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The Difficulties and Opportunities Chinese Transfer Students Encounter in an American University: A Learning Perspective

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THE DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES CHINESE TRANSFER STUDENTS ENCOUNTER IN AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY: A LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

by

Hui Chen

A THESIS

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THE DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES CHINESE TRANSFER STUDENTS ENCOUNTER IN AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY: A LEARNING PERSPECTIVE

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University of Nebraska, 2011

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students encounter in learning in one American university. The researcher also explored the strategies that transfer students used to deal with the difficulties and opportunities.

The study employed qualitative survey and interview methods. Ninety-seven students who transferred from Zhejiang University City College and Xi’an Jiaotong University City College to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln were invited to participate. These students came to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln through the Partner Degree Program (PDP). Forty-one individuals completed the online survey and two students participated in interviews. The participants were asked about their learning experiences in UNL, including the learning abilities in class and after class. The content involved reading, listening, writing and speaking and students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods. Seven questions directed the research: (a) what is the student’s basic information? (b) how do students evaluate their English abilities in general? (c) how do students evaluate their English abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing? (d) how do students evaluate their performances in class? (e) what are students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods? (f) what are students’ attitudes towards assignments after classes? and (g) regarding the difficulties encountered as transfer
students, what are the attitudes towards credit transfer, class selection, having classes, doing homework, and communicating with English-speaking students?

The results demonstrated that the transfer students from PDP have difficulties in adjusting to American learning environment. The professional words, instructors’ accents, and speaking speeds were the three factors that hindered most the students’ learning on the American campus. Moreover, students’ English abilities were an important factor. Their personal characteristics and the learning habits formed in Chinese learning environments made them need more time to adjust to the new learning environment. Helping students better adjust to the American campus and encouraging instructors to raise their own awareness of students’ difficulties is essential for students success on the complex American campus.
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Chapter One

Introduction

The United States is the premier provider of tertiary education for international students (Singaravelu, White, & Bringaze, 2005, p. 46). The Institute of International Education’s *Open Doors 2010 Fast Facts* (2010) indicated that the number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States during the 2009-2010 academic year increased by 2.9% over the prior year, reaching an all-time high of 690,923 students. The top three sending countries—China, India, and South Korea, comprised nearly half (44%) of the total international enrollments in U.S. higher education. The rapid development in China has encouraged a great number of Chinese students to migrate to the U.S. to pursue advanced degrees. According to the newest figures, there have been 128,000 Chinese graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in the U.S. in 2010. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln for example, has 2,328 international students and scholars in Spring 2011 that came from 112 countries. Seven hundred and thirty-four Chinese students constitute the highest proportion of international students at UNL (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2011). Chinese students come from a country that is far from the United State in distance, culture, political system, and language. They have to start a completely different life style and struggle in a different learning environment.

In addition to the students’ own efforts, an increasing number of universities are creating opportunities for international education or study aboard. The concrete forms include visiting scholars and students and partner programs. This research focused on the transfer students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Partner Degree Programs
(PDP) with Zhejiang University City College and Xi’an Jiaotong University City Colleges. International students’ difficulties have been researched by scholars. However, the language difficulties of transfer students from a specific country with a specific program at a single site have not been explored.

**UNL’s Partner Degree Program**

UNL established partnership degree and faculty exchange programs with Xi’an Jiaotong University City College and Zhejiang University City Colleges. According to UNL publications, degree program students study in the Chinese universities for two years and then complete their studies at UNL. The degree program with Xi’an Jiaotong University City College, which is called XJTUCC, began in fall 2007, and the Zhejiang University City College program, which is called ZUCC, began in fall 2008 (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2008). Chinese students who apply for these programs must meet the following requirements.

1. They must take TOFEL test or IELTS test. The score of TOFEL should be above 70 or for IELTS be above 6. If TOFEL score is above 6.1 but below 7 or IELTS score is above 5, but below 6, they can study in intensive English program (IEP) held by UNL before continuing their undergraduate study in UNL. Thus, as other students, they must experience intensive English training.

2. The average score for each semester must be above 80 or a GPA above 2.0 according to UNL standards. These students should have great learning capacities.
3. Students in China must take English classes from UNL lecturers twice a week. The lecturer helps the students learn language and American cultures. The score for each English class must be above 70.

In addition, some groups of UNL students and faculty members have visited the two Chinese institutes. They introduce UNL and communicate with Chinese students. Moreover, UNL faculty members present lectures in these two universities. All these programs are intended to help the students better adjust to living and studying environment in the United States. When the students arrive at UNL, UNL will host a social event to welcome the students and help them become familiar with American cultures. The person in charge of this program cares about these students’ learning and living in America. The students in PDP at UNL pay resident tuition, which can be understood as a tuition discount. Through 2011, there have been 99 Chinese transfer students through the program, including two students who already graduated (personal communication, December, 2010).

Unlike traditional international students and transfer students, the PDP students received professional English training in advance and experienced courses taught in English. UNL selected the qualified applicants based on the students’ performance and achievements in Chinese universities. Thus, the students should be outstanding. The problems encountered by these students on American campuses were the focus of this research.
Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the difficulties and opportunities Chinese transfer students encounter in learning in an American university and to explore the strategies they used to deal with the difficulties.

Research Questions

The central research questions for this study were: What are the difficulties and opportunities Chinese transfer students encounter in an American university? What strategies do they used to deal with the difficulties? There are some sub-questions to direct the research:

1. What is the student’s basic information?
2. How do students evaluate their English abilities in general?
3. How do students evaluate their English abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing?
4. How do students evaluate their performances in class?
5. What are students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods?
6. What are students’ attitudes towards assignments after classes?
7. Regarding the difficulties encountered as transfer students, what are the attitudes towards credit transfer, class selection, having classes, doing homework, and communicating with English-speaking students?

Definitions

The following terms are provided to help the readers understand the thesis.  

*International students*—Individuals who currently reside in U.S. and attend classes either as regular students or traditional students but are not citizens of the U.S.
Thus, though these individuals may not have a student visa, they nonetheless take classes in American institutions of higher education (Ejiofo, 2011, p. 8).

*International education*—International education teaches about the lives and natural and social contexts of people living in other countries and cultures and actively promotes immersion experiences in other countries and cultures. International education explores interactions and connections among nations, especially the ways in which other people and cultures impact our daily lives. International education is an approach that creates awareness of political, economic, scientific, and cultural interdependence that exists across national and cultural borders. International education acknowledges the complexity of the world’s peoples, including their differences, similarities, conflicts, and connections (Uraneck, 2002, p. 2).

*Transfer students*—Students who have attended a college or university and enroll to continue their education at a different two- or four-year institution (Poisel & Joseph, 2011).

*International Transfer Students*—According to the introductions of transfer application in UNL, international transfer students must meet the following two requirements: (a) the candidate is not a United States citizen or does not currently hold a permanent resident authorization from the U.S. immigration service, and (b) the candidate has attended a post-secondary institution (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2010).

*PDP*—The full name is Partner Degree Program. UNL previously established partnership degree and faculty exchange programs with Xi’an Jiaotong University City
College and Zhejiang University City Colleges in China (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2008).

**Delimitations**

1. The study was delimitated to one institution, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

2. The 97 undergraduate students who transferred from Zhejiang University City College and Xi’an Jiaotong University City College though the PDP were the only research subjects.

3. The study only focused on the language difficulties and opportunities that the transfer students encountered. The learning perspective was the only research scope.

**Limitations**

Some factors may have affected the final results. First, UNL and PDP are the only institution and program to be researched. Thus, the number of participants was very limited and represented only one institution. Second, the low to moderate return rate of surveys may not have shown the real situation, and the participants’ attitudes towards the study affected the accuracy of the answers provided, as some students did not finish the survey as directed. In addition, the two interviewees, both males, were enrolled in the same department—the Department of Electrical Engineering. Thus, the difficulties that the students in the College of Education and the College of Business Administration encountered were not touched deeply. Female students’ problems would not be addressed in detail; females and males may confront different problems on American campuses.
Significance of the Study

The body of international students becomes more diverse on American campuses and the number of partner programs is increasing year by year. The results may inform UNL practices. The universities may pay more attention to these special students, and policies and practices may be made to help the students better adjust to the new learning environment. Greater levels of participation may help students better understand difficulties and opportunities that they have. Results may inform students of strategies that can be used to confront difficulties and opportunities. Although the subjects were the Chinese transfer students from PDP at UNL, the data and suggestions can also be referenced by the traditional international students.

Summary

This is a qualitative study that explored the language difficulties and opportunities that the Chinese transfer students encounter in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; their strategies and suggestions deal with these difficulties. UNL’s Partner Degree Program with Zhejiang University City College and Xi’an Jiaotong University City College was researched. Survey and oral interviews were used to obtain data. The researcher’s experiences and observations as an international student were also added to enrich the content. American college personnel can make some changes to help students better adjust to the new learning environment.
Chapter Two

Literature Reviews

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the difficulties and opportunities Chinese transfer students encounter in learning in an American university and to explore the strategies they used to deal with the difficulties.

