficulties that arise in the process of initial adaptation of foreign students. Among the most significant factors causing difficulties, Antonova, Bulygina, & Guzarova highlight the influence of climate, caused by a change in climatic zones, a change in temperature and air humidity, fluctuations in atmospheric pressure, etc. The consequence of the listed changes, as well as a change in time zones and daylight time characteristics, may be a failure of biorhythms, which, in our opinion, may entail regular lateness of students to classes, passivity, inactivity in classes, decreased concentration, irritability, as well as chronic fatigue and decreased motivation for learning; change in the range of food products, diet, taste of food; educational and cognitive difficulties caused, first of all, by language and didactic barriers, that is, the lack of communication practice in both Russian and English (Antonova, 2017, Bulygina, 2019 & Guzarova, 2019).

Moreover, there are differences in the education systems of Belarus and China, primarily, this concerns a striking discrepancy in the methodology of teaching a foreign language (Maksimov, 2017). Foreign students need to adapt in a short time to the new requirements and system of knowledge control; organization of the educational process, technologies, methods and techniques of teaching foreign languages at the university. In the process of adaptation, new skills of autonomous work are also formed; communication predicaments in the process of interpersonal activities in various situations; information oversaturation at various levels of the new socio-cultural and educational environment (Sawir, 2013); everyday difficulties

associated with the lack of skills of independence, decision-making and problem solving in budget allocation, self-sufficiency, self-service (Sawir, 2011).

A positive effect can be achieved by developing the direction of internal internationalization, which also implies the creation of favorable academic, social, and cultural conditions for incoming students. Therefore, more and more experts note that at present “the concept of internationalization is being revised and the concept of internal internationalization is being brought to the forefront” (Clifford & Montgomery, 2014). Such an approach includes the development of intercultural competence of students and teachers, qualitative changes in the educational process, compliance with international standards in the implementation of academic programs and projects, etc. A well-structured implementation of the internal internationalization processes of education results in a long-term effect from attracting foreigners to universities. A foreigner who goes to study in the other country is not just a consumer of educational services abroad. Upon returning home, he shares the experience he has gained with his circle of friends and becomes an active subject of internationalization, promoting or counteracting the growth of the flow of students to the country of his study. In an effort to ensure a positive experience for foreigners, “internationalization is thus transformed from a concept into a strategy for improving the quality of higher education” (Zhang, 2010). One of the ways to assess the implementation of the internationalization of education is to analyze the experience of foreign students studying at universities in the country, in particular, its academic, social, and cultural aspects.

Previous studies have explored various aspects of the internationalization of education among Chinese students. For instance, Henze & Zhu, (2012) examined the push and pull factors that influence Chinese students' decisions to study abroad. They found that academic quality, career prospects, and cultural experiences are major drivers for overseas education. Additionally, Zhu, et al. (2021) investigated the challenges faced by Chinese students during their international educational journeys, highlighting language barriers, cultural adaptation, and financial constraints as significant obstacles.

2. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. A total of 120 Chinese students studying at the Belarusian State Technological University in the Republic of Belarus were surveyed using an

online questionnaire. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 participants from China to gain deeper insights into their experiences.

Research objectives were to identify the motivations behind Chinese students' decisions to study abroad, to examine the challenges faced by Chinese students in foreign educational environments, to analyze the academic and social integration experiences of Chinese students in host countries, to provide recommendations for enhancing support services and teaching techniques for Chinese international students.

The survey results revealed that the primary motivations for Chinese students to pursue international education include:

1. Academic Quality: 72% of respondents cited better academic standards and reputable institutions as their main reason for studying abroad.
2. Career Prospects: 67% believed that an international degree would enhance their job opportunities both domestically and internationally.
3. Cultural Experience: 51% valued the opportunity to experience different cultures and broaden their horizons.
4. Language Proficiency: 48% saw studying abroad as a way to improve their English or other foreign language skills.

