

Review

Tertiary Teaching of International Student: a Matter of Cultural Adaptation

Eric Chan

School of Architecture and Building, Deakin University, Gheringhap Street, Geelong, Victoria 3220, Australia
E-mail: eric.chan@deakin.edu.au; Tel: + 61-3-52278304

Abstract

When international student start studying in a university in another country, they always take a time of adjustment. Starting a new page in a different country is a matter of adaptation, with some of them facing major lifestyle and cultural impacts. Educators can help them to adapt by recognising their cultural diversity and regard such differences in the pedagogical approach. For hardware, adequate supports from university and school level are essential; more appointments of international academic staff, who can share multi-cultural experience with international students, are also helpful. Then, not only educators may use wider range of international 'real world' examples from different countries in the teaching; but also can combine students into groups from diversified cultures and urge them to share and combine their existing own knowledge/experiences into the studies. Finally, educators have to design assessment, less on written English but more on knowledge and understanding of the concepts, and also make explicit instructions which may assist international students to complete their assignments easier.

Keywords: Tertiary Teaching, International Student, Australian Education, Pedagogical Approach.

INTRODUCTION

Confucius said, "Teach without discrimination (有教無類 *you jiao wu lei*) Pursuant to Verse 38 in Chapter 15 of Analects of Confucius. " It is the Confucian motto that a teacher must teach all comers without any prejudicial bias. This philosophy applies to teach for cultural diversity. Deakin University ("University") aims to be the Australian most internationally recognised university for the relevance, innovation and responsiveness of its teaching and learning. In the past few years, the University does attract many international students to make this institution as their first choice.

In 1990, Australia welcomed 47,000 international students. By 2000, this number had grown to 188,000. In 2009, nearly 500,000 students were studying in Australia, Pursuant to International Students Strategy for Australia by Council of Australian Governments which is available from http://www.coag.gov.au/reports/docs/aus_international_students_strategy.pdf (accessed on 05 October 2012). These numbers have

been increased to 557,425 in 2011 which included 242,351 students in higher education sectors, a recorded growth of 0.1% in enrolments, Pursuant to End of Year Summary of International Student Enrolment Data by Australian Education International which is available from https://aei.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/Monthly%20summaries%20of%20international%20student%20enrolment%20data%202011/12_Dec_2011_MonthlySummary.pdf (accessed on 05 October 2012). According to the TEQSA Performance Portfolio 2011, Pursuant to Audit Reports undertaken by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency which is available from http://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/auditreport_deakin_2012.pdf (accessed on 05 Oct 2012), Deakin has a diverse and multicultural student population with 23%. They came from 112 countries in 2010. From 2008 to 2010, Deakin students has annually increased by 5.7%, 1.8% and 4.8% respectively, these include the number of

domestic students increased by 4.9%, 1.3% and 4.3%. However, the percentage of international students has been increased by 8.9%, 3.7% and 6.9% respectively. These percentage changes indicate that not only more and more international students enrolled to Deakin, but also reflect that students from diversified cultures have been steadily increased. It means educators have to teach in a much diversified cultural environment with students from distinct ethnic, religion and custom. As there is a growing trend of culturally diversified students pursuing the degree at Australia, it demands educators should be more concerned the needs of the cultural diversity of these students, such as languages, religion, and customs. Their learning styles may vary greatly because the home environment and cultural background in which they were reared.

The majority of international students move to Australia specifically in order to take up their studies, many of them may find that there is a time of adjustment; starting a new page in a different country is a matter of adaptation, with some international students facing major lifestyle and cultural impacts. For example, living and studying overseas will certainly mean an adjustment to a totally different time zone, climate, and food. Learning how to communicate with the locals in their language can also be a significant adjustment. The process is seldom easy and may include mood swings ranging between mild depression and exhilaration. University is responsible for, and must be sensitive to, any special needs, related to studies, of these students.