Introduction

Literature reviews familiarize readers with the development of the related field of study in recent years. More specifically, it’s about the changed subjects, content and results. In the earlier studies, scholars used international students as their study population and paid attention to their adaptation in America. Nowadays, Chinese students as a separate body have attracted more attention. In this section of the thesis, the researcher reviewed literature from the following four aspects: (a) the related studies about international students in American universities; (b) the related studies about Chinese students’ adaptation in American universities; (c) the related studies about transfer students in American universities; and (d) the related studies about the international education programs.

International Students in American Universities

Furnham and Bochner (1982, cited in Sun & Chen, 1997, p. 6) proposed four potential problems foreign students may face in the host culture: (a) problems such as discrimination, language problems, accommodation difficulties, separation reactions, dietary restrictions, financial stress, misunderstanding, and loneliness; (b) the requirement of becoming emotionally independent, self-support, productive, and responsible; (c)
academic stresses; and (d) serving as a prominent role of representativeness of their own culture.

Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) did a qualitative study and found that language skills, academic issues, and social interaction were the most difficult adjustment problem areas for international students. These students were more likely to have positive academic and nonacademic experiences if they could adapt to and enjoy contact with the host community, and their successful achievement of academic goals was more likely if the emotional and social atmosphere was pleasant and the environment was congenial (pp. 399-406).

Gudykust (1994, cited in Sun & Chen, 1997, pp. 6-7) identified several sources that lead to misunderstanding when international students communicated with strangers. The sources included the inappropriate transmission of a message, the different of communication rules, language barriers, lack of task competency in a different social context, different group identity or intergroup expectations, and unfamiliar topic in interactions. These problems appeared in the process of intercultural interaction that interfered with the effectiveness of intercultural communication.

Li, Fox, and Almarza (2007) conducted a case study to investigate international students’ perceptions of the issues they face using English as a second language while attending American higher education institutions. The following six points were the findings.

1. *Concerns about proficiency in English.* The interviewees’ deep concerns were about their inability to manipulate the English language. Most of them appeared to lack confidence in their English skills and felt upset for not better
mastering the language. These reflections revealed that these international students were highly sensitive about how others may perceive their skills in speaking English.

2. *Previous experiences of learning English.* Participants expressed difficulties in using English in America. It’s hardly possible for international students to experience the full range of American dialects and the multiple forms of informal English unless they lived in the USA for many years.

3. *Difference between formal and conversational English.* Participants found that there was a great distance between their previous knowledge of the more formal English language and the more informal, authentic spoken English in American life. In the course of interviewing, the author noted that these students’ unfamiliarity with the way of oral language was the main reason why they may become “deaf” in communication. Different from written language, oral language involved a great many idioms and colloquial expressions, accumulating from one generation to another.

4. *Native cultures vs. adopted cultures.* The difference between their native culture and the American culture makes it more difficult for them to properly function in an American environment.

5. *Lack of vocabulary.* Most of the participants felt overwhelmed by the number of new words they had to learn and by the limitations that the lack of vocabulary imposed. This shortage of vocabulary could also increase international students’ timidity in communicating with native speakers. The other possible consequence of lacking vocabulary was that international
students were not liable to comprehend much of the language coming at them, if it was too fast and has little repetition.

6. *Individual personality.* The researcher put forward some suggestions, such as to engage in informal and formal English whenever possible, form international groups and seek comfort from culture and family (Findings section).

**Chinese Students in American Universities**

Wan (1999) did a case study on a graduate student and his wife at a major university in the eastern part of the United States. The following six questions and results were supported and obtained from the study.

1. The students’ motivations for learning, which were to grow professional and prove their ability and personal and political frustration in home country.
2. The frustrations of cross-cultural living and learning, which included the communication difficulties, discrimination, disillusionment and pressure in study.
3. The satisfactions of cross-cultural living—the good living conditions and fair policy.
4. Their strategies for coping with limited English in school work and in daily life was to take advantage of better knowledge of reading and writing in English to compensate for their insufficiencies in aural and oral English. For instance, reading books after class and checking the words before using.
5. The new perspectives they had gained through learning and their hope of opening doors with better credentials.
6. The cultural differences in the classroom and daily life they found were the teacher-student relationship; classroom was interactive but chaotic; and the different systems used to measure length, weight and capacity and the way that language used and learned in daily life. (pp. 7-16)

Feng (1991) described four Chinese students’ and one international student advisors’ experiences in America. The students had spent different length of time in USA and were in different majors. Financial difficulty, cultural differences, academic concerns and language ability were found to be the major four difficulties that the
students from PRC had. Economical support determined to a great degree not only how they lived in the States but also how American universities were chosen. In addition, their financial situation was closely related to and had negative impact on other areas such as participation in social activities, academic achievement, social interaction, and English language skill. PRC students found American cultures quite different from their own; it was difficult for them to adjust and socialize with American. They had difficulties in understanding class and taking notes, understanding English idioms, southern accents and jokes. Their language difficulty often kept them from participating in social activities (pp. 6-15).

Sun and Chen (1997) did a study to investigate the difficulties Mainland Chinese students encountered in the process of adjusting to American cultures. The study found that the lack of language proficiency, a deficiency in cultural awareness and bad academic achievements were the three dimensions of difficulties Chinese students had. According to the students’ opinions, the hardest things to adjust to in the United States were: (a) difficulty in making American friends due to cultural differences; (b) difficulty in understanding the language; and (c) feeling uncomfortable in classroom communication (pp. 8-12).

Lin (2002) described the challenges of Chinese graduate students in a social science program, explored the conflicts the Chinese graduate students perceived between their own learning styles and the American way of teaching and learning, and examined how they coped with these problems. The following three questions directed the research: (a) what differences did they perceive in American social science programs as compared to their educational background in China; (b) what were some challenges they had in
American social science program? and (c) what strategies did they employ to cope with the challenges? The researcher found that the students’ learning challenges included language proficiency in classroom discussions, a lack of training in research skills, a lack of exposure to current research related fields, and a lack of cultural knowledge or understand (pp. 4-8).

Huang (2004) did a study on how American professors’ use of English in class affected Chinese students' understanding of academic lectures. The study indicated two factors that affected Chinese students’ English academic listening at an American university.

1. The linguistic challenges were caused by both Chinese students' lack of English proficiency and their American professors’ use of English in class.

2. Non-linguistic factors, which included (a) the rapidness of professors' English speech; (b) professors' lack of clear pronunciation; (c) professors' use of long and complex sentences; (d) professors' use of colloquial and slang expressions; (e) professors' lack of clear definition of terms and concepts; and (f) professors' use of discourse markers.

Several suggestions for American professors were put forward in this study: (a) the teacher can speak a little more slowly when delivering a lecture; (b) the teacher should use formal English to deliver lectures; (c) the teacher should avoid using colloquial and slang expressions; (d) the teacher should explain some important concepts clearly in class; (e) the teacher should vary the pace of lesson and break up content into accessible units; (f) the teacher should speak clearly and loudly in the classroom; (g) the teacher should try to get rid of strong accent and strange pronunciation; and (h) the
teacher should use more body language to facilitate students' learning (Results and Discussions section).

**Transfer Students in American Universities**

In many ways, transfer students represent one of the most exciting and most complex student subpopulations in undergraduate education. Most studies about transfer students focused on two-year community college transferring to four-year institution, which was also a unique phenomenon in American education. The two main topics involved, as referenced in the related studies, were transfer shock/culture shock and student engagement.

**Transfer shock/culture shock.** Transfer shock was generally understood as an initial dip in academic performance immediately following the transfer experiences (Poisel & Joseph, 2011, p. 3). According to Hill (1965, cited in Ishitani, 2008, p. 404), transfer shock occurred when there was a dip in transfer student’s grades during the first semester after transferring to a four-year institution. Peng and Bailey (1997, cited in Ishitani, 2008, p.404) studied differences between transfer and four-year college native students, and the results of their study suggested that these two groups of students were different in many ways. In particular, they reported that native students had higher GPAs than those of first-year transfer students. If the transfer shock mainly focused on the students who transferred in the same country, another concept of culture shock can be used to describe the international transfer students. The culture shock phenomenon had been used interchangeably with the “sojourner experience” in the research literature. According to Oberg (1960, cited in Laanan, 2007, p. 40), culture shock was characterized as moving from an original place of origin to a foreign environment. Individuals (or
sojourners) have to adjust and/or adapt to the new signs and symbols of the foreign environment. When entering a strange culture, all or most familiar cues are removed. There were two important factors that explained the adjustment process during the cross-cultural relocation process. First, in the psychological adjustment process, the extent to which individuals were successful in their adjustment to the foreign environment can be explained in his/her ability to cope and deal with the stress of making the transition. Further, students’ level of satisfaction and their perception of their well-being would likely impact the relocation process. Second, in the sociocultural adjustment process, the success of an individual making the crossover to the foreign environment was highly dependent on the extent to which individuals perceived that they possessed the social skills and had the ability to fit in the new environment (Laanan, 2007, pp. 40-41).