Qualitative interviews highlighted several challenges faced by Chinese students:

1. Language Barriers: Many students struggled with understanding lectures and participating in class discussions due to limited proficiency in English as well as in the local language.
2. Cultural Adaptation: Adjusting to new social norms, food, and living conditions was identified as a significant challenge, especially during the initial stages of their stay.
3. Financial Constraints: The cost of tuition fees and living expenses posed a considerable burden for some students, leading them to seek part-time jobs or scholarships.
4. Homesickness: Long periods away from family and friends often resulted in feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Despite these challenges, most students reported positive outcomes from their international education experiences:

1. Enhanced Career Opportunities: 83% of respondents felt that their international degrees had significantly improved their employability, both in China and globally.

2. Personal Growth: 91% noted substantial personal development, including increased independence, cross-cultural competence, and broader perspectives.

3. Network Expansion: Many students developed extensive professional networks through internships, exchange programs, and alumni associations.

3. Findings

The findings suggest that while there are numerous benefits associated with international education, there are also significant challenges that need to be addressed. Universities and governments can play an essential role in supporting Chinese students by providing language assistance, cultural orientation programs, and financial aid. Moreover, further research is needed to explore long-term impacts on career trajectories and societal contributions upon the students.

Furthermore, the discussion should emphasize the implications of these findings for policy makers, educators, and students themselves. It is crucial to recognize that the internationalization of education not only affects individual students but also has broader social and economic consequences for both sending and receiving countries. For example, the return of highly skilled graduates to China can contribute significantly to the country's economic development and innovation capacity. Conversely, the brain drain resulting from prolonged stays abroad may pose challenges for China's labor market and economy.

Additionally, the impact of cultural differences on academic performance and integration deserves further exploration. Some studies indicate that cultural background influences learning styles and expectations, which could affect how well Chinese students adapt to European pedagogical approaches. Understanding these nuances can help universities design more effective support systems tailored to the specific needs of international students.

Finally, future research directions should focus on longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of international education on career paths, income levels, and overall life satisfaction. Such studies will provide valuable insights into whether the initial investment in overseas education pays off over time and inform policy decisions aimed at optimizing the benefits of internationalization for all stakeholders involved.

4. Discussion and Suggestions

Teaching English to Chinese students is a unique experience that requires an understanding of both cultural differences and language issues. Let us look at some key aspects that distinguish teaching English to Chinese students.

Cultural differences. One of the most important factors in teaching Chinese students is their cultural background. The Confucian tradition emphasizes respect for authority figures, including teachers. Therefore, Chinese students often show great deference to their teachers and may be less inclined to openly challenge them or question them. This can sometimes lead to passive learning styles, where students wait for clear instructions rather than actively participate in class discussions.

Chinese culture highly values group harmony and unity of views. Therefore, students may hesitate to speak up if they feel that it will disrupt the dynamics of the lesson and the interaction between students and the teacher. One of the goals of the lesson is to create an assisting environment in which individual contributions are encouraged while maintaining group harmony (Widdowson, 2015).

Face-Saving Culture. The concept of “face” (*mianzi*) is central to Chinese culture. Losing face means embarrassment or loss of dignity, which the Chinese try to avoid at all costs. To save face, students may refuse to admit mistakes or ask questions in front of other students for fear that it will reflect badly on them. Teachers need to produce a safe and supportive atmosphere in which students feel comfortable making mistakes and asking for help without fear of losing face.

Learning Styles. Traditional Chinese education places a strong emphasis on rote memorization and repetition. While this approach can be effective for certain types of learning, it is not always suitable for foreign language learning, where methods rely on critical thinking, problem-based and project-based learning. Adapting to new learning styles can be challenging for Chinese students, especially when it comes to tasks that require independent thinking and analysis (Antonova, 2016).

Linguistic Features. English is a Germanic language of the Indo-European family and is characterized by the presence of a large number of vowels, diphthongs, and consonant fricatives. Chinese, on the other hand, forms the Sinitic branch of a Sino-Tibetan language and has a tonal system, where the pitch of a word determines the meaning of a word. For example, the word “ma” can have four different meanings depending on the pitch of the tone it is spoken. The word “ma” can mean “mother,” “horse,” “hemp,” or “swear” with different tones. This can make pronunciation difficult for Chinese students when learning English, since English does not rely on tone to convey meaning. English grammar is significantly different from Chinese grammar. The Chinese one lacks articles (“a,” “an,” “the”), plurals, and verb tenses. This means that Chinese students must learn these concepts from scratch, which can be challenging. In terms of vocabulary, many English words do not have direct equivalents in the Chinese language, making vocabulary acquisition complicated. In

addition, homophones and homographs in English may be confusing for Chinese learners who are accustomed to characters representing specific meanings. To address these issues, teachers should adopt customized teaching technologies and methods that are tailored to the needs of Chinese learners (Hua, & Li, 2016).