From the students' perspectives, academic and personal support services, by their lecturers from the frontline and school that they enrolled, are extremely important to integrating international students into the life of the University and community, as these are their first contact point within the University. From the educators' perspectives, university should appoint academics internationally and multi-culturally, so that they can synchronize and share their difficulties much directly with students. When teaching in the multi-cultural setting, these international academics and educators can better recognise student's cultural diversity and adapt their cultural differences in the pedagogical approach. They will also easier identify different learning needs of different students from different cultural background and thus tailor pedagogically to support such diverse student population.

For example, in the School of Architecture and Building of Deakin (School of A+B), they have a diversified cultural mix of students. Amongst this blended population, most research students are from overseas, such as China, Malaysia, India, and Middle East. There is a need to understand how a different culture will have shaped their understandings and expectations. For instance, each student has his/her own cultural

background, and teaching needs to adapt an approach to avoid unnecessary embarrassment or conflicts. In this paper, some practical tips, in respect of teaching effectively for cultural diversity at Deakin, are provided. These include:

1. Review of existing supports available in the university and school
2. Study of theories, as knowledge basis, via literatures review of teaching in a cultural diversity setting from various countries during the past twenty years
3. International experience to enhance pedagogical approach

Existing Support within the University and School

Support is part of the hardware provision, it is extremely important for the University to acknowledge the depth of the adjustment and speed of adaptation required by those students studying in a new country, especially for those come from different cultural background, and that appropriate support needs to be available for those who require it. Fortunately there are various supports available within the University and each school, as well as programs in specific faculties providing a range of assistance, including social activities which can be helpful to them.

The International Student Support team of the University is made up of International Student Advisers (ISAs) on each campus. Those ISAs are to assist all on-campus international students to deal with mainly matters about living and studying in Australia, studying at Deakin, and connecting with the community. This support may encompass a wide range of issues, including cultural adaptation, enrolment-related matters, fees- or finance-related matters, social or adjustment difficulties, academic difficulties, personal issues, grievances and crisis management, homesickness/feelings of isolation, visa related queries etc. As those ISAs normally have lived and studied in other countries, who have experienced firsthand the cultural and various adjustments and adaptations required when living in this new country, they may provide support more directly and effectively.

For example as for helping students who may have his/her own religion inherent from diversified culture, in order to connect with the community better, information for places of worship on or near each campus will be provided from the University portal. The other mean is the broad based intercultural engagement program which aims to actively engage students with their culturally diverse peers in a positive manner. This kind of programme supports the development of international perspectives in students, staff and local and international communities. It also promotes and encourages

participants to take the next step and further their knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity and to develop and strengthen a social consciousness. Events held by the intercultural engagement program include cultural activity in library, multi-cultural festival, Chinese New Year celebrations, Australian Football International Cup, Melbourne Cup anniversary celebration, multi-cultural recreational footy team, Chinese Mid-Autumn festival celebrations, speed language programme etc.

As far as School of A+B is concerned, the cultural backgrounds and international experiences of the staff and student population are increasingly diverse. This school have academics from Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe and Australia; many of them speak English as second or third language. School of A+B welcomes students from every corner of the globe and is committed towards providing an inclusive learning environment for all international students. In fact, the School has a long association with educating international students since 1974, and cumulates over 800 international students graduated who are also now part of the School alumni community. There are now some 200 international students enrolled in the undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs in architecture and construction management. The first thing for a student from a diversified culture who comes to School of A+B will lead to feel that he/she is in an inclusive learning environment. The second thing is that he/she is invited to be an integral part of the School community and profile. The School encourages all local students to have integration with international students at all times. Since 2010, the School has stepped up its proactive approach and is working towards the creation of a school agenda for intercultural awareness, inclusion and the celebration of diversity. Several initiatives towards this agenda have been introduced successfully already. These include:

- Building intercultural awareness through staff professional development workshops
- Social mentoring opportunities for staff and students
- Positive early intervention and support for international students at risk
- Celebrations of major cultural and religious events
- Global themed social events

Dyer (2005) brings forth the emphasis on the lived experiences of teachers and educators in order to develop deeper global understandings in students. Her experience has shaped the choice of content she makes in developing teacher education courses. It is not only curriculum statements, textbooks, films, videos, that are the carriers and resources in global education but teachers themselves through their own stories and narratives and the meanings attached to these. Therefore,

the next section illustrates the required international experience pertaining studying and working in diversified culture that may help to implement and enhance the necessary supports of students' cultural adaptation.

