

Barriers in the Academic Adaptation Among Students in the U.S. on the Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Cooperation Program from Anhui Province, China

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Abstract: This study uses a qualitative research approach to explore the barriers in the academic adaptation of CFHECP students' cross-cultural adaptation in the U.S. In order to improve the reliability and validity of the research, this study selected 6 students and 3 faculty members from 3 related programs as the interviewees, and conducted in-depth analysis of the interview transcripts with the help of qualitative analysis software NVivo11. The analysis yielded three domains from the data: barriers of the English language, learning shock, overloaded academic requirements. Implications of this study for policy makers, CFHECP students, and the teaching staff are discussed.

Keywords: CFHECP Students, Cross-cultural Adaptation, Academic Adaptation, Barriers, Qualitative, NVivo11.

1. Introduction

With the acceleration of economic globalization, the process of educational internationalization has also entered a new stage of rapid development. Educational openness, exchange and cooperation have become one of the important development strategies to cultivate international talents and improve the competitiveness of international education. The mobility of international students has become an important indicator of the internationalization process of higher education. According to the needs of their own development, countries around the world actively explore the suitable path of education internationalization, and various forms of Transnational Higher Education (TNHE) models emerge and flourish accordingly. As the main realization form of TNHE in China, the Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Cooperation Program (CFHECP) has made remarkable progress in recent years.

In 2021, Liu Jin, director of the Department of International Cooperation and Exchange of Chinese Ministry of Education, introduced at the International Educational Services Trade Forum that China is the world's largest source of international students, from 1978 to 2021, the cumulative number of students studying abroad has reached 6,968 million, with about 1.61 million students studying abroad, and about 1.36 million currently overseas. 91% of the people who originally planned to study abroad still insist on studying abroad under Covid-19 (MoE, 2022). Among them, the United States has always been the first choice for Chinese students because of its unique educational resources, advanced science and technology, and a relaxed academic atmosphere.

According to the latest data released in 2021 by Chinese Foreign Affairs Supervision Information Network of the Ministry of Education (MoE), by December 31, 2021, 2,447 Programs of Chinese-Foreign Cooperation in Running Schools (CFCRS) had been approved by Chinese MoE, among which 1295 programs are CFHECP (MoE, 2022), covering 31 provinces within the central government of mainland China, among them, Anhui is a central province. According the data released by the 12th China-Foreign

Cooperation in Running Schools Annual Conference in December 2021, up to now, there are about 600,000 CFCRS students in China, including 500,000 CFHECP students, more than 1.6 million CFHECP students have graduated in the past. In China, studying abroad through cooperative programs of higher education has become a trend.

As an important part of Chinese students studying abroad, the overseas study of CFHECP students is both colourful but stressful to some extent. Language barriers, academic pressure and other issues arising from cultural discrepancies, educational system differences and other factors have greatly affected students' learning and living conditions in the new cultural environment. Their academic adaptation in the host culture has a very important impact on their academic achievement, and even their mental health and personal development (Wang, 2019).

2. Literature Review

The focus of cross-cultural adaptation (CCA) is the process of students' studying abroad. However, at present, there are very few studies specially emphasizing academic adaptation of CFHECP students' CCA during their overseas study. As far as the authors can see, there are only 3 relevant research articles listed below both east and west. Hou (2019) explored Chinese students' transnational learning experience in a Sino-British cooperative education program. The research shows that there are obvious differences between CFHECP students and individual students in CCA, which need to be treated differently. Therefore, it provides valuable basic information for this study and also proves the necessity of specialized research on CCA of CFHECP students. However, the study mainly used quantitative statistical methods in data processing and analysis, while it did not make enough descriptions and explanations on the specific content of the interview, thus it was slightly weak in qualitative analysis.

Wang (2021) explored the academic adaptation of joined-education Chinese students in American universities, focusing on CFHECP students. The article discussed the challenges of their academic adaptation and analyzed the factors in order to propose practical implications to the

classroom teaching in Chinese universities. However, the statement and analysis of the interview in this article are relatively simple, which is neither detailed nor in-depth enough. This knowledge gap piqued my interest in further exploring the topic.

Different from domestic scholars, international scholars have focused on the problem of academic adaptation of CFHECP students and pointed out that it does exist and should be paid adequate attention to (Mok&Han, 2019). In summary, the academic adaptation of CFHECP students' CCA during their overseas study has its own characteristics, and indeed there are still many problems under-researched. These problems not only have an important impact on students' academic achievement and personal growth, but also play an important role in the quality and sustainable development of the entire Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Higher Education (CFCHE).