**Student engagement.** The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) found that transfer students were less involved in campus clubs, service-learning, research projects with faculty members, and other activities that constituted student engagement (Poisel & Joseph, 2011, pp. 3-4). Astin’s (1984, cited in Laanan, 2007, p. 40) theory of student involvement provided a useful perspective to understand transfer students. Astin maintained that the quality and quantity of students’ involvement on a college campus can explain the environmental influences on student development. Based on previous research studying college students, Astin identified factors in the college environment that had significant effects on students’ persistence, retention, and overall satisfaction in college. He found that the factors contributing to students remaining in college suggested involvement, whereas those factors contributing to students dropping out implied a lack of involvement. The underlying premise was that involvement
referred to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devoted to
the academic experience. An involved student was one who devoted energy to studying,
spending time on campus, participating in student organizations, and interacting with
faculty members and other students. Astin’s theory held that transfer students who had
high levels of social and academic involvement at the 2-year college would most likely
continue this behavior at the 4-year institution.

**International Education Programs**

American universities have created agreements with Chinese universities to
attract Chinese students to study in America and have sent their staffs and students to
contact Chinese cultures. Here are some examples.

University of California, Riverside partnered with universities throughout the
world to maintain the highest standards of teaching and research, to keep up with
academic trends, and to share innovations. UCR had made 51 agreements with Chinese
universities through 2010 (University of California, Riverside, 2009).

Cornell had for most of its history had a long list of international agreements with
institutions across the globe. The university recognized the value these exchanges had in
strengthening the teaching, research, and extension capabilities of the institutions
involved, broadening the international experience of the participants, and fostering
goodwill between Cornell and the international community. Cornell entered into
agreements with institutions throughout the world on the initiative of faculty members
and academic administrators alike (Cornell University, 2011). Cornell University had
signed nine exchange agreements with Chinese universities. The latest one was assigned
on April 29, 2010.
Institute of International Education (IIE) (2011) provided the general information about the international partnership program. IAPP, whose full name is the International Academic Partnership Program and funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), was a major initiative of IIE’s Center for International Partnerships in Higher Education that seek to increase the number of international partnerships between higher education institutions in the U.S. and those in India and China. Over the course of a year, the 2011 IAPP Program engaged a select group of 10 U.S. higher education institutions to facilitate the formation of international partnerships with institutions in China. The IAPP would provide the ten selected institutions with seven core services.

1. Guidelines for assessing on-campus international partnership capacity and developing practical strategic plans for international programs.

2. A series of webinars, focused on implementing strategic partnerships, fostering faculty engagement, developing a consolidated China strategy and understanding higher education in China.

3. Ongoing mentoring by one of the members of the IAPP China Advisory Group and IIE staff including guidance on developing or expanding a strategic plan for partnerships with China.

4. A study tour to China that will include visits to select higher education institutions and other educational exchange organizations. All in-country expenses will be covered by the program, but participants are responsible for covering their international airfare.
5. A list of suggested partner institutions in China based on the goals of each participating institution’s strategic plan.

6. A suite of IIE publications, policy research reports and information resources on the higher education systems in China.


Summary

From the literature reviews, it’s easy to note that more and more studies have focused on international students and international education in recent years. Chinese students as a separated body attracted more and more attention. However, few studies were found on the international transfer students. Most studies about transfer students centered on the students who transferred from two-year community colleges to four-year universities in America. Although some findings could also be used to explain the difficulties that international transfer students had, the international transfer students had their own problems due to the specific cultures and habits. Based on these findings, this paper focused on Chinese transfer students in American university.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Purpose

This research was to investigate the difficulties and opportunities Chinese transfer students encounter in learning in one American university and to explore the strategies students used to deal with the difficulties and opportunities.

Research Question

The central research questions for this study were: What are the difficulties and opportunities Chinese transfer students encounter in an American university? What strategies do they used to deal with the difficulties? There are some sub-questions to direct the research:

1. What is the student’s basic information?
2. How do students evaluate their English abilities in general?
3. How do students evaluate their English abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing?
4. How do students evaluate their performances in class?
5. What are students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods?
6. What are students ‘attitudes towards assignments after classes?
7. Regarding the difficulties encountered as transfer students, what are the attitudes towards credit transfer, class selection, having classes, doing homework, and communicating with English-speaking students?
Research Design

This was a mixed methods research design. Survey and interviews were the main methods to obtain data. David Wilson and Tong Chang, both associated with the Chinese transfer student program, were asked to assist in the recruitment of survey participants.

Instrument. A questionnaire and follow-up interviews were the instruments. The content was created based on the researcher’s personal experiences and scholars’ literature reviews. The researcher designed the survey from her perspective as a graduate student in the Department of Educational Administration. The questionnaire consisted of 19 main questions and sub-questions. The content included the students’ basic information, such as the enrollment time, majors in China and in the USA, and the registered credits in this semester; the students’ basic English abilities in reading, listening, writing and speaking in class and after class; and the students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods. The three forms of inquiry on the survey were choices, open-ended questions, and rank order of items. In order to avoid a low response rate, most questions were designed with choices; single choice and multi-choices were used based on the different nature of the topics. One draft was reviewed by two undergraduate students to determine if it was practical. Through the pre-evaluation, two big problems were found. First, the teaching methods in the Department of Education were very different from other departments, mainly in the length of a class and the presentation styles. Second, undergraduate study and graduate study in America were different, and thus they met different challenges and difficulties. Based on this consideration, final amendments were then made. The survey was estimated to take 15 minutes to complete.
The on-line program, Qualtrics, was used to create the online survey and to distribute it. The final question sought volunteers to serve as interviewees.

**Participants**

All the students were transfers associated with the UNL’s PDP. They were asked to participate in the survey. They were all undergraduate students. Thus, populations consist of 97 students, including females and males. The participants’ entry years in the program ranged from 2007 to 2011. The latest entry date was January, 2011. Most students started their junior year at UNL. A few students transferred to UNL before finishing their first year of study in China. Thus, some of the transfer students were very young. Business and engineering were favorite majors.

Two students agreed to take the oral interviews. The two male interviewees both came to the United State on August, 2011, and studied in the Department of Electrical Engineering. However, each studied at one of the two Chinese institutions engaged in the PDP with UNL.

**Data Collection Procedures**

There were six steps for data collection:

1. to decide a topic that interested and make sure the research participants;
2. to review related papers and books;
3. to submit the proposal to UNL Institutional Review Board (IRB) with the research design;
4. to select the methods to obtain data:
   (a) interview—to decide the questions,
   (b) questionnaires—to decide the forms and titles,
(c) observations—to select the proper settings;

5. To arrange time to carry out each method; and

6. To analyze and summarize data.

The project methods, procedures and design were submitted to UNL’s IRB for approval. IRB was granted in the fall of 2010. One staff reviewed the project and asked questions related to students’ rights, such as whether the students need the guardians’ permissions; ultimately permission was granted.

Liaison Tong Chang assisted in sending the survey to the qualified participants directly without giving the researcher their email addresses. His work as a research assistant with PDP gave him access to the e-mails of the selected participants. One email letter with the description of the study purpose was sent with the survey link. However, the results were returned directly to the researcher through the system. One week later, a reminder letter was sent by Tong Chang again. Because the return rate of electronic surveys was low, the researcher then had two assistants distribute hard copies to PDP students in classes who then returned the survey immediately to the assistants. The assistants returned the hard copies to the researcher.

At the close of the survey, the students were asked whether they would like to take an oral interview to share their personal experiences on American campus. If they so chose, they were asked to leave their email addresses or cell phones numbers to be contacted. Also Tong Chang was asked to recommend students who might be good interviewees. The interviewees were selected based on gender, majors, the time that enrolled, and the responses for the open-end questions. Five students agreed to be interviewed. They were contacted to set up the interviews via email, including thanks
letter and the suggested interview sits and time. Two students replied and provided their available time and place they preferred. The student union was the favorite place for the interviewer and interviewees. Interviewees were asked to read the inform consent forms and ask any questions about the study, and then to sign the forms before interview began. The signature meant they agreed to be audio taped. Chinese was the main language to use, as it made more convenient to express ideas. Interviews took about 45 minutes. The students provided some good personal experiences and suggestions.

In the writing of the thesis, no participants were identified by names. In the thesis text, the English name of the Chinese student would be used. This name was not used in the context of classes and interactions on the campus. Students went by their given names in Chinese. The participants were identifiable only for interviews. No persons who returned the survey would be identified. Names linking data to codes would be removed after coding.