International Experience from Different Cultures

According to the TEQSA Performance Portfolio 2011, the University's 2010 statistic reflects that there are 3,339 students from China, 503 students from Hong Kong and 115 students from Singapore which represents 48% of 8,179 students from the Chinese or Confucian background. For example, the author of this paper has international experience from, earned from Hong Kong, some different cultures which can be very helpful to these population groups.

Firstly, Hong Kong is a bi-cultural city and has a very cosmopolitan outlook on life. Hong Kong is an Asia's city geographically per se, but became a colony of the British Empire after the First Opium War and reigned under Anglo culture since 1842. Due to its historical background and Anglo cultural influence, reflecting the culture's mix of the territory's Chinese roots with influences from its time as a British colony. The culture of this cosmopolitan city, often describes as "East meets West", and the educational system, which used to follow the system in England until reforms implemented in 2009. Therefore, as the author was brought up in this bi-cultural setting and loosely Anglo studying environment with Confucian background which equips to attract the cultural imperative and can help international students either from East and/or West.

Secondly, many educators in the University were immigrant to Australia from a different cultural background. For example, some of the academics in the School A+B even completed the higher research degree (HDR) in Australia. Their unique experience, as a HDR student to work with others in a research team from different cultural background, can consolidate them, from the student's perspective, in the multi-cultural country. They can then teach, supervise and assist other HDR students, from various countries of diversified cultures, firsthand and effectively. Not only the educator's knowledge and skills, but also a frame of mind, temperament, feelings and emotions play a significant role in effectively meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. In fact, a good educator must have good experience and wisdom into relevant knowledge, and be able to translate information to student. Then, effective communication is a "must". Pedagogical approach, in this situation, will then be very effective and when done correctly students from different background can undertake their research easier. Whereas, they understand the international students' concern and needs,

from the student's perspective, then they can supervise the research much efficient. When educators came from a different cultural background to teach: moved immigrant from multi-cultural city, studied in a cultural diversified university, gained working experience internationally; they can share the fear and pain of international students that may encounter various settlement difficulties and study dilemma. Their experience and knowledge are definitely an unique advantage that may help international students to promote a better local community groups and networks.

However, Brown (2007) suggests that educators must gain a better knowledge of culturally responsive teachers' practices, recognize the benefits these practices have for all students, and support teachers in their efforts to transform their teaching, classrooms, and schools so that they will be more responsive to the students they serve. The next section will then move to the literatures review as knowledge basis for teaching effectively for cultural diversity.

Learn from Literatures: Knowledge Basis

Various writers offer different pedagogical strategies. For the key aims and purposes of teaching effectively for cultural diversity, learning from previous research may help apply the findings to the pedagogical approach. In an USA case study, Ogbu (1992) states that the crucial issue in cultural diversity and learning is the relationship between the minority cultures and the American mainstream culture. Minorities whose cultural frames of reference are oppositional to the cultural frame of reference of American mainstream culture have greater difficulty crossing cultural boundaries at school to learn. This assertion also applies to Australian setting, and identification of cultural diversity is crucial.

Campbell and Mingsheng (2008) suggests the importance for lecturers and host institutions are professionally responsible to equip Asian students with adequate knowledge of academic discourses and to help them transcend the culturally framed borders and subjectivities. To meet these challenges, it is important to review and adapt our pedagogical practices and approaches and to realign them to the needs of both local and international students.

According to the studies by Hofstede (1980; 1994), the author describes five dimensions of national-cultural differences: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity and long-term orientation. These dimensions are relevant to discern East and West students. Minjuan (2007) stems on Hofstede's work and mentions that those five cultural dimensions can affect online learning for those may effectively engage learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. She examines the

effect of one of the important cultural dimension (power distance) on learners' perceptions of their online learning experiences. Knowing the differences in student perception regarding course content, technology and facilitation of courses is an important consideration in the design and development of online curricula. This means that academic must attend the cultural differences prior to developing study material, utilizing technology and facilitation of the courses.

