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Essay 2

International Students' Academic Challenges at American Colleges

The United States of America is one of the most popular destinations for international students seeking higher education. The colleges attract a diverse group of students from different cultural backgrounds. The American learning culture is subject to many literal works and includes widely spread subtopics that can be considered. Other learning cultures that international students have brought from their countries cause academic challenges that might affect international students' performances in class. Overwhelmed by the transition from accustomed international education systems to the American College system, a lot of students are confronted with challenges in their academic careers. Examining academic challenges is crucial in order to assist international students in overcoming these obstacles and enhancing their academic performance. This literature review focuses on the academic challenges that international students face at American colleges by examining what research has already been done and what needs to be improved when it comes to dealing with students of different origins. The key points of the literary sources are mostly connected to the language barrier as well as the diversity of academic cultures, which depict a challenge and can influence the student's academic education negatively.

International students face significant challenges in dealing with the language barrier. Foreign students' first language mostly isn't English, which challenges their adaption to American classroom life and academic discourse. A lot of international students struggle with their verbal and written communication skills since they must provide and develop their ideas

in English. Therefore, speaking, reading, writing, and listening only in English challenges a lot of international students, especially in the beginning. In the article “International Student’s Challenges and Adjustments to College” Wu et al. give insight into how the language barrier can affect the academic experience of an international student. Several students of Asian background claimed that it is hard to understand native speakers due to their “different accents, rate of speech, and pronunciation” (5). Participants in the research talk about the issue of communicating with their professors and other students about the issues that arise due to the language barrier (Wu et al., 5). Hana from Korea says, “The reading is very difficult. There are many words I cannot understand... They speak so fast, and they just say it aloud” (6).

There are other research studies that highlight international students’ language barrier. Bista is writing about his observations and experiences as an international student at a US college. In a website source “Why Some International Students Are Silent in the U.S. Classroom,” he describes different aspects of why students stay silent in class. Bista recalled his memory saying, “I did not join class discussions out of fear that I would be unable to deal with the possible conflicts” and “my self-esteem was low, and I felt a sense of incompetence being in a graduate class.” His reflection clearly shows that the language barrier is one of the academic challenges international students are facing. Bista mentions the accent as one reason for his struggle to participate in class: “My English sounded awkward, and the class and the professor did not understand my English. In addition to international students’ concern about having an accent, Skilton-Sylvester discusses that they struggle when participating in class discussions because they pay too much attention to their grammatical mistakes. She shows that international students focus more on grammatical form rather than the information and its deliverance, citing a quote “[F]ormalism... emphasizes accuracy

rather than fluency. Until students can make a complete sentence, they do not dare start to speak" (qtd. in Skilton-Sylvester 226).

Both articles provide reasons for how the language barrier causes academic challenges for international students, but none of them demonstrates a way to avoid that. Additionally, the findings of these studies by Wu and others should be carefully interpreted since it focuses only on a particular group of international students. International students don't have to feel bad for their attempts of speaking in a different language. In this respect, it is important to conduct a research study to know about the consequence when a professor communicates openly with affected pupils. The results would indicate whether the students are ashamed or afraid of the misunderstandings or try to participate in the classroom discussions.

The second point is about the difference in academic cultures. We have already learned that international students' academic challenges arise due to their native languages. Another important reason for the difficulties is the expectations and the learning environment in class. Academic cultures vary globally, and this creates challenges for international students who are accustomed to different learning styles and methods. Rebekah Nathan provides information about differences between American and other countries' higher education. Several students report that the classroom atmosphere in America generally is characterized by an open relationship between teacher and pupils, as well as retrieving knowledge and group work in terms of the taught content (Nathan 79). Ballard describes that the teaching and learning style in America is approached analytically: The professor takes on a coordinating role and teaches the material to the students in an analytical manner that leaves room for interpretation. The students are expected to form their own opinions and develop their own ideas through critical thinking (151).

In contrast, the article “Cultures of Learning: Language Classrooms in China” by Cortazzi and Jin emphasizes that educational systems in other countries rely on individual learning, memorization, a strict teacher-student relationship, and an individual way of learning the material (184). Referring to Ballard, this teaching and learning approach is “reproductive”: the teacher is an “almost exclusive source of guidance” who emphasizes the importance of replication and correctness. Students are expected to memorize the information and retrieve it as it was provided by the professor (151).

It becomes clear that American college education differs from the one provided in other countries. Foreign students have become accustomed to their home education system, which can make the transition to the American system difficult and lead to issues.

Wu et al. mention the fear of not being “recognized” and being “ignored”: teachers and other students sometimes tend to create an atmosphere in which international students don’t feel comfortable as newcomer students. Cultural isolation causes for instance the difficulty of not fitting into a group (Wu et al. 5) or not feeling comfortable participating in the classroom which refers to the topic and another source that is connected to international students’ academic challenges. Al Murshidi namely describes findings that some international students don’t feel “comfortable” working with native speakers in his work “The Impact of American Students and Teachers on Gulf Students’ Academic success” (4). Those findings reinforce the point that the learning environment causes academic challenges and negatively impacts their academic journey. Based on the research studies about cultural differences in education, it is important to create a research project where international students feel comfortable sharing ideas and participating in classroom discussions. By providing this environment, the student’s academic performances are likely affected since participation is mostly part of the grading for courses, but also is it a way for other students to get a different view on a topic and to

broaden their horizon since various cultural background shares different important and interesting ideas on specific themes.

Related to this point, Cortazzi and Jin write about expectations of good students and teachers at a US College that varies due to the academic conditions that are given in other countries (169). Professors want them to be active and participate in class as opposed to that, disrupting a teacher in Korea is considered “rude behavior” (Wu et al. 5). It becomes clear that all the introduced sources in this paragraph are thematically connected to academic differences and that the results are strongly related to the country of origin. Different cultural backgrounds lead to a variety of assumptions and beliefs about how professors and students should behave and act in classrooms. Finally, many international students tend to be passive and struggle to adjust to the American classrooms' active learning environment. In my opinion, the mentioned different expectations are a cause of difficulties in American classrooms for non-native students. The readings again do not show how to work against those problems. Al Murshidi provides important information on how teachers and students are supposed to behave in college. I believe it is a good start to deal with the education system in other cultures and to make sure that affected students can integrate easier. Becoming a professor should include gaining knowledge about academic systems worldwide and a pedagogical education that ensures that teachers know how to approach and reach out to international students to effectively work with them and reduce the above-mentioned issues.

This literature review showed that the language barrier and academic differences due to the students' origin cause academic challenges for international or immigrant students at American colleges that negatively affect their study abroad experience and academic career. The readings emphasized the arising difficulties and illustrated that awareness of those problems already exists. In my opinion and speaking out of my own experience, there are still

a lot of opportunities for improvement. International students' academic challenges in the United States are multifaceted and complex. The literature review emphasizes the language barrier and differences in academic cultures as two main reasons to cause significant challenges that international students face. To prevent those issues from arising, American universities must invest in services to help international students overcome these challenges and achieve academic success. The investment could involve providing language resources or support and a cultural competency course for college faculty and staff to ensure that all participants are on the same page as mentioned earlier. As a result, American universities can contribute to a comfortable environment for international students, which will help them integrate more easily and participate in the school community.

Works Cited

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