**Data Analysis**

The survey results were obtained through the Qualtrics survey system with the analysis tools. The data from the hard copies were added to Qualtrics to determine final counts. All the information was used in the analysis. The data were analyzed both from the horizontal and vertical levels. The students’ replies were read one by one first, and then were compared the answers for the same questions with frequency and percentage. The answers to the open-ended questions were listed and generalized. Tables were used to display the numbers of students in each group and make clear the results.

The researcher listened to and read the tapes and notes from the interviews, which were conducted in Chinese. The participants’ own words were paid attention to and
some main points were sorted out with comment and interpretations. The tapes then were translated into English by the researcher for analysis. One person who knew Chinese and English very well helped check the accuracy. The tapes for interviews were kept for one year, and stored in a locked drawer in the researcher’s home. The researcher and her advisor were the only persons to access all data, which were destroyed after one year.

The data obtained from the survey and oral interviews, combined with the researcher’s personal experiences were analyzed and generalized into several main categories.

**Summary**

This was a mixed methods study utilizing survey data and oral interviews were. Ninety-seven Chinese students who transferred from Zhejiang University City College and Xi’an Jiaotong University City College were the participants. An online survey was sent to the qualified participants and data were returned to the system automatically. Interviews were taped and transcribed. All data were combined to make the final analysis.
Chapter Four

Results

This chapter presented the results of the study. Survey and interview were used to obtain the data. Ninety-seven Chinese students who transferred from Zhejiang University City College and Xi’an Jiaotong University City College were invited to participate in the study. Among them, 41 students finished the survey and 2 students took an oral interview. The survey included the students’ basic information and their self-evaluations of the abilities in listening, reading, writing and speaking. In class and after class were the two basic situations to examine the students’ difficulties. Two students from different institutions shared some valuable experiences and suggestions through the conversations. Respondent demographic data and the results of the survey are presented first, and then the results from interviews.

Purpose

This research was to investigate the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students encounter in learning in one American university and to explore the strategies students used to deal with the difficulties and opportunities.

Research Questions

To investigate the learning difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students from PDP encounter, the following questions were used to direct the research:

1. What is the student’s basic information?
2. How do students evaluate their English abilities in general?
3. How do students evaluate their English abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing?
4. How do students evaluate their performances in class?
5. What are students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods?
6. What are students ‘attitudes towards assignments after classes?
7. Regarding the difficulties encountered as transfer students, what are the attitudes towards credit transfer, class selection, having classes, doing homework, and communicating with English-speaking students?

Survey Results

Participants.

Research Question 1: Basic information of the participants. The population of students participating in PDP was 97 Chinese transfer students. All were contacted to participate the study—22 from Zhejiang University City College and 75 from Xi’an Jiaotong University City College. Forty-one online surveys were returned, representing a 42.2% response rate. One participant submitted a survey that was completely blank. Thus, there were 40 usable surveys that served as the sample. The respondents’ demographic data are displayed in Table 1.

The sample represented 41% of those who transferred from Xi’an University City College and 41% of those who transferred from Zhejiang University City College. The data indicated that the number of females and males that participated in the survey was similar. Only four students changed their majors. The respondents were enrolled in three main departments at UNL were the College of Business Administration (N = 32, 80%), which including Finance, Accounting and Business; the College of Engineering (N = 6, 15%), which including Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering; and the
Table 1

**Respondent’s Demographic Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Sub-types</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Zhejiang University City College</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xi’an Jiaotong University City College</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major (In China and in the USA)</td>
<td>The Same Major</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Different Majors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment Time</td>
<td>2007-2008 Academic Year</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2008-2009 Academic Year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-2010 Academic Year</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010-2011 Academic Year</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011-2012 Academic Year</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Credits (in Spring semester,2010-2011)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Forty participants provided their sex type, institutions, majors and enrollment time. Only 38 students offered their registered credits. The registered credit zero meant the students were in Intensive English Programs (IEP). They have not started their undergraduate study.

Department of Education (N = 2, 5%). The registered credits ranged from 0 to 16 hours. Twelve credits was the minimum for which full time undergraduate students must register. As they have multiple quizzes, homework and exams in undergraduate study, exceeding 12 credits may overload students’ capacity to learn effectively. The last two
items of enrollment time and registered credits were included to help the readers understand these transfer students’ current learning situations. Did these changes cause more difficulties and troubles for their study in an American University? As time passed, did these students better adjust to the foreign environments? And what were their study pressures they have now – which can be inferred, to some extent, from their registered credits?

**Findings.** In addition to basic respondents’ information, the survey was divided into six parts. The followings results are presented one by one.

**Research Questions 2: How do students evaluate their English abilities in general?** There are three survey questions that addressed research question 2:

1. How do you assess the English skills you had before coming to USA?
2. How do you assess your English after coming to USA?
3. How do you assess your English for professional study in America?

Table 2 combined the responses to survey question 1 and 2. Table 3 presented the results of survey question 3 and its reasons.

The data showed that in the Chinese learning environment, most students (N = 36, 90%) reported that they have fair or above English skills. After coming to USA, more than half (N = 24, 60%) of the participants reported their English abilities improved. The responses from open-ended questions indicated that most students attributed their improvements to the immersion in English speaking environment, including all class work in English, living with English-speaking roommates and doing homework or projects with foreign classmates in English. Thus, they had more opportunities to be in
Table 2

*Participants’ Self Evaluation of English Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Frequency (N = 40)</th>
<th>Before coming to USA</th>
<th>After coming to USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outstanding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much Better</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Same</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Much Worse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

*The Self-Evaluation of English for Professional Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Assessment of English Usage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So far, so good</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If choice was insufficient, what reasons? N = 24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a small vocabulary, especially the special vocabulary.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructors speak too fast to catch.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The learning points are very new to me.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not adapt the teaching methods.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know, but I have difficulty in learning.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages may exceed 100 due to rounding
contact with the native English. In addition, some participants expressed that they had to improve English to finish their studies. The state of becoming worse mainly was due to students’ self characteristics. The participants said they did not like to speak or communicate with foreign friends.

Regarding their English ability for professional study, only 14 actually responded to the prompt “insufficient,” but 24 responded to sub questions. Most students (N = 23, 58%) considered they had performed well so far, as most of them started their learning careers in America, and the classes they selected for this semester were easy. For those who responded for insufficient, 24 students expressed their opinions. Nine students, which consisted of 38%, said “I have a small vocabulary, especially the special vocabulary.” The choice of “the learning points are very new to me” was the second most selected reason, and had 7 responders. Five students chose “the instructors speak too fast to catch” as the reason that hindered their learning. This answer reflected students’ problem of listening. One student said he did not adapt the teaching methods and 2 other students understood clearly that they had difficulties in learning in American campus. However, they cannot cite the exact reasons. The data support that the students’ self description of English abilities and the new environments bring the difficulties and opportunities for these students.

**Research Question 3: How do students evaluate their English abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing?** The following seven survey questions addressed research question 3:

1. Which of the following aspects do you think is the most difficult, speaking, listening, writing and reading?
2. How often do you speak to English-speaking people?
3. Do you speak to them positively (find as many as chances) or negatively (have to speak with them)?
4. Is your English well understood by English-speaking people?
5. Do you have any difficulty in writing English? What are the difficulties?
6. How much of what the teacher says in class do you understand? What cause the difficulties?
7. How long do you spend in studying after class per day?

Table 4 showed the frequency of the students’ self-evaluations of the four basic skills. Table 5 focused on the students’ speaking, their attitudes towards the communications with English-speaking people. Table 6 concerned students’ abilities of writing and difficulties in writing. Table 7 displayed data about the listening ability, and Table 8 addressed the time spent after classes.

The data obtained from the survey indicated that writing and speaking were the two difficult skills for Chinese transfer students. Forty-three percent of participants selected speaking and writing, respectively. Listening was the third choice, which constitutes 15%. No students chose reading (see Table 4).

Respondents were requested to select “positive” if they found as many opportunities as opportunity to talk with English-speaking people to improve their English skills; “negative” speaking meant students believed they were required to speak in order to solve the problems (see Table 5). Respondents were also asked to rate “how often” they speak with English speakers. The data showed more than half of the
Table 4

*Participants’ Evaluation of Difficulty Associated with Four Basic Skills*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of Skills</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages may exceed 100 due to rounding.

Table 5

*The Frequency that the Transfer Students Talk to English-Speaking People*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Attitudes</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Times</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages may exceed 100 due to rounding
participants said they do speak with English-speaking people, but the speaking frequencies were still very low. The choice of “often” was only 9 times and “always” was 0. The choice of “sometimes” was the first most selected, which was 18 times.

Regarding the effect of communicating with English-speaking people, 22 (55%) said “they can catch the main points although they do not understand me very well” and 20% of responders expressed that “they do not understand what I say.” These answers make clear the students’ view of their situations on the American campus, especially for the English abilities. Only 9 students considered their spoken English good enough to be understood. One student did not know whether English-speaking people understood him. Thus, there were total 77% respondents acknowledged that they had problems in expression and communication (see Table 6).

