

The Great Wall of Language and Communication in Social Adjustment among International Students

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Abstract –The study examined the value of language and communication in the context of social adjustment among international students in China. The sample for the study consisted of a total of Two Hundred and Fifty Four Students from two universities in North-East China. The Social Adjustment Scale and Chinese Language Proficiency Scale were employed to collect data. The study revealed that cultural background and the official language of the international students have a significant effect on Chinese language proficiency. The result of the study also established a significant effect of one year language study on Chinese language acquisition and a significant effect of length of stay in the host country on students' ability to communicate effectively in Chinese language. Conclusively, this work emphasizes the essence of language acquisition as an adjustment strategy in China which can also form a basis for other migration and adjustment patterns.

Keywords –Communication, International Students, Language Proficiency, Social Adjustment

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the necessity of connecting with the world has become more obvious. In view of this, as mobility and communication increase the impact of globalization, the value of international study increasingly attracts more popularity among people, especially scholars all over the world. Also, migration of people has been a continuous trend for ages, and will remain so, as people crave for better life, education, better climate, environment and security among many others [1]. International studentship as a trend of migration can be referred to as a global educational experience which reinforces commitment

to diverse cultural values and foreign language study. In other words, it can also be referred to as global literacy. While studying abroad often creates a channel for the acquisition of unique skills that influence career path, it expands the knowledge base of students with different judgments and beliefs of the host country, combined with academics.

The Chinese government has attached a lot of value to International students' education, thereby conveying China's initiative toward academic exchanges with the rest of the world. This goal is carried out through the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC), granting scholarship to scholars on yearly basis. The Chinese educational system has helped to produce professionals in the fields of science, technology, education, diplomacy, management, etc. for many countries, especially developing countries and has also engineered the enhancement of political, diplomatic and economic ties between China and those countries as well as promoting the exchange of culture, education and personnel [2].

The examination of global concerns from similar and dissimilar perspectives, as well as multiple sources of knowledge brings students into close contact with the cultural and interactive practices of China to yield dramatic increase in language learning, cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. However, despite the numerous benefits involved in studying in China, there are many challenges that foreign students are faced with during the course of their study and stay in China. Most of these challenges are embedded in the area of communication and interaction. A probable explanation is that this act is supposed to be an important activity on a daily basis and a useful tool for integration. This case is especially unique to China

because of her deep rooted culture and tradition which is also expressed in the language. Although, China, just like some other big countries in Asia such as Japan, Korea, and India share similar features of distinctive and exclusive language, however, the fact that China boasts of the biggest population in the world, along with its recent open door policy and indisputable growing economy, makes the embrace of foreign communication more unique and spectacular. The uniqueness of this case lies in the reality of adjustment experiences in an almost no-English or in clearer terms, pure-Chinese communication. This is because communication with the host community is exclusively in Chinese. Selmer[3] concludes that Chinese communication is situated in and influenced by the promises of its culture. This conclusion, according [4] was based on examples of five major speaking practices that have been identified in Chinese culture: implicit communication, listening centeredness politeness, a focus on insiders, and face-directed communication strategies. These form of speaking practices according to [3], and [5], sometimes make people perceive otherwise that Chinese people are timid, indirect, and reticent, or maybe elusive and deceptive, and therefore, inevitably creating communication barriers between the Chinese and others.

Aside from unavoidable communication problems that foreigners encounter with host communities, international students in China are also faced with the difficulty of learning the Chinese characters (Hanzi), speaking Chinese (Hanyu) and even listening skills (Tingli). Research indicates that the higher developed a student's first language, the higher success that student will have acquiring a second [6]. This implies that learning a language involves a process which international students may or may not have passed through successfully. The Chinese language is the foundation on which their traditions, culture and even development is premised. The obligation of learning the Chinese language skills is conveyed in the need to interact with the environment and the people, either directly or through media. For example, maps, bill boards, signs, local newspapers, local television programs are mostly in Chinese and most of all, majority of the people can communicate frequently only in Chinese. Considering the fact that one cannot live in isolation especially when there are new things to learn in a new environment, interaction with the environment becomes a tool for learning and adjustment. In view of these, coupled with the fact that adjustment to a new educational system and

social adjustment to a new location are potential areas of difficulty [7], the addition of language barriers, different ways of thinking, historical, environmental and cultural differences are stressors among foreign students in China.