3. Methodology

This study focused on Chinese-Foreign Higher Education Cooperation Program in Anhui Province of China, it is a particular program from similar education programs. Therefore, for this research, the authors chose qualitative as research approach, with case study as the research design, which has its unique application and productivity (Creswell,2018).

Purposeful sampling can provide samples of greater relevance for research and is likely to provide the most valuable data (Marshall et al.,2019), therefore, this study chose to use purposeful sampling. The following was a table to show the demographic information of the 6 students and 3 faculty members using purposeful sampling.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Six Students and Three Faculty Members

Name code	Gender	Age group	Nationality	Title	Length of studying in the U.S./Length of teaching in CFHECP
S1	Female	Below 21	Chinese	CFHECP students of Program A, major in engineering	10 months
S2	Female	21-25	Chinese	CFHECP students of Program A, major in engineering	1 year and 11 months
S3	Male	26-30	Chinese	CFHECP students of Program B, major in design	6 months
S4	Female	21-25	Chinese	CFHECP students of Program B, major in design	1 year and 3 months
S5	Male	21-25	Chinese	CFHECP students of Program C, major in business	1 year and 4 months
S6	Male	21-25	Chinese	CFHECP students of Program C, major in business	1 year and 10 months
F1	Male	51-55	Chinese	CFHECP expert,administrative faculty member of Program A	nearly 25 years
F2	Female	31-35	Chinese	CFHECP academic faculty member of Program B	more than 4 years
F3	Female	41-45	American	CFHECP academic faculty member of Program C	more than 9 years

The instruments of data collection has been determined in this study mainly stemmed from the fact that the data to be acquired by the research tool was qualitative data (Yin, 2018), therefore, the authors took an in-depth interview approach. In terms of ethical considerations, security measures has been taken to the participants identity, code names was used in this research. The authors have negotiated and discussed with each participant the schedule and arrangement, and respected the time and place they thought convenient for the interview, the authors tried to be as discreet as possible in the interviews with the interviewees and stuck to the principle of confidentiality.

Qualitative data involves words instead of numbers and statistics that are used in quantitative analysis. It is easy to understand communicable words; however, words can be unclear and challenging to compare objectively (Dworkin,2017). As a result, qualitative inquiry requires careful listening to and reflection upon how individuals extract and express meaning from experience and their use of language to describe that meaning over time. The Three-level Coding has been adopted: (1) Open Coding; (2) Axial Coding; (3) Selective Coding. Meanwhile, NVivo 11 has been used

since in NVivo codes are referred to as nodes, which helped us to make sense of the participants' responses and help us to interpret their meanings. What's more, the authors have used NVivo's Word Cloud function which helped us analyze the word frequency. the authors have also adopted Sentiment Analysis in NVivo to make the related emotional points clearer and more three-dimensional.

4. Theoretical Framework

As to the theoretical framework of this study, it is guided by Constructivist Learning Theory (CLT) and Kim's Theory of CCA. CLT believed that learning is a process in which students take the initiative to process the cultural information and construct its meaning in the social and cultural environment (Smith et al.,1997). Kim's CCA includes the process that sojourners begin to find the differences and similarities between their own culture and the mainstream culture, and gradually, they will learn to adapt themselves to the new construct of norms and value systems of the new surroundings (Kim,2017). The following is a figure to show how these theories are interconnected in this study.