Table 6

*The Degree of English that can be Understood by English-speaking People*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The degree that can be Understood</td>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spoken English is good enough to be understood</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can catch the main points, although they do not understand me very well</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They usually do not understand what I say</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages may exceed 100 due to rounding.
The answers were very clear, 85% (33/39) students in this research reported they had difficulty in writing English (see Table 7). The two biggest problems indicated by the transfer students were “Native English expression” (N = 11, 30%) and “Grammar” (N = 10, 27%). The next most difficult categories were the “vocabulary” (N = 9, 24%) and “structures” (N = 6, 16%). As respondents used the multi-choices form, some students had more than one aspect problem. Thus, students’ writing ability must be improved from the whole aspects in order for students to be more successful in the English speaking environment.

Table 7

*The Students’ Writing Abilities and Difficulties*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties Existed?</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for Difficulties?</td>
<td>N = 37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native English Expression</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The choices for reasons used the form of multi-choices.
Most students understood 70% of the content in a class (see Table 8). They said that being familiar with the content before having classes enhanced their understanding of the points. In the open-ended questions, some participants presented their reasons for the insufficient information received. The reasons are generalized and listed as follows:

- Some professional words and academic vocabularies that exist cause the problems of understanding.
- The instructors’ accents. Some students said “I get some problems of the instructor who is not a native American,” Some Indian instructors’ accent may challenge my listening skills,” “I need time to adjust to each instructor’s accent in the first few weeks of each semester.”
- Some major courses are very difficult when learning or teaching in English.
- The instructors speak too fast to catch the points.
- “I felt difficult when the classes involve some detailed information.”
- Students’ personal English abilities hinder the understanding, such as listening, vocabulary and grammar.

In sum, the difficulties come from the students’ personal abilities and the external learning environments.

Fifteen of 39 participants chose the choice of 3-4 hours per day, and 11 students said they need extra 5 or above hours to continue studying (see Table 9). Only 2 students need less than 1 hour. The students said they spent most time in reading the textbook, going over the content and doing the homework.
Table 8

*The Percentage that the Students can Understand English in Class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choices</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% of English Presented</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70% of English Presented</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% of English Presented</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50% of English Presented</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9

*The Time that Students Spend in Studying after Classes per Day*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 hour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 hours</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 hours</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 5 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Research Question 4: How do students evaluate their performances in class?*

Four survey questions addressed research question 4:

1. Do you often get lost in the class? If yes, what are the reasons?
2. How often do you take part in the class discussion or answering questions? If is rarely or seldom, what is the reason?
3. How much can you learn from the course?

4. When asked to answer a question or express opinions, how do you feel?

Sixty-four percent of respondents did not perceive that they “got lost” in a class, as the time for an undergraduate class was only 45 minutes (see Table 10). Thus, most students said they could concentrate on the coursework. Fifteen students provided their reasons for getting “lost” in class. Five students said “I cannot understand what the teacher said.” They attributed this to the foreign accents, especially the speech offered by the non English-speaking instructors that made it difficult to understand what the teacher said. Moreover, the students were unfamiliar with the content and when the content was in English, the difficulties were exacerbated. Two students considered “I am not interested in the course.” The most transfer students from Partner Degree Program have to take general education. They must earn those credits at their freshman and sophomore years. However, some students said these classes were very boring. Four students thought “the course is too easy for me.” If the students had learned some related knowledge in China, they said it was easier to understand. Four respondents replied “I am tired which results in a lack of concentration.” The remaining two respondents said they did not know.

Most respondents (N = 17, 44%) did not like to participate in classes (see Table 11). Forty-eight percent of the respondents considered that they could not express their opinions clearly as the reason to rarely or seldom talk in class. One respondent provided her own answer—-the other people in her class speak faster and clearer than her. Seventeen percent of the students said they only enjoyed listening and 14% students did not want to speak.
Table 10

*The Students’ State of Having a Class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get lost?</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

*The Students’ Participation in a Class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation Time</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If rarely or seldom, what are the reasons?  
N = 29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not catch what the teacher said</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot express my opinion clearly</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy listening</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not want to speak</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Thirty-nine participants provided the answers in the participation time. Twenty-nine students presented the reasons.
More than half students \((N = 27, 69\%)\) students could catch 70\% of content from the classes (see Table 12). It was a good phenomenon. Two respondents reported receiving less than 50\% of the contents. Only one student reported that he would catch 100\% of content.

Table 12

*The Percentage that Students Learn from a Class*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Content</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 50%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depend on which courses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data, one conclusion is easily reached. That was, the most students knew the answers and could express their opinions. However, they usually placed themselves in a passive role. Most respondents \((N = 26, 67\%)\) reported feelings of nervousness, as illustrated by choice of “I am afraid I cannot express myself well.” Nine respondents replied “calm, I listen to the classes very sincerely” and four respondents were glad to have the chance to talk in class (see Table 13).
Table 13

*Students’ Feelings about Being Asked Questions in Classes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Feelings</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous, as I do not know the answer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous, as I am afraid I cannot express myself well</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm, I listen to the classes very sincerely</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy, as I have a chance to express opinions</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 5: What are students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods?**

The following two survey questions addressed the research question 5:

1. How do you assess the teaching ways in an American university?
2. What teaching methods do you like most? Lectures, discussion, group work or the presentation by students?

The majority participants had positive attitudes toward American teaching methods (see Table 14). Fifty-nine percent of the respondents liked them, as they were very informative and challenging. Thirty-six percent of the participants did not care for the teaching ways. One respondent reported that he liked the forms of discussion and conferences very much. Regarding the different teaching methods that they liked most, 17 students of the 39 respondents liked lectures, 9 students preferred discussion and 12 students enjoyed group work. Only one student liked presentation by students. This answer was the same as the question that asked them to rank the different teaching methods.
Table 14

*The Students’ Attitudes toward American Teaching Methods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiring Survey</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like them, they are very informative and challenging</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not care for the teaching ways</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like them, as I am not accustomed to them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some are very good, such as</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages may exceed 100 due to rounding.

**Research Question 6: What are students’ attitudes towards assignments after classes?** Four survey questions addressed this issue:

1. Which course in your major is the most difficult for you?

2. How do you assess the assignments (generally speaking)? If you feel difficult, what cause the difficulties?

3. Regarding assignments, which form do you like better? Individual exercises or group exercise?

4. When you encounter difficulties during studying, how do you solve them?

The results are presented in two tables. Table 15 focused on the students’ evaluation of their assignments accompanying reasons. Table 16 addressed the methods that deal with the difficulties.

Twenty-four students considered the assignments were fair, and 15 students considered them a little difficult (see Table 15). Six participants said “I do not understand the course very well,” 9 students regarded the vocabulary hindered their
Table 15

*Students’ Evaluation of Assignments*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty Degree</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N = 39</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very easy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little difficult</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very difficult</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Difficulties?</th>
<th><strong>N = 20</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I cannot understand the assignment requirements</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not understand the course very well</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My vocabulary hinders my expression</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty in catching some ideas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Thirty-nine students answered the first part. 20 students answered the second part. Percentages may exceed 100 due to rounding.

expressions. That meant the English expressions added difficulties although they could say a lot in Chinese. Five students reported difficulty in catching some ideas. The students considered the professional courses were their most difficult ones. Moreover, English and some courses in related arts were also hard, as the latter one involved some abstract conceptions and was very unfamiliar to the Chinese students. More importantly, art and music did not attract them. With regard to the form of assignments, 21 students preferred individual exercises, and 18 students favored group exercises. The former group considered the leaning style and thinking ways may make the cooperation harder.
However, the latter group considered it was a good opportunity to learn mutually and improve the speaking and listening.

Among 35 participants, 16 students chose to read books as their first choice to deal with the difficulties in studying (see Table 16). Asking classmates and asking teachers were the second and third most selected choices. Respondents preferred asking Chinese classmates than the foreign ones, as the former ones could explain detailed.

Table 16

*Rank Order of Five Methods that Used to Deal with the Difficulties in Studying*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask classmates</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read books</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore them</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total 35 students ranked the items.

**Questions 7:** Regarding the difficulties encountered as transfer students, what are the attitudes towards credit transfer, class selection, having classes, doing homework, and communicating with English-speaking students? International transfer students have a unique set of problems, such as transferring credits, selecting classes, adjusting to a new learning environment including the new classmates and new teaching methods. Table 17 presented the results of difficulties that students ranked.
Table 17

*The Students’ Ranking of the Difficulties that They Encounter*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credit Transfer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class selection</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have classes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do homework</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with English-speaking students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Thirty-four students ranked these items

Eleven students ranked the class selection as the biggest challenges for their studying and transferring credit was the second biggest one. Having classes and communicating with English Speaking classmates were the following preferred items. The difficulties of having classes mainly reflected through the extent of how much they could obtain from the class. Various students had various explanations about their problems in classes. Respondents behaved difficulties in communicating with foreign students are the common interests or topics were hard to find. Thus, they usually did not know how to respond.