Educators also need to understand the role of collaboration in teacher preparation to meet the needs of diversity. According to Patrick and Reinhartz (1999), there is educational needs in with increasing diversification and collaboration impacts the preparation of educators. Best practices from schools, universities, communities, and industries establish benchmarks that these collaborative systems can use to develop effective teacher preparation programs. When such collaboration exists, the educational systems become aligned in a seamless web of experiences, leading to knowledge, skills, and attitudes inherent in lifelong learning. Gay (2002) further suggests to improve the school success of ethnically diverse students through culturally responsive teaching. There are five essential elements of culturally responsive teaching are examined, namely developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. Therefore, involving personal experience to respond to cultural needs of student will be extremely useful.

Application to Pedagogical Approach

University's student population is increasing in size and diversity, and educators will teach international students with a range of learning styles and abilities, from many different cultural, social, educational and linguistic backgrounds. The above literature reviews not only cover the various research and studies of teaching in a cultural diversity setting, such as in U.S.A. New Zealand, U.K. during the past approximate 20 years; but also especially discusses effective ways of teaching in various disciplines (Ogbu 1992; Dogra, Giordano et al. 2007; Minjuan 2007; Campbell and Mingsheng 2008). The

section identifies references to the above literature sources that provide supporting evidence for, and guidance in the application of teaching in a diversified culture. Based upon this knowledge basis and with reference to practical tips Pursuant to Practical tips: "How do I make my teaching more inclusive?" which is available

from <http://www.deakin.edu.au/itl/assets/resources/pd/teaching-tips/make-inclusive.pdf> (accessed on 20 May 2011), from the University's resources, it can be brought forward in dealing with diversity in the classroom, and covers students from other countries with different cultures in a broad sense. If teaching has to be more inclusive, teacher can adopt the following strategies:

1. Use wider range of 'real world' examples from different countries in the teaching as well as case studies from different cultures
2. Combine students into groups from diversified cultures and urge them to share and combine their existing own knowledge/experiences
3. Design assessment and make explicit instructions

Gollnick and Chinn (1983) state that education requires teachers to educate students varying in culture, language, abilities, and many other characteristics. To meet this challenge, teachers must employ not only theoretically sound but also culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must create a classroom culture where all students, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background, are welcomed and supported and provided with the best opportunity to learn (Richards, Brown et al. 2007). As more and more students from diverse backgrounds populate the classrooms, to effectively raise the interests of these students, teacher may shift away from traditional monolithic system but creates an environment that embraces as well as enhances diversity awareness. In order to use wide range of industrial examples from different countries, educators are encouraged to share international experience that they have accumulated from other countries. For example, the author can share experience from some landmark projects which include those for regional and international; public and private; domestic, residential and commercial developments. On the other hand, universities should pursue the strategies not only to persuade students to build their international capabilities and intercultural understanding, but encourage them to consider studying a language to improve their international skills. It will be helpful to select relevant case studies, when designing the study material, from different cultures. In fact, along-the-way of globalization, multiculturalism is the way to promote understanding between people and there is a significant growth of cross-cultural projects. Students, both local and international, will be benefited by case studies from different cultures.

This may also help not mere cultural assimilation and adaptation, but the obliteration and adjustment of local culture.

In order to help those international students adjusting, settling and adapting the new student life better, there is a need to involve and integrate them into the local community. By combining students into groups and mixing up the cultural diversity is an important step in the classroom, as it can urge those international students to share and combine their existing knowledge/experiences with those domestic students and assist students to explore new knowledge arena in their own individual conceptions of the world. This can also help international students to accumulate his/her understanding of Australian culture. In the group, students will be given an opportunity to express skills and learn more about university environment as well as expand our knowledge on others countries cultures and languages. In fact, acknowledge membership of different cultures and individual abilities and aspirations within any students in the group are crucial. Moreover, educators need to be alert to the different learning needs of first year students, mature aged students, international students, and assess how belonging to one group influences how one relates to and views other groups. In order to this, collaboration from the school is required, this includes the administrative structure and the way it relates to diversity, and the use of physical space in planning schools and arranging classrooms.