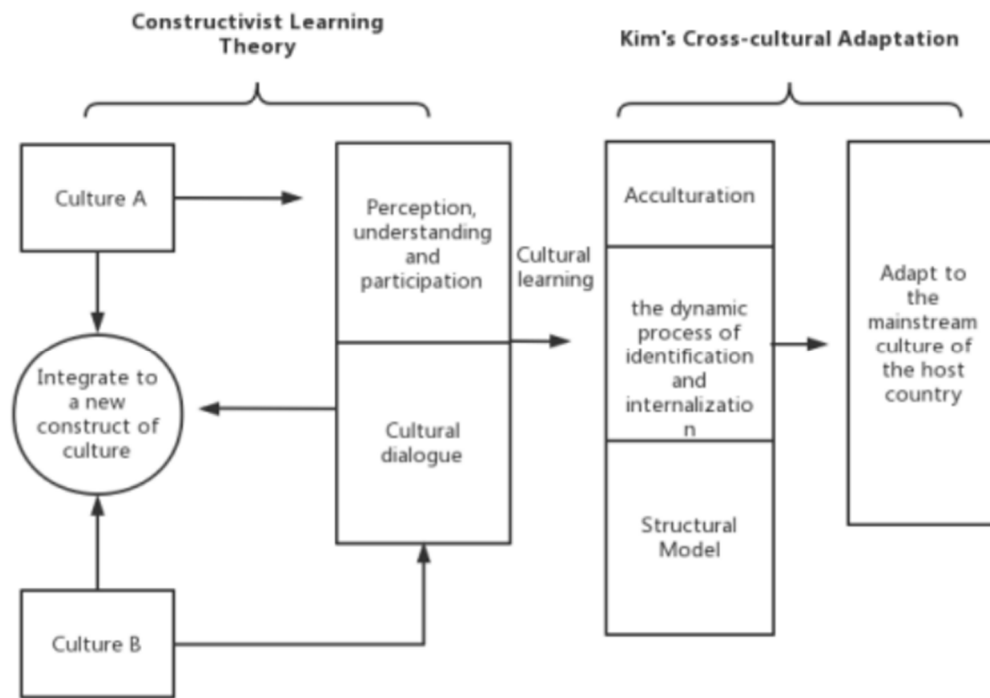


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Based on the above, in this study, CFHHECP students' CCA process could be expressed as: during the contact and interaction with the mainstream culture of the host country, students have experienced a series of changes in their learning, values, ways of thinking, norms of behavior. From the perspective of academic adaptation, this study has explored the possible barriers in study among the CFHECP students during their living and learning in the mainstream culture in the U.S.. Meanwhile, individuals in the dynamic process of acculturation will gradually achieve a relatively stable result of academic adaptation through a series of academic behavior changes.

5. Results

The above six students and three faculty members all participated in in-depth interviews. NVivo11 was used to confirm the rationality and scientificity of the data collected from these participants. Therefore, in the first step of data analysis with NVivo, the author conducted sentiment analysis on the interview transcript, which has avoided the shortcoming that qualitative interviews may be too subjective and absolute to a certain extent. A sentiment analysis of the interviews with all respondents is shown below in Figure 2.

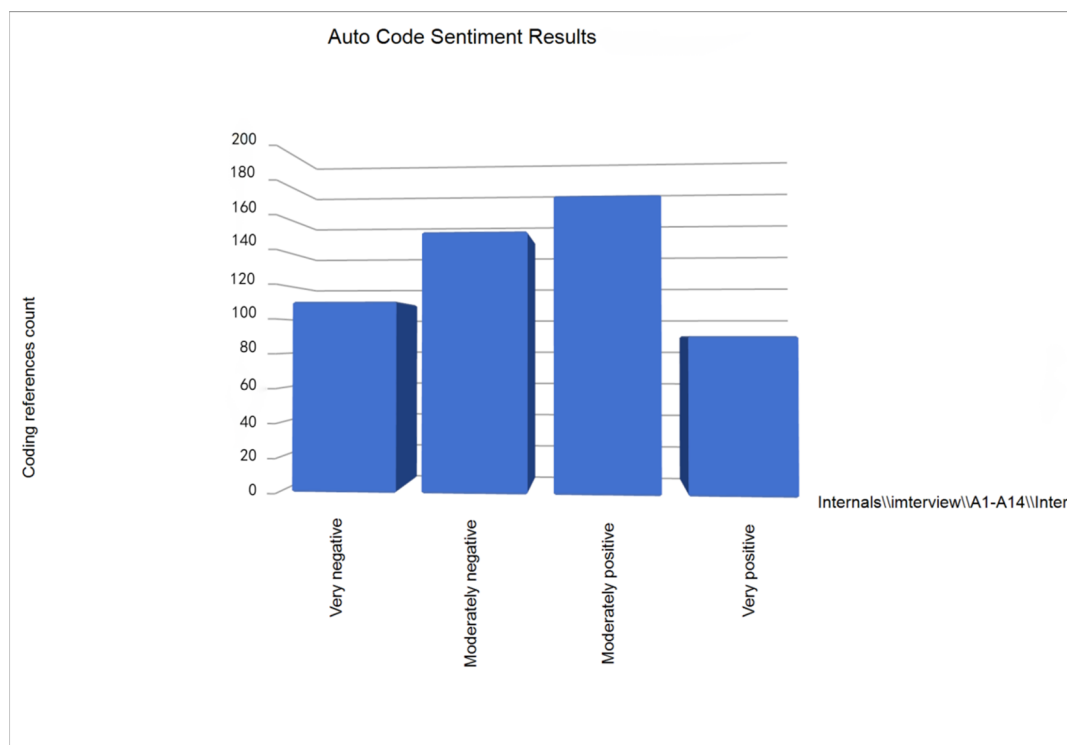


Figure 2. Overall Sentiment Analysis of the Participants

could definitely graduate smoothly. Just as F3 pointed out, "... They haven't passed the exam... Not every student has a happy ending...". Therefore, it is necessary to clarify what are the main academic majors encountered by CFHECP students while studying in the U.S.