**Interview Results**

**Participants.** The two male interviewees were both contacted through the email address they provided in the online survey. The first interviewee transferred from Zhejiang University City College and the second one was from Xi’an Jiaotong University City College. They both came to the United States in August, 2011, and studied in the
Department of Electrical Engineering. The two interviewees took the same majors in China and in USA.

Findings. There were ten questions that addressed the interview:

1. Is there any difficulty in transferring credits? What are the difficulties?
2. What are the difficulties in selecting classes?
3. Is the professional English training before coming to USA helpful? How do you evaluate its practice?
4. What are the difficulties in having a class? How do you solve them?
5. Do you have any difficulties in reading? How do you solve them?
6. How do you evaluate your performances in class?
7. What are your attitudes toward American teaching methods?
8. How do you rate the assignments in America?
9. How do you evaluate the communications with English-speaking persons?
10. Do you have any personal experiences that you use to deal with the difficulties?

The interview results were presented one by one.

Interview Question 1: Is there any difficulty in transferring credits? What are the difficulties? Regarding the problems of transferring credits, the interviewees introduced that very few credits could be transferred automatically through PDP. For the credits that cannot be transferred, respondents had to negotiate with Chinese universities and ask them to negotiate with UNL. The most difficulties were the transfer of credits of general education. Neither Chinese university provided English description of classes. Students had to translate them, and UNL verified the equivalents. For the credits for the
general education that could not be transferred, the interviewees said they had to take some courses that they had taken in China. Most of problems were going well now. However, the process of transferring credits wasted a lot of time.

**Interview Question 2: What are the difficulties in selecting classes?** The two interviewees confirmed the existence of difficulties in selecting classes at the beginning. One interviewee explained that the advisor would provide a course list to students, yet students could not determine the difficulty of the courses. Thus, selecting too many easy courses made the semester very busy and selecting more difficult courses pressured the students. Balancing the courses’ difficulties was essential for students’ efficient learning. The other interviewee added that he selected classes based on other students’ recommendations and his understanding of the courses.

**Interview Question 3: Is the professional English training before coming to USA helpful? How do you evaluate its practice?** The two interviewees did not think the English training helped them a lot, but only a little. An overview of their comments identified the following problems: (a) the training system in Zhejiang University City College was not very mature and the examination system was not very strict; (b) the training length was short, but the content was plentiful; and (c) the classroom was so crowded that most students could not be noticed and the opportunities of taking oral practice was very limited.

**Interview Question 4: What are the difficulties in having a class? How do you solve them?** The two interviewees both mentioned two factors that caused the difficulties of having a class—their own English abilities and the instructors’ accents. One interviewee used the example of taking biology and its experiments. The instructor
played a film about the developing of the living things with two pages length of questions. The film was obtained from BBC. The interviewee said he was completely lost as the film was full of professional and new words. The instructor could not help him understand the film due to his accent. In fact, the level of difficulty for the film was in the senior middle school in China. He also encountered big problems in taking exams as he did not know one word in the choices of 15 questions among 50 ones. The other interviewee considered that most difficulties came from having specific classes, especially when the instructors had accents, such as Indian and German instructors. It was much better if he took American instructors’ classes. Moreover, he considered his English ability to another factor. He stated that if he was familiar with the points or the contents he had taken in Chinese, such as mathematics, it would be much easier for him to understand. In addition, he stated that the instructors’ notes in blackboard help him understand what the instructors said.

The interviewees said they usually read the contexts by themselves after class to help understand the points, or they deepened understanding with the help of reading Chinese versions. Asking instructors or classmates was another useful way. However, they preferred asking Chinese students who could explain the points in detail. In addition, the instructors’ main words could also help them better learn according to the two interviewees’ descriptions.

**Interview Question 5: Do you have any difficulties in reading? How do you solve them?** Both interviewees confirmed they had difficulties in reading. One interviewee provided a concrete example. He stated that the forms of English 151 were usually the essays with various topics. The difficulties would be less if the topics were
familiar to him, and the number of words was small; there would be some problems if too many new words involved. He introduced two different types of paper essays—ones were written by college students, and the others were written by American professors. He said the former ones were easy to be understood, but the latter ones were hard.

Both interviewees used the dictionary to solve the problems. They said they usually looked up the new words in sentences that hindered their understandings rather than each word.

*Interview Question 6: How do you evaluate your performances in class?* Both interviewees said they seldom participated in class. One interviewee expressed his opinion. He said there were three situations: (a) it was impossible to discuss if he did not understand what the instructors said; (b) the foreign classmates’ questions were too simple to be discussed; and (c) he would ask questions in class when had a little learning and could express himself clearly.

*Interview Question 7: What are your attitudes toward American teaching methods?* They stated that American teaching methods brought them both challenges and difficulties. One interviewee took the English courses for example to show its advantages. Students were often asked to make oral presentations without a written copy. He said these opportunities were very rare in China. The practice could add to their confidence and improve their spoken ability as they spoke the second language. The other interviewee said the cooperation among Americans helped him be familiar with American thinking ways. However, he also said that the American education system was much stricter than the Chinese one. In China, there were only one or two exams—the middle exam and final exam. Thus, students could bone up for an examination and get
very good scores. The final scores in this American school consist of various assignments, quizzes, and exams. They must perform well every time. The interviewees summarized that the learning habits in China could not be used to the American campuses.

**Interview Question 8: How do you rate the assignments in America?** One interviewee introduced that the difficulties came from the quality other than the quantity. To the specific courses, they usually need a lot of time to finish one question. The other interviewee explained the reasons much clearer—American instructors provided the specific points more generally than Chinese instructors did. Thus, he had to read the textbook and understand the points firstly before starting the homework, which consumed extra time. If the course involved data search, the working time would expand. Chinese students were not professional in doing the independent research. However, Americans formed this habit when they were very young. It was a disadvantage for Chinese students.

Through the conversations, the researcher found the two interviewees showed little preference for asking instructors when they encountered difficulties in doing assignments. When asked the reasons, one interviewee said it was not very convenient to meet the teachers’ office time. His habit of doing the homework a little earlier than the due date caused him to miss instructors and teacher assistants’ office time. In addition, he was afraid that he would miss some points or could not understand what the instructors said. The other interviewee said it was his habit.

**Interview Question 9: How do you evaluate the communications with English-speaking persons?** The two interviewees mentioned similar situations when communicating with English-speaking persons. One interviewee said it was OK if they
discussed in class. He experienced difficulties if the contents involved the daily life. He usually did not know what the foreign students said at a social event, although the words were very simple. He said his mind was usually blank. Thus, it was difficult for him to continue the discussion. The other interviewee said he usually did not know what they should talk about. The conversations between him and foreign friends were very simple and similar, such as “Hi, guy, what’s up?” He said they usually did not touch topics deeply. The interviewees attributed the difficulties in communicating to the different cultures and speaking habits.

*Interview Question 10: Do you have any personal experiences that you use to deal with the difficulties?* One interviewee mentioned three strategies were very useful. He said that living with foreign students was a direct way to contact native English expressions. More specifically, it could help enhance the abilities in speaking, listening and writing. In addition, he considered it was very essential to communicate with instructors. Let the instructors know there were international students in the classes, and their English was poor. Meanwhile, the students could obtain professional suggestions and instructions. The interviewee also said the learning in America was a process of imitating. He recommended watching American drama and noting the English-speaking personas’ speaking ways. He cited a simple example. At the beginning of coming to USA, he usually used “I want to. . .” to buy things. One day, he noted the person in front of him said “Can I get. . .?” He suddenly realized there was another expression. Now, he learned to use “Can I get. . .?” The other interviewee said the practice would be helpful. He stated that English 151 and its homework helped him form the right train of thought, especially the professional suggestions from teachers helped him change some
bad habits in writing and speaking. In addition, he recommended contact with instructors or teacher assistants when having difficulties in doing homework. He considered that all international students should take advantages of these resources.

Summary

PDP students had difficulties in adjusting to the American campus. The difficulties came from the internal and external factors. The former one included two aspects. One was on the students’ personal English abilities which meant their proficiency in listening, reading, writing and speaking, and the other related to the students’ attitudes towards themselves and foreign classmates or the degree to which they were confident in understanding. The latter one included the instructors’ speaking speed, foreign accents and the ways of teaching. Respondents reported the above factors were the major three that hindered the students’ learning on the American campuses. Based on the above analysis, some changes should be made to help students better adjust to the American learning environment.
Chapter Five

Discussion

Purpose

This research was to investigate the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students encounter in learning in one American university and to explore the strategies students used to deal with the difficulties and opportunities.