English has a fixed word order (Subject-Predicate-Object), meaning that the subject precedes the verb and is followed by the object. In addition, English uses articles ("a", "an", "the"), prepositions, and auxiliaries to express tense and aspect of an action. Chinese also has a fixed word order (Subject-Predicate-Object), but does not use articles or auxiliaries. Instead, it relies on context and particles to convey tense and aspect (Liu, & Gong, 2020).

English has an extensive vocabulary that includes loanwords from many other languages, such as Latin, French, and German. The Chinese language, although it has a large number of hieroglyphs, often uses combinations of hieroglyphs to create new words. In addition, many Chinese words have multiple meanings, which requires careful consideration of the context when translating.

In English, there is a clear distinction between formal and informal communication styles, which is expressed through the choice of words and grammatical constructions. In Chinese, etiquette plays an even greater role, especially in relation to elders and respected persons. The use of correct titles and addresses is an important aspect of communication.

English culture tends to perceive time linearly, where the past, present and future are clearly delineated. This is reflected in the grammatical system of tenses in English. Chinese culture, on the contrary, perceives time cyclically, which is reflected in the philosophy of Taoism and Confucianism. In Chinese speech, temporal relations are expressed less strictly than in English.

A comparison of English and Chinese reveals significant differences in their structure, vocabulary and cultural foundations. These differences are due to the historical development of each language and the cultural characteristics of the peoples who speak them. Understanding these differences is important for effective intercultural communication and translation of texts from one language to another (Wang, 2007).

Using visual aids such as pictures, videos, and diagrams can help bridge the gap between the two languages. Since Chinese relies heavily on context and visual cues, incorporating these elements into lessons can enhance comprehension. Encouraging interactive methods such as role-playing, debates, and group work can promote active

participation and overcome the tendency to be passive. These activities also help develop critical thinking skills, which are essential for effective communication in English.

It is important to set aside time in class for regular pronunciation practice. Exercises, recordings and feedback sessions can be used to help students improve their pronunciation and spontaneity in speaking English. Focusing on stress patterns, intonation and rhythm can greatly improve fluency. In contextual learning, providing real-life examples and scenarios helps students understand how business English can be used in everyday and work situations. This approach makes learning more relevant and interesting, encouraging students to apply what they have learned outside the classroom (Gorina, 2014).

5. Conclusion

Education is highly valued in Chinese society, and academic success is seen as a path to social mobility and respect. Students are under intense pressure to perform well, which often results in long class hours and heavy workloads. This competitive atmosphere can sometimes lead to stress and burnout among students, affecting their overall well-being and motivation.

Teaching English to Chinese students requires a differentiated approach that takes into account both cultural and linguistic factors. By understanding these differences and adapting teaching methods accordingly, teachers can create a positive learning environment that promotes confidence, active participation, and successful language acquisition. Studying in a foreign country means navigating unfamiliar customs, social norms, and expectations. Chinese students may have difficulty adapting to different learning methods and social interactions. Building intercultural awareness and supporting cultural adaptation can help ease this transition. With patience, creativity, and sensitivity to cultural norms, teachers can effectively guide Chinese students on their path to English proficiency.

This research paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the internationalization of Chinese students in foreign countries through a mixed-methods approach. By identifying motivations, challenges, and integration experiences, the study seeks to contribute valuable insights for educational institutions and policymakers to enhance support for international students.

To summarize, the internalization of education among Chinese students is a multifaceted phenomenon driven by diverse motivations and characterized by grave and consequential challenges and rewards. While the pursuit of academic excellence,

career advancement, and cultural enrichment remain strong incentives, addressing linguistic, cultural, and financial barriers is critical to ensuring successful outcomes. By fostering supportive environments and conducting ongoing research, we can maximize the potential benefits of international education for Chinese students and society at large.

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