Thirdly, educator has to design learning materials and assessment which are inclusive of broad cultural diversity. Although studying is not only for marks, some international students may always be under particular pressure to succeed in meeting assessment requirements. According to Kutieleh et al. (2004), international students invest a great deal of time and money in their education, often at a high personal cost (and opportunity cost). They are looking for a reward; and family expectations push them to aim for an outstanding academic outcome. It is imperative that University establish a strategy to minimise unnecessary risks of academic failure for international students, who are concerned not only with the high quality of course materials, but also the requirements for completing assessment tasks. Hence, lecturing and tutoring helping student completing the subject and assessment is essential in every subject and design assessment and make clear instructions are crucial. Each assessment is a central element in the overall quality of teaching and learning in higher education, and well designed assessment sets clear expectations, establishes a reasonable workload (one that does not push students into rote reproductive approaches to study), and provides opportunities for students to self-monitor, rehearse, practise and receive feedback. Therefore, it will be

necessary to have a structure for an assessment that depends less on written English and more on knowledge and understanding of concepts, so that those international students may not be adversely affected. In addition, educators will use the clear and plain language in setting out the assessment requirements to avoid any ambiguity which might be caused by using terminology that has a literal dictionary meaning and may be at odds to those international students. Assessment is an integral component of a coherent educational experience. Educator will also use appropriate certain styles of communication that those international students understand and may be used in their home countries. Educator will make sure the ways that assessment is matched to subject and course objectives and inform students about the assessment purpose, requirements and expectations. Though students are come from diversity background, fairness of assessment must be ensured, educator will ensure the ways of assessment tasks provide staff with feedback on student learning, and timely and helpful feedback to students will be provided.

CONCLUSION

Quality of education is one of the key factors when students decide where to study; the higher the quality of education, the better equipped the student is for the future. The reputation of Australia's international education sector relies primarily on quality. There are, however, a number of issues affecting international students that have become apparent and need to be addressed. Some students have identified issues such as education quality in comparing with their home country, health and wellbeing, and the quality and accessibility of information as particularly important. All these are matter pertaining to settlement in a cultural diversified environment.

The international education sector is very important economically in Australia; it is the third largest source of export income in 2010, Pursuant to International Students Strategy for Australia by Council of Australian Governments as above. The Council of Australian Governments supports a high-quality experience for international students, in order to ensure a sustainable future for quality international education in Australia. Therefore, universities should always care about the wellbeing of all international students and have promoted many interactions and communications between different cultural groups. There are irrefutable facts that Australian universities will have more international students from other countries, and the need for appropriate pedagogical approach that respond to culturally diversity intensifies; educators have to undertake necessary action to support the needs of culturally diverse students. Educators must

come to realize that students' cultural attributes are not inferior to the existing or prevailing culture, but rather, these "foreign" attributes give meaning and direction to a student's life.

In order to better assist international students easily adapt the cultural diversity, this paper concludes that providing adequate supports from both university and school level and utilizing international staff's experiences are deemed essential and necessary. These are the two hardware provisions. Furthermore, educator should use not only wider range of 'real world' examples from different countries in the teaching; but also may combine students into groups from diversified cultures and urge them to share and combine their existing own knowledge/experiences into the studies. Finally, educator has to design assessment, less on written English but more on knowledge and understanding of the concepts, because university is not going to assess merely their language but of skill and knowledge. Therefore, making explicit instructions of assessment task is required because it may directly assist international students to complete their assignments easier.

There is a need of creating such pedagogical approaches that recognizes and supports diversified cultural backgrounds from experiences and exposures. Once developed, they will amplify to all international students from various countries and lead them to a more rewarding learning outcome.

The major limitation of this paper is that only two hardware items and three means are identified to help those international students in adaption. The author is going to explore the more effective tools and adopt them into the future pedagogical approaches. These may include designing and adopting a better delivery method for teaching effectively for cultural diversity; using proper languages and better wording of critique and feedback to international students. As a whole, it is the long-term goal and overarching target of universities to create a comfortable learning environment for international students.

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