Research Questions

To investigate the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students from PDP encountered, the following sub-questions were used to direct the research:

1. What is the student’s basic information?
2. How do students evaluate their English abilities in general?
3. How do students evaluate their English abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing?
4. How do students evaluate their performances in class?
5. What are students’ attitudes towards American teaching methods?
6. What are students ‘attitudes towards assignments after classes?
7. Regarding the difficulties encountered as transfer students, what are the attitudes towards credit transfer, class selection, having classes, doing homework, and communicating with English-speaking students?

Implications

Chinese students who transfer to study in American universities bring questions that require answers from both Chinese and participating US institutions. The most outstanding aspect was the language, despite the extensive English training they had in
their home country. In China, teachers paid more attention to the exams and grammar rather than the developing of speaking and listening abilities. In addition, the formal English expressions learned in China caused some difficulties for international transfer students in America. They found what they learned before was so different from what they heard here in America. It was hardly possible for international students to experience the full range of American dialects and the multiple forms of informal English. The problems of language deficiencies caused some difficulties, including receiving and sending information. Much worse, it led the students to behave unconfidently and avoid expressing opinions, such as to keep silence in class.

Through this study, the researcher did confirm the existence of difficulties for PDP student and concluded two reasons that led to the results. One came from the students’ personal English abilities and characteristics, and the other was from the instructors’ characteristics. Each area is discussed separately.

**Students’ Personal English Abilities and Characteristics.** Most students considered that their difficulties in American class came from the unfamiliarity with the professional words and new words. Extra difficulties were added when the new information was learned in English. The problem was the lack of vocabulary, which led to difficulties in listening, reading, writing and speaking. The students could not receive the information effectively as the professional words hindered understanding. They spent extra time reading textbooks, as they had to use dictionaries to check the meanings of the unknown words. The students expressed annoyance with written work as they could not find proper words. The similar results happened when they wanted to speak. In sum, the lack of vocabulary created a chain reaction, especially for those students who suddenly
transferred to a new learning environment that relied on English. The limited English learning in China or the formal English training caused another difficulty. When the researcher first came to the USA, she considered the answer to the question of “How are you doing?” She was wondering whether it equaled to “How are you?” After making sure they were the same, the researcher habitually answered “Fine, thank you. And you?” and thought it was the only reply. Some days later, the researcher found a lot of different answers, such as “not too bad,” “good,” “nice.” Most Chinese students had this same puzzling experience. This is due to the English education in China. The native English expressions were more causal, various, and informal. Thus, changing the expressions often caused problems of understanding. The low English ability also showed in the superficial knowing of American cultures. As the interviewees and survey participants indicated, it was difficult to find common topics for discussion with foreign students and language was one cause. The more important issues were the unfamiliarity with how to talk and what to talk, which could be concluded as the unfamiliarity with American cultures. In addition, students’ personal characteristics were another deciding factor. Unlike most American students who were often talkative, most Chinese students were shy and afraid of speaking wrongly. The English-speaking environment added pressures. According to the results, most Chinese students kept silence, but it was not due to not knowing answers. They considered English-speakers could express themselves more clearly and better than the Chinese students, which can be understood as the lack of confidence. The learning habits formed in China made students dislike expressing themselves in public.
Expanding vocabularies and contacting American cultures in daily lives and studies are very necessary for international transfer students. Professional and systematic English training should be provided for these students, especially the professional oral and writing practices. One interviewee said imitation was a good way, no matter from the TV or the persons nearby—noting how they say and what they do. Living with foreign classmates is a most direct way to contact Native American cultures. Some Chinese students prefer living with Chinese classmates to avoid speaking English and culture clash. Institutions should discourage this practice and instead, encourage more Chinese students living thinking with American students. One interviewee said the foreign roommates helped amend his paper and provided the clearest and accurate explanations to some issues that happened in daily life. “Some changes happened during the daily practices,” he said. The researcher considered the critical point was to improve the students’ consciousness of learning English. To assist with the problem of disliking speaking, instructors could provide them opportunities to express ideas. Some Chinese students were eager to say something. They felt they needed more time to compose their answers. According to the researcher’s personal feelings, she was excited to express some ideas in a class. She disliked being the only person that said no words in the whole course. One interviewee shared a similar experience. He was full of confidence when he made presentations without the written notes in front of the class, as he spoke the foreign language. Though he was forced to do it due to his assignment, it provided him a sense of accomplishment. The researcher considered the procedure was extremely important.

**Instructors’ Characteristics.** Besides the students’ personal problems, the three major characteristics that foreign instructors caused Chinese transfer students were their
speaking speed, accents, and the ways of providing class information. In some classes, the number of Chinese students was too small to be noticed by foreign instructors in a big class. The fast speaking speed may not be noticed by the instructors themselves. The students, who were able to learn the knowledge presented, also did not recognize that the speaker’s speed of talking was the problem. If the international students did not put forward the problem, the instructors would consider the speed was accepted by the majority. Regarding the foreign accents, instructors have difficulty improving in a short time. Most students responded that accents, especially the accents from Indian and German instructors hindered their understanding. The situations became worse when the knowledge was unfamiliar to them. One student said he had to spend one or two weeks in adjusting to foreign instructors’ accents to continue his study. Unlike Chinese instructors who taught material very detailed, American instructors usually presented material very generally without providing any examples. They only provided a rough frame work and asked students to fill in the contents. Thus, American instructors always directed the students, and students were asked to study independently, which was not acceptable to Chinese transfer students. They formed their learning styles to fit Chinese universities. After being transferring to American universities, the learning styles were no longer useful. The concrete form of teaching mainly reflected through the homework. Some students said they cleared the requirements of the assignments and understand the basic theories. However, they did not know how to solve the problems in hand. American instructors paid more attention to forming students’ abilities for finding ways to solve problems.
Regarding the above three problems, communicating with instructors was an effective way. The researcher considered one interviewee’s suggestion was very good. That was, let the instructors know there were international students in their classes and that their English was poor at the beginning of the semesters. They reflected that instructors’ speaking speed was too fast to get information. One recommendation would be for the instructors to adjust speed to better service international students. Just as importantly, international students could get some professional suggestions and instructions. As well, when the foreign accents are difficult to understand, notes or records might be helpful for international students to understand. Some students said they did not understand what the teachers said. However, they knew the points when the instructors wrote them down. To solve this problem, students should prepare before class and review after class. Preparation for class can help students recognize the main points and get a general idea of what the instructors will do in class. When they are unknown points, they could ask in class or after class. Reviewing the contents can cement the new information. Adjusting to the new leaning environment needs time and patience. Students can gradually get familiar with American teaching methods and master the effective learning ways. Thus, they can form good learning habits. Good use of the resources, such as the instructors, teacher assistances, and foreign classmates can help solve problems.

In addition, transferring credits and selecting classes were two other problems for the Chinese transfer students. The students considered communication was practical. The communication should be between students, two institutions, student and advisors.
However, as this program is carried out by an American university, both institutions should create more detailed agreements concerning credits transfer.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Given the students’ difficulties, the researcher offers possible questions for future research.

1. As numbers of exchange programs between USA and China increase, what are the more practical methods for exchange foreign instructors to present English to help students better prepare for the future American study in China? What are the concrete forms? The interviewees reflected that the training from UNL did not help them a lot, the training time was very short and the contents were so plentiful. The classes were so crowded that most students could not be noticed. In addition, the training system has not matured. One interviewee considered it would be much better if the students who applied for PDP received professional English training at the beginning of entering university in China.

2. For this special group, what should the American universities do to help them better adjust to the new environments? According to some students’ descriptions, there was no special institute to be in charge of them. They were treated as ordinary international students. The students came here because of the program. However, what are their studies in American universities? Should not the issues such as class selection, credit transfer, be attended to the American university, and thus form a well-disciplined system?
3. What are the more effective teaching methods in American universities that can help Chinese transfer students? One aspect involves the problems of linking the students’ studies in China and in America and the other aspect is to improve students’ whole abilities. Some Chinese students who study abroad could obtain very good scores after graduation. However, they have difficulty with speaking and writing, which is a very common phenomenon in Chinese job fairs.

4. Given that Chinese students characteristically are shy and dislike expressing themselves, are there any ways to improve this situation? Is it practical to use Chinese students’ characteristics as the research subject to analyze their living and studying in American universities?

Summary

Studying in American universities bring Chinese transfer students opportunities and difficulties. On the one hand, they expand their fields of view, receive the most advanced knowledge, and form new values and outlooks of life. On the other hand, personal English abilities and external factors cause some challenges for them in learning in America. The university and the students themselves must work together to solve these problems.
References


Appendix A

Informed Consent Form
Informed Consent Form

Identification of Project:
The Difficulties and Opportunities Chinese Transfer Students Encounter in American Universities: A Learning Perspective.

Purpose of the Research:
This is a research project that will investigate the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students encounter in learning in one American university. The researcher will also explore the strategies students use to deal with the difficulties and opportunities. You must be a transfer student who is from Zhejiang City College or Xi'an Jiaotong City College to participate.