5.1. Barriers of the English language

While CFHECP students in different majors expressed different opinions about American colleges/universities, many agreed that English is an insurmountable chasm. Like all international students, the language barrier is the first challenge they have to face, one of the most representative examples is S4. She said:

"My English score has always been fairly good... so I think such a program should be suitable for me. Many of my classmates worry about English, but I almost never worry about it...but what I didn't expect was the English, which I have always been proud of, brought me an unprecedented sense of frustration. I realize that my spoken English is weak, or to be more precise, what I am good at is only Chinglish. The English writing that I am not good at, the presentations that I have never given before, and the authentic oral communication are just what I need to master while studying abroad."

Through the analysis of the interviews, the authors find that almost every student have encountered the language barrier, especially at the initial stage of their stay in the U. S., and all the three interviewed faculty members agreed that language barrier is the main barrier for CFHECP students. In other words, these students lack the confidence to speak in class in an English-speaking environment. There is no doubt that English set up obstacles in the way students adapt to studying overseas. Yet, as F2 has pointed out that:

"I think language problems are only part of the challenges they face, because in fact, even if they can speak fluent English, cross -cultural adaptation is not so easy."

Indeed, the English language barrier is only part of the challenges CFHECP students faced, after all, CCA was never an easy thing.

5.2. Learning Shock

Learning shock could be considered as a kind of culture shock in the learning environment, which is caused by the mismatch between the new learning style and the traditional one or the mismatch of knowledge. Participants identify areas that are significantly different from their traditional learning culture, such as self-directed learning, classroom presentation, and being a member in academic teamwork (Zeller&Mosier,2020). In the beginning, students often find it difficult to adapt to the way of study in an American university/college, especially something they have not been exposed to or are not familiar with during the first two years of study in China or in the program. The learning shock did happen to S5:

"I'm actually very afraid of what's called a presentation here. It seems quite difficult, I am prone to feel tense and anxious, and I can't adapt to it. I was very nervous when I was doing it for the first time on a forum. I made a lot of grammatical errors, and I just didn't remember the sentence I thought of before on the stage... It's really very terrible... But the more nervous, the worse the performance. Anyway, I think it was totally a failure...Maybe mainly because that I did too little in the past, so I was extremely nervous when I came to the stage."

On the one hand, CFHECP students feel that American campuses are not as relaxed as they had imagined, on the other hand, what F2 has mentioned is an echo of these students' words:

"They are a special group of students, because the students who participate in such a program have lower entrance scores than the other students, but the tuition sometimes reaches 4 times higher. They generally have relatively good family conditions but poor academic foundation. Many students expressed to me the academic pressure that they had never experienced before studying in American universities, which became their first learning shock."

5.3. Overloaded Academic Requirements

For CFHECP students, the unfamiliar and overloaded academic requirements, especially English presenting, reading, and writing seem to be such a headache challenge in American classrooms.S2 said that:

"Also, the large amount of reading required by the university here is extremely difficult for me. For example, there is a specialized course that required us to read about 200 pages from Monday to Wednesday, and then from Wednesday to Monday, I have to read about 300 pages. At that time, because I had just come to the U. S., my reading speed was very slow, and I didn't know how to deal with so much reading. In the first semester, I could only read no more than 30 pages per hour, so I couldn't finish the reading required by the teacher, and it was difficult to adapt to such academic requirements."

Even for S6 who has graduated from an international high school in China and has passed the TOEFL, he is still caught off guard when faced with such a stressful writing load in American classrooms.

"Knowing the format of the writing was not enough, I had to support my paper with a variety of sources, anticipate possible rebuttals and refute those rebuttals to strengthen my point, it is all things that I had never done before..."

6. Conclusion and Implication

From the above data analysis, the researchers found that the major academic barriers to CFHECP students' CCA in the mainstream culture of the U.S. through both the perspectives of these students and the faculty members are mainly in three aspects: barriers of the English language, learning shock, overloaded academic requirements.

The findings may help CFHECP students studying abroad to better adapt to the new culture and achieve academic success, to get a deeper understanding of the acculturation process that could reduce learning shock to Chinese students' overseas study. Meanwhile, for the students who are going to take the program of CFHECP, this study could help them do better to become familiar with the academic host culture, building up related competence, and developing confidence psychologically to do well during the transition.

In addition, the findings will provide some helpful references for both the policy makers and the teaching staff(two staff teams in the transnational cooperation) on the awareness to effectively link the two stages of teaching and learning, and the awareness to successfully promote students' academic adaptation to provide enough social support to help these students achieve academic success.

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