Language, Communication and Adjustment

Just as language is an expression of the culture of a place, the culture is also closely embedded in the local language. This indicates that there is an interrelationship between these two concepts which provides a platform for human and societal development. Further to this, Lindfors [8] describes language as inextricably entwined with our mental life and every attempt to make sense of our experience in the world. Language can also be referred to as the most effective vehicle of communication. Regardless of the type of language in use, whether sign language, body language or verbal expression, it is an inevitable component for social interaction, whereas adjustment cannot take place without interaction. In the case of international student adjustment, it is even a more likely challenge because of interferences of cross-cultural characteristics.

A theory of integrative communication was proposed by Young Yun Kim to describe communication and adaptation patterns. According to her, Communication is primary element in the process of acculturation because it provides the basic means by which individuals develop insights into their new environment [9]. Language competence is necessary to establish interpersonal communication within the indigenous resident community of the new host culture. In the same manner, language proficiency is also required to utilize fully the host culture's mass media. For these reasons Kim proposes that increased language competence will increase both interpersonal communication and mass media usage [9],[10]. This indicates the strong correlation between language and culture where human communication is necessary for social adjustment in a society.

Poyrazli and Grahame [11] in their study of the barriers to adjustment of international students discovered communication concerns in their interactions with academic and social communities. They found out that students experienced difficulty in participating in class discussions which arises from their perceived inadequacy in English, fear of making language mistakes while approaching the professors to ask questions and fear of potential ridicule from their classmates and professor. While Anaya and Cole [12] opine that interaction with faculty members facilitates

greater academic achievement among minority and international students, [13] believe that “interacting with faculty, whether in the classroom, the laboratory, office hours, or other venues is one of the key college experiences associated with student development”. In addition, other positive effects such as student persistence [14]; student satisfaction [15]; cognitive and affective development [16]; associated with interaction among students and faculty presents a link between language proficiency and student social adjustment.

The case of learning a new culture and relating in the language of the new culture emphasizes a deeper attention, as international students in their interactive process also have to cope with interacting with other students from diverse cultures with different languages and accents. According to the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, there are certain thoughts of an individual in one language that cannot be totally comprehended by those who live in another language, because the way people think is strongly affected by their native languages. This implies that no two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality [17]. Although [18], concluded in her study that language proficiency was not found to be contributing to general adjustment of international students [19]. However, Searle and Ward [20], and Ward and Kennedy [21] opine that host language proficiency is vital to cultural learning and intercultural communication competence, which of course are fundamental factors of international student adjustment. Also, Yashima [22] argued that for international students to establish good interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively with the people around them, it is impossible without the ability to understand and use the language spoken in the host nation. The following research objectives were raised and addressed in the study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to examine the role of language and communication in the context of social adjustment among international students. This study aimed to examine the influence of cultural background and official language of international students on Chinese Language Proficiency; investigate the effect of one year language study on Chinese Language Proficiency; and examine the effect of length of stay of international students on Chinese Language Proficiency.

Hypotheses were generated from the research objectives to establish significant association among

the dependent variable ‘language proficiency and the independent variables; cultural background; official language of international students; one year language study and the duration of stay of international students. Statistical package for Social Scientists was used for the statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Pearson’s Chi-square (χ^2) test and one way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed to test significance of bivariate relationships. To ascertain the validity of the statistical relationship, probability (p) value of less than 0.05 was considered in the test of variables’ association.

METHODS

A quantitative research design was adopted for this study. The study was carried out in China, which is the most densely inhabited country in the world with a total population of 1,382, billion as at June 2016. Changchun, the study location is a small city compared to many big cities in China, is located in the North-eastern part of China and is the provincial headquarter of Jilin Province. It is located in the central part of Song Liao Plain, covering a total area of 20,571 square kilometers (about 8,012 square miles). Changchun is one of well-known cities of science and education in China. The city has 27 regular institutions of full-time tertiary education. Two universities which are reputable for the admission of international students in Jilin Province; Jilin University and Northeast Normal University were purposively selected for the study.

The study was campus-based, it employed primary source of data collection with a structured questionnaire that assesses the students’ level of adjustment’. The sample size of this study was drawn from the population of international students totaling 2,200 from the two universities selected for the study. A non-probability quota sampling technique was adopted to select 254 international students aged 16-58 years with the mean age of 26 years from the two Universities (Jilin University and Northeast Normal University). The content validity and face validity of the instrument was reviewed by test and measurement experts and some inappropriate items initially included were deleted. Respondents’ “Personal Characteristics” was designed to elicit information on personal and demographic data of the students. Social Adjustment Scale (SAS) which was derived from similar measures used in previous studies by Taft and Johnston, [23]; Lasry, [24]; and Annis, [25]; and Jancz, [26] was adopted to cover significant aspects of social adjustment. Chinese Language Proficiency

Scale (CLPS) is a 4 items scale that was adapted from Language Proficiency Descriptors by Brian North of Euro centres Foundation, [27]. The scale was used to elicit information that described the Chinese language proficiency as related to the interaction level of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Type	f	%
Sex	Male	152	59.8
	Female	102	40.2
	Total	254	100.0
Age	≤19 years	6	2.4
	20-29 years	203	79.9
	30 -39 years	41	16.1
	≥40 years	4	1.6
	Total	254	100.0
Continent	African	90	35.4
	Asian	103	40.6
	European	38	15.0
	North American	18	7.1
	South American	5	2.0
	Total	254	100.0
Duration of stay in China	less than 1 year	24	9.4
	1-2years	86	33.9
	2-3years	58	22.8
	3-4years	58	22.8
	4years and above	28	11.0
Total	254	100.0	
1 Year language study	Yes	148	58.3
	No	106	41.7
	Total	254	100.0

Table 1 shows that participation of males in the study was higher than the females. The table also shows that the variation of ages ranged between 19 years and 40 years, while the mean age of the study was 25.9. Those who were between the ages of 20 to 29 years participated more than the other age groups while the least age group of respondents in the study were those above 40years. Also, most of the respondents were unmarried. Furthermore, out of all the respondents from the five continents that participated in the study, 5 were South Americans, 18 were North Americans, 38 were Europeans, 90 were Africans, while 103 were Asians which constituted the highest number of respondents in terms of the origin of international students. The instrument also elicited responses on their length of stay in China; the highest numbers of respondents in this category are those who have spent 1 to 2 years in China while the least number of respondents are those who have spent less than 1 year in China. Equal numbers of respondents have spent between 2 and 4years in China. Finally, the

table also shows that 148 students who participated in the study took a one year language study while 106 did not.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: This hypothesis states that continental affiliation of international students does not have a significant effect on their Chinese language proficiency. This hypothesis was tested using one-way ANOVA. The result is presented in table 2.

Table 2. Analysis of variance of Chinese language proficiency across continent of origin

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F _{calc.}	F _{critical}
Between Groups	6.527	4	1.632	4.913	2.407
Within Groups	82.705	249	.332		
Total	89.232	253			

From table 2, the F-value is 4.913 and the critical Value is 2.407. At 0.05 level of significance, the F-value is greater than the critical Value, thus the null hypothesis is rejected. From this, we can infer that there exists a significant effect of continent of origin on Chinese language proficiency.

Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis states that official language of students have no significant effect on their Chinese language proficiency. This hypothesis was tested using the chi-square method of analysis. The results are revealed in table 3.

Table 3: Chi-square test of effect of official language of international students on their Chinese language proficiency.

Official Language	Chinese Language Proficiency			Total	X ²
	Highly proficient	Fairly proficient	not proficient		
English	56 (42.4%)	64 (48.5%)	12 (9.1%)	132 (100%)	6.87
Others	60 (49.5%)	59 (48.8%)	2 (1.7%)	121 (100%)	
Total	116 (45.8%)	123 (48.6%)	14 (5.5%)	253 (100%)	

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that 56 students(42.2%) out of 132 who speak English as their official language were highly proficient in Chinese language,64(48.5%) were fairly proficient while only 12 (9.1%)out of the total 132 students that use English as their official language belong to the 'not proficient' category. From the category of those who speak other languages apart from English as their official language, 60(49.5%) out of 121 reported to be highly proficient in Chinese

language while 59(48.6%) could fairly speak Chinese language. Only 2 respondents (1.7%) belong to the not proficient category. Finally, the table shows that ($X^2 = 6.87$, $df=2$, $P<0.05$) which implies that there is a significant effect of official language spoken in the respondent's country of origin on his Chinese language proficiency. Hence the null hypothesis is hereby rejected.

The effect of one year language study on cultural adjustment of international students

It was hypothesized that one year language study does not have a significant effect on cultural adjustment of international students. This hypothesis was tested using the chi-square method of analysis. The results are revealed in table 5 below.

Table 5. Chi-square test of effect of one year language study on cultural adjustment of international students.

One year language study	Levels of Cultural Adjustment			Total	X^2
	Highly adjusted	Fairly adjusted	not adjusted		
Yes	101 (75.9%)	27 (20.3%)	5 (3.6%)	133 (100%)	42.3
No	44 (36.4%)	72 (59.5%)	5 (4.1%)	121 (100%)	
Total	145 (57.1%)	99 (39%)	10 (3.9%)	254 (100%)	

* $p<0.05$

Table 5 shows that 133 students studied Chinese language study for one year while 121 students did not. Out of the 133 students that studied Chinese language for one year, only 5(3.6%) reported under the category of not adjusted while the remaining 130 students were either highly adjusted 101(75.9%) or fairly adjusted 27(20.3%). However, out of the 121 students that did not take Chinese language study for one academic year, 5(4.1%) reported under the category of not adjusted. The other 116 students were either highly adjusted 44(36.4%) or fairly adjusted 72(59.5%).

The chi-square value as shown in the table is ($X^2 = 42.3$, $df=2$, $P<0.05$). This result implies that there is a significant effect of one year Chinese language study on the cultural adjustment level of international students. Hence we reject the null hypothesis.

4.8.5. The effect of length of stay of international students on adjustment experience It was hypothesized that the length of stay of international students has no significant influence on their adjustment experience. This hypothesis was tested using one-way ANOVA and five categories of length

of stay were tested in the study. The result is presented in table 6.

Table 6. Analysis of variance of social adjustment across length of stay

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	$F_{calc.}$	$F_{critical}$
Between Groups	.747	4	.187	2.099	2.408
Within Groups	22.170	249	.089		
Total	22.917	253			

From the table 6, the F-value is 2.099 and the critical Value is 2.408. At 0.05 level of significance, the F-value is less than the critical Value, thus the null hypothesis is accepted. From this, we can conclude that the sample does not have enough statistical proof to reject the null hypotheses. Hence null hypothesis is accepted.

The effect of length of stay of international student on Chinese language proficiency

It was hypothesized that the length of stay of international student does not have any significant effect on their Chinese language proficiency.

This hypothesis was tested using one-way ANOVA and five categories of length of stay were tested in the study. The result is presented in table 7.

Table 7. Analysis of variance of Chinese language proficiency across length of stay

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	$F_{calc.}$	$F_{critical}$
Between Groups	7.211	4	1.803	5.473	2.408
Within Groups	82.021	249	.329		
Total	89.232	253			

From this table, the F-value is 5.473 and the critical Value is 2.408. At 0.05 level of significance, the F-value is greater than the critical value, thus the null hypothesis is rejected. From this, we can infer that there is a significant effect of duration of stay of international students on their Chinese language proficiency.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis stated that cultural background of international students does not have a significant effect on their Chinese language proficiency. Data was gathered to identify whether the cultural background of international student as represented by their continental affiliations has a significant influence on their Chinese language proficiency. Chinese language proficiency was

categorized into highly proficient, fairly proficient and not proficient. These categories were tested across five continents of origin. The result established a significant effect of continent of origin on the Chinese language proficiency. The data involved was enough to prove the null hypothesis as void and conclude that cultural background of international students has a significant effect on their Chinese language proficiency. This finding relies on the opinion of Baljit [28], that language sub skills develop depending upon the individual's communicative needs in particular cultural and institutional background. Also, considering the Whorfian hypothesis, an individual's thoughts are likely to be closely linked with cultural background.

It was also hypothesized that official language spoken in the country of origin does not have a significant influence on the Chinese language proficiency of international students. This hypothesis was rejected based on results obtained from the survey, which revealed that official language spoken in the country of origin of the students does have a significant influence on the Chinese language proficiency. Respondents whose official language was English had the least influence on their Chinese Language proficiency while respondents whose official language was Korean had the highest influence on Chinese language proficiency. Findings of other related researches show that there are many other influences at play when learning a foreign language, but the influence that the official language or first language has, has become a very important one. Baljit Bhel [29] argued that second language learners appear to accumulate structural entities of the new language but demonstrate difficulty in organising this knowledge into appropriate, coherent structures. He posited that second language learners rely on their first language structures to produce a response. If the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in the new language [30], [31].

Furthermore, another hypothesis tested, revealed that one year language study has a significant effect on the Chinese language acquisition. This result revealed the impact of a comprehensive study of Chinese language in classroom on the foreign students. A general comparison of students that are studying in English language compared to those that took compulsory one year Chinese language study as a pre-requisite to their discipline showed that the latter students have better Chinese language proficiency than the former, they are better in spoken, written and

listening which are the three major components of acquiring language. Although, those who did not take the one year language study may be able to communicate, yet their communication may not be as effective as their counterparts who studied the language. Finally, this finding contradicted the findings of Ward [32] that argued that, the fundamental psycholinguistic process of second language acquisition is the same whether learners enter the classroom to learn or acquire outside the classroom. Finally, the study investigated another factor identified to influence Chinese language proficiency. Thus, the effect of length of stay of international students on Chinese was tested. The result revealed that there is a significant effect of length of stay on students' ability to communicate effectively in Chinese language. However, the length of stay of international students has no significant influence on their adjustment experience. This finding contradicts Polek [33] who opines that the length of stay of individuals in a foreign country is a strong determinant of a better adjustment process to their new environment. This view is also coherent with that of Polek, Van Oudenhoven, and Berge [33], who also proved that length of residency is positively related to identification and contact with the host culture.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusively, Chinese as the most spoken language in the world is an exclusive feature, as no other country in the world speaks Chinese except China alone. Further to this, the rapid development of china and her recent opening-up have attracted many scholars, business persons, industrialists and tourists. In the event of this inflow of people, language has been identified as an indispensable requirement for easy settlement in china. Therefore, it was necessary to determine if students from a particular continent were more disposed to learning and speaking better Chinese. The study concluded that continental affiliation of international students has a role to play on Chinese language proficiency. Also, official language spoken in the country of origin of the students has a significant influence on the Chinese language proficiency of international students. It was assumed that the length of stay of international students did not influence their Chinese language proficiency. However, the finding of the study revealed that there is a significant effect of duration of stay on students' ability to communicate effectively in Chinese language.

In view of this, the study recommends other acculturation processes that would further integrate migrants, as language proficiency based on the length of stay does not entirely determine the total adjustment of a migrant. Secondly, although not every nation is strongly affiliated to China and people cannot change their official languages, however, the paper recommends that a period of time to learn the language of the host country should be considered to improve proficiency and adjustment level of migrants. Finally, the paper also recommends that considering the complexity of the Chinese language, nations of the world can begin to consider Chinese as one of the international languages to be introduced at basic level. These recommendations are premised on China's rapid economic growth, prompting increase in the inflow of migrants to China.

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