Procedures:
Participation in this study will require approximately 15 minutes of your time to finish a survey. Six respondents will be selected for an oral interview. The oral interview will last to 45 minutes. This interview will be audio taped with your permission. The interview will take place in a quiet room. Audio tapes will be transcribed.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. In the event of problems resulting from participation in the study, the participants can contact the first investigator (402)304-6445 or secondary investigator (402) 430-7373 or (402) 422-0998.

Benefits:
The answers may inform UNL practices. Participating may help students better understand difficulties and opportunities that they have. Results may inform students of strategies that can be used to confront difficulties and opportunities.

Confidentiality:
No participants will be identified by names. In the thesis text, the English name of the Chinese student will be used. This name is not used in the context of classes and interactions on the campus. Students go by their given names in Chinese. Only the primary and secondary investigators have access to the data. Data will be kept in locked drawers in the primary researcher’s home and will only be seen by the investigators during the study and for one year after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in journals or presented at scientific meetings, and the data will be reported as aggregated data. The audiotapes will be erased after transcription.

Compensation:
There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may call the investigator at any time, (402)304-6445. Please contact the investigator:
- if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research
- in the event of a research related injury

141 Teachers College Hall / P.O. Box 880360 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / (402) 472-3726 / FAX (402) 472-4300
Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:
- you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant
- to voice concerns or complaints about the research
- to provide input concerning the research process
- in the event the study staff could not be reached,

**Freedom to Withdraw:**
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

__________ Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

**Signature of Participant:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Research Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Name and Phone number of investigator(s)**
Hui Chen, MA candidate, Principal Investigator  (402) 304-2328
Barbara A Lacost, Associate Professor, Secondary Investigator  (402) 430-7373
(402) 422-0988
Appendix B

The Email that Sent to Students to Take the Survey
Dear Chinese transfer students at UNL:

My name is Hui Chen. I am a master student in Department of Educational Administration at UNL with a specialization in Student Affairs. Now I am writing my graduate thesis, which focuses on the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students encounter in an American university.

This following survey about your learning experience at UNL will take you about 15 minutes to finish. Participation in this survey is voluntary. There are no known risks involved in this study. Any personally identifying information obtained during this study will be kept confidential. Please be as honest as possible. Please note that two things are critical to be kept in mind: (1). you must be a Chinese transfer student; (2). you should complete the survey only once, i.e., do not participate more than once if different people send you this survey.

Completion of the survey implies consent to use the data in an anonymous, grouped form. You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

My email address is:solamy1121@gmail.com
My phone number is: (402)304-6445
You could also contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara LaCost at (402)430-7373 or (402)422-0988.

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in the research, you may contact the UNL Institutional Review Board at (402)472-6965.

Survey link: https://qtrial.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3yHonKnM3p8KUpS

Thanks for your help!

Hui Chen
Master Student
Department of Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Appendix C

Reminder Email that Send to the Students to take the Survey
Dear Chinese transfer students at UNL,

My name is Hui Chen. Earlier this month, I invited you to be a participant in a survey on the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students encounter in an American university. Your information will assist me in writing my thesis. Your feedback is extremely valuable to me.

There are no known risks involved in this study. Any personally identifying information obtained during this study will be kept confidential. Please contact me solamy1121@gmail.com or (402)304-6445 with any questions about the survey.

Please click on the link below to go the survey:
https://qtrial.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3yHonKnM3p8KUpS

Thanks for your help.

Hui Chen
Master Student
Department of Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Appendix D

Questionnaire
Questionnaire

This survey is designed to understand your learning experiences in adjusting to American universities. I greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in this project by answering the following questions:

What is your gender? Male: ___________ Female: ___________

What is your major in China? __________

What is your major at UNL? __________

When did you enroll in UNL? __________

How many credits did you register for this semester? ________

From which university are you?
Zhejiang University City College _______ Xi’an Jiaotong University City College_____

Questions:

1. How do you assess the English skills you had before coming to USA?
   A. outstanding    B. excellent    C. good    D. fair    E. poor
   How do you assess your English after coming to USA?
   A. much better    B. the same    C. worse    D. much worse    E. I do not know
   What aspects do you improve most? What cause the change?
   _________________________________________________________________

2. How do you assess your English for professional study in America?
   A. enough    B. so far, so good    C. insufficient    D. I do not know
   E I do not know, but I have difficulty in learning
   If your choice is C, what is the reason? (You can select more than one choice.)
   A. I have a small vocabulary, especially the special vocabulary.
   B. The instructors speak too fast to catch.
C. The learning points are very new to me.
D. I do not adapt the teaching methods.
E. I do not know, but I have difficulty in learning.

3. Which of the following aspects do you think is the most difficult? (Circle one)
   A. speaking     B. writing       C. listening           D. reading

4. How often do you speak to English-speaking people?
   A. rarely      B. seldom     C. sometimes          D. often      E. always

   Do you speak to them positively (find as many as chances) or negatively (have to speak with them)?

   Positively _____                Negatively______

   Is your English well understood by English-speaking people?
   A. My spoken English is good enough to be understood.
   B. They can catch the main points, although they do not understand me very well.
   C. They usually do not understand what I say.
   D. I do not know.

5. Do you have any difficulty in writing English?
   Yes____     No______

   If your answer is yes, what are the difficulties? (you can select more than one choice)
   A. vocabulary    B. grammar     C. structure           D. citation   E. native English expression
   F. others such as ___________________

6. How much of what the teacher says in class do you understand?
   A. 100%          B. 70%            C. 50%                 D. less than 50%

   What cause the difficulties? ___________________

7. How long do you spend in studying after class per day?
A. less than 1 hour  B. 1-2 hours  C. 3-4 hours  D. 5 hours  E. above 5 hours

8. Which course in your major is the most difficult for you? _________

9. How do you assess the assignments (generally speaking)?
A. very easy  B. fair  C. a little difficult  D. very difficult

If your choice is C or D, what cause the difficulty? (you can select more than one choice)
A. I cannot understand the assignment requirement.
B. I do not understand the course very well.
C. My vocabulary hinders my expression.
D. I have difficulty in catching some ideas.
E. others. Such as __________________

10. Do you often get lost in the class?
A. Yes  B. No.

If the answer is yes, the main reason (you can select more than one choice.):
A. I cannot understand what the teacher said.
B. I am not interested in the course.
C. The course is too easy for me.
D. I am tired which results in a lack of concentration.
E. I do not know.
F. others. Such as ________________

11. How often do you take part in the class discussion or answering questions?
A. rarely  B. seldom  C. sometimes  D. often  E. always

If the choice is A or B, what is the reason? (You can select one than more choices.):
A. I do not catch what the teacher said.
B. I cannot express my opinions clearly.
C. I enjoy listening.

D. I do not want to speak.

E. others. Such as ________________

12. How much can you learn from the course?

A. 100%    B. 70%           C. 50%              D. less than 50%              E. depend on which courses

13. When asked to answer a question or express opinions, how do you feel?

A. Nervous, as I do not know the answers.

B. Nervous, as I am afraid I cannot express myself well.

C. Calm, I listen to the classes very sincerely.

D. Happy, as I have a chance to express opinions.

E. Others. Such as ________________

14. How do you assess the teaching ways in an American university?

A. I like them. They are very informative and challenging.

B. I do not care for the teaching ways.

C. I do not like them, because I am not accustomed to them.

D. Some are very good. Such as__________

Which teaching methods do you like? (You can select more than one choice.):

A. lectures        B. discussion              C. group work                 D. presentation by students

E. others, such as ______

15. Regarding assignments, which form do you like better?

Individual exercises_________    Group exercises ____________

Please rank the following items from 1 (you do or like most) to N (you do or like least).
16. Regarding the difficulties that you encounter as a transfer student
   ______ credit transfer
   ______ class selection
   ______ have classes
   ______ do homework
   ______ communication with English-speaking students

17. Regarding the teaching methods
   _____ lectures
   _____ discussion
   _____ group work (case study/ role play)
   _____ online course

18. When you encounter difficulties during studying, how do you solve them?
   _____ ask teachers
   _____ ask classmates (Chinese classmates_____ foreign classmates_____ both _____)
   _____ read books
   _____ ignore them
   _____ other. Please explain_______

Please answer the following question

19. I want to obtain more resources about Chinese students’ experiences in an American university. Would you like to participate in an oral interview to share some your experiences with me? The interview will last within 30 minutes.
   Yes_________ (You email address_______________________
   or cell phone number_______________________)

   No __________
Appendix E

Email Sent to the Interviewees
Dear student,

My name is Hui Chen. Several days ago, I sent out a survey on the difficulties and opportunities that Chinese transfer students encounter in an American university to help my thesis. Thanks for your interest in participating in an oral interview and sharing some your experiences with me.

The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. The interview place will be either in union or library or your choice of site. Please indicate which time would work for you—(FOR INSTANCE, TUESDAY, DATE, 10:00 AM OR 2:00 PM). If this choice does not work for you, please email me with a date, time and site for which you are available in the next week.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Hui Chen
Master Student
Department of Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln