Research in Social Sciences
ISSN: 2641-5305
Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 43-53.
2022
DOI: 10.53935/26415305.v5i1.231

The Cross-Cultural Academic Adaptation of Chinese Students in an American University: Academic Challenges, Influential Factors and Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT: *Most of the studies on international students' cross-cultural adaptation focused on their sociocultural and psychological adaptation, few studies have specifically addressed international students' experiences with academic adaptation. This study examines the academic challenges, influential factors and coping strategies of the Chinese students on an American university campus. The research was based on the responses of 122 Chinese students to a cross-cultural academic adaptation questionnaire and interviews with 14 Chinese students at the same American university. The results show that the main academic challenges that Chinese students had were English language proficiency, American university classroom culture and policies, different learning strategies and ways of thinking, and academic writing. Both male students and female students had difficulties in cross-cultural academic adaptation, with no statistical significant gender difference in cross-cultural academic adaptation; graduate students outperformed undergraduates in cross-cultural academic adaptation; length of stay in U.S was positively correlated with Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation. Specific coping strategies were also identified.*

Key words: *Academic adaptation, American university, Chinese students, Cross-cultural.*

1. Introduction

Difficulties in adapting to a new environment interfere with the academic success and overall well-being of all international travellers (Neuliep, 2012). However, as education sojourners, international students' cross cultural adaptation is unique, mainly due to their unfamiliarity with foreign educational and social practices, which are often a radical departure from the educational practices and social expectations at their universities of origin. Chinese international students experience particular difficulties and challenges in terms of their cross-cultural adaptation (Chiu, 1995).

Moreover more undergraduate Chinese students are studying in the foreign countries (Open Doors, 2022) and most of them are a generation of singletons due to China's one child policy (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011). Therefore, it is worth developing a deeper understanding of what these students perceive as the causes of their academic adjustment stress (Yan, Berliner, & David, 2009) and what coping tools they have developed to deal with it.

With the increase of the Chinese students in the foreign countries, studies on the acculturation of Chinese students are on the rise, but most have focused on the social cultural and psychological aspects, such as economic problems, cultural differences, cultural awareness, pressures and anxieties, friendship, engagement, language problems and academic achievement (Yeh, 2000; Zhao, 2005). The studies tend to be primarily concerned with stress levels, coping strategies and the quality of the support mechanisms, which is reflected in their conceptualization of students' study-abroad experiences (Jin & Cortazzi, 2012). Systematic empirical research on Chinese international students' academic adaptation experience is lacking (Yan et al., 2009).

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Email: ofonadolf@gmail.com
Funding: *This study received no specific financial support.*
Article History:
Received: 6 July 2022
Revised: 19 August 2022
Accepted: 30 August 2022
Published: 16 September 2022
Copyright:
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There are few studies that have specifically addressed Chinese international students' experiences with academic adaptation and what these students encounter in their academic adaptation process and how they tackle with those problems has not been fully explored (Yan et al., 2009).

Studying how Chinese students adapt to academic life in the U.S and what kind of assistance they need to adapt to the new environments successfully has practical implications for both Chinese and American universities, for the staff and organizations that work with international students, and for the Chinese students who are studying and are planning to study in the U.S., in that such knowledge can maximize successful outcomes for these students.

2. Literature Review

The existing literature regarding salient variables in acculturation models was explored, including acculturative stressors encountered frequently by international students, e.g., language barriers, educational difficulties, loneliness, discrimination, and practical problems associated with changing environments (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). A comprehensive review examined 64 studies of psychosocial adjustment of international students in the United States and concluded that the most frequently reported predictors of psychosocial adjustment were stress, social support, English language proficiency, region/country of origin, length of residence in the United States, acculturation, social interaction with Americans, self-efficacy, gender, and personality (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Other studies suggest that faculty and administrators in strategic positions to educate and support international students are not sufficiently and accurately aware of these students' perceptions of, and satisfaction with, their educational experiences, including the challenges and needs the international students have during their study in the U.S (Joo, 2002).

In addition to the general social culture shock, international students also suffer from "academic culture shock." (Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010). Gilbert (2000) argued that academic culture shock was a subset of culture shock and "is a case of incongruent schemata about higher education in the students' home country and in the host country" (p. 14). The concept of incongruent schemata is associated with differences in the academic learning environment, including the education system, lecture style, assessment, relationship between students and lecturers, and so on. Church (1982) found that adjusting to the new educational systems was among the major academic concerns for international students. International students from Asian countries, whose only study experience is in their home countries' educational systems, might feel significant discomfiture when starting their studies at a western university (Li et al., 2010).

Chinese students' academically related problems in the U.S can be readily traced to the differences between the educational systems of China and the United States (Yan et al., 2009). Chinese students find the "rules" governing their academic experience in the U.S considerably different from those in their previous academic environment in China (Lin, 1998). Xu (2003) interviewed 11 Chinese graduate students at a Midwestern university to explore their adaptation process to the U.S. teaching and learning systems. The results revealed that the participants had experienced difficulties due to English language deficiency and the lack of awareness of differences in the teaching and learning systems, in faculty's expectations and standards used for assessing student performance. Holmes (2004) also observed that Chinese MBA (Master of Business Administration) students in business school were unprepared for the interactive nature of classroom communication and had problems interacting in a western academic setting. Wang and Shan (2007) found that the majority of Chinese students in Australia had a hard time tolerating uncertainty and ambiguity. Dimmock and Ong Soon Leong (2010) also found that one of the very first adaptations Chinese students needed to make when studying in Singapore was to orient them to a more western-style student-centered learning environment.

The language barrier was identified as another major factor that prevented international students from academic adaptation in the U.S and discussed in a number of research studies (Yeh, 2000). Previous research studies indicated that many Asian students experienced difficulties in oral presentation, class participation, understanding lectures, taking notes, writing papers and class discussions due to limited language proficiency and unfamiliar instructional styles (Dunn, 2006; Lin, 2002; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Professors' accents, idiomatic styles, humour and choice of examples in lectures posed problems (Holmes, 2004). It is now generally acknowledged that language proficiency results in much frustration for students from China at American universities and colleges. Wang (2003) suggested that the influence of Chinese language, lack of contextual knowledge, and lack of opportunity to practice English, was associated with Chinese students'

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language barrier. In fact, many international students experienced difficulties in listening, speaking, reading, and writing at the beginning stage of their study (Edwards, 2007; Jin & Cortazzi, 2012). Language difficulty remains to be a major challenge to the Chinese students when studying abroad (Pan, Yue, & Chan, 2010; Zhang & Mi, 2010).

Individual variables also influence the stress-coping process in acculturation, such as age, gender, length of stay, and field of study, types and levels of support, level of study (graduate or undergraduate), immigration status, country of origin and educational background (Berman & Cheng, 2001; Berry, 1997). However, few studies deal with the impacts of such specific independent variables (Kwon, 2009). What's more, the relationships between demographic features of students and their academic achievement appeared to be inconsistent in different empirical studies (Li et al., 2010). For example, some studies revealed that the problems perceived by male international students were not significantly different from those perceived by females (Moffett, 2006). Others found that female international students suffered from more adjustment problems than their male counterparts (Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007). Others even found female students had a higher level of adjustment than males (Ying & Han, 2006).

As for the effect of age, length of stay in the foreign country and education status, contradictory findings have appeared. Clark and Ramsay (1990) found a negative relationship between age and academic performance, whereas McInnis, James, and McNaught (1995) found that mature students were more likely to perform better. Dunn (2006) showed that older students who had stayed longer in the U.S. tended to be more academically well-adjusted. Dunn's results also showed that gender, marital status, number of countries travelled to, and length of stay in those countries were not related to academic adjustment. Cheng and Erben (2012) found that students who stayed longer in the United States and were in art-related majors had the lowest anxiety, and that gender and acculturation were correlated with language anxiety levels. Other researchers noted that graduate students experienced greater levels of adjustment strain than undergraduate students (Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). Previous studies also indicated that graduate students faced more difficulties than undergraduate students in adjustment to an American university (Kwon, 2009).

Based on the above reviewed literature, the current research focuses on the Chinese students' academic adaptation issue in the American universities, using two methodologies: 1) interviews as a qualitative method to study how, why and to what extent the frustration, tensions and challenges are embedded in the Chinese students' academic adaptation in the U.S., and 2) an academic adaptation questionnaire to further survey the Chinese students' academic difficulties in the U.S and to examine what factors influence Chinese students' academic adaptation comparing differences between males and females, graduates and undergraduates, and length of stay in the U.S. Specific strategies for dealing with the cross-cultural adaptation problems of Chinese students are also identified in this study.

In short, this research focuses on the Chinese students' academic adaptation in the U.S rather than their social and psychological adaptation and intends to answer the following research questions:

(1) What are the specific academic problems Chinese students encountered in the U.S and why?

(2) What are the individual factors affecting Chinese students' academic adaptation in the U.S?

3. Research Method

3.1. Participants

The participants in this research were 122 Chinese students at an American University, of which 82 were undergraduates and 40 were graduate students, 38 were female (undergraduate n=26; graduate n=12) and 84 were male (undergraduate n=56; graduate n=28). The sample had a mean age of 21.59 years, ranging from 18-30 years old). The average length of stay in the U.S was more than one year (M=1.85; SD=0.85), with 44.3 % (n=54) having less than one year of residence in U.S, 26.2 % (n=32) having less than two years of residence in the U.S, and 29.5 % (n=36) having more than two years of residence in the U.S.

3.2. Instruments

A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Before the formal interview, the pre-interview and questionnaire pre-test was conducted. The pre-interview questions and questionnaire were adapted from the socio-cultural adaptation scale (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Based on the results, a final questionnaire and interview outline were developed. The interviews were done on the American university campus. Questionnaires were administered via email. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part

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solicited demographic information including age, the length of stay in the U.S, types of student (graduate or undergraduate) and gender, and the second part was the academic adaptation scale with 8 items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from no difficulty to extreme difficulty. The scale demonstrated satisfactory inter-item reliability (a=0.92).

3.3. Procedures

Emails were sent to invite the participants to fill in the survey. One hundred and twenty-three participants responded. The total number of usable questionnaires was 122. After the questionnaires were collected, emails were sent to the participants who finished the questionnaire to invite them to be interviewed, and 14 elected to be interviewed., including nine males (six undergraduates and three graduates) and five females (four undergraduates and one graduate). The interview protocol included six questions such as "*(1) what is the most difficult that you encountered at the beginning of your study in the American university? How did you deal with the difficulty?* "; "(2) *During your study in U.S, which one of the followings is the most difficult and which one is the easiest, and why? (Understanding the professors' lecture and students' discussion in class; to express your ideas freely; giving oral presentation; reading in class and tasks after class; taking notes in class and academic writings.)*".

4. Results

4.1. Survey

The mean (M) and the standard deviation (SD) scores for the sample of Chinese students on the cross-cultural academic adaptation scale is shown in the Table 1. The lower the mean is, the better the academic adaptation. From Table 1, we can see the means of items 1-7 are between 2 (2=slight difficulty) and 4 (4=great difficulty) except that item 8 is less than 2. The scores indicate that the students had moderate difficulty with academic adaptation, especially in academic writing (M= 3.196), English oral presentation (M=2.980) and group class discussion (M=2.814). They had the least difficulty adjusting to campus life (M=1.360). These results coincide with the data collected in the interviews.

Table 1. The statistic descriptions of the academic adaptation.

Item	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Number (N)
Academic writing	3.196	2.029	122
English oral presentation	2.980	1.872	122
Group class discussion	2.814	1.734	122
Understanding the American teachers	2.345	1.220	122
Understanding the American classmates	2.213	1.198	122
Reading after class	2.016	0.826	122
Daily communication	2.000	1.125	122
Campus life	1.360	0.876	122

In order to investigate the related factors which influence Chinese students' academic adaptation in the American university, an independent-sample T-test was used to assess whether gender and education background influence academic adaptation. A One Way ANOVA was used to test whether length of stay influenced academic adaptation in the U.S. Table 2 shows that the mean score for males on the academic adaptation (M=2.041) is almost the same as that of females (M=2.039) indicating that both males and females had similar difficulty in academic adaptation. The mean of graduate students (M=1.663) on the academic adaptation scale was lower than that of the undergraduates (M=2.143) indicating that graduate students were better in academic adaptation than undergraduates. The length of the stay of the Chinese students in the U.S. appeared to influence their score on the academic adaptation scale. The groups with more than one year of residence in the U.S. scored better on the academic adaptation scale than the group with less than one-year stay in the U.S（M=2.375).

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Table 2. The statistic descriptions of the academic adaptation by demographic factors.

Demographic factors		Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Number(N)
Academic Adaptation	Female	2.039	0.956	38
	Male	2.041	0.815	84
Academic Adaptation	Undergraduates	2.143	0.866	82
	Graduates	1.663	0.713	40
Academic Adaptation	Less than one-year	2.375	0.906	54
	Less than two-years	2.039	0.772	32
	More than two-years	2.041	0.587	36

As Table 3 shown, no statistical significance in the academic adaptation (t=0.009, P=0.993>0.05) was found between males and females, and between graduate students and the undergraduates (t= 1.833, p=.072>0.05).

Table 3. T-test of the academic adaptation by gender and educational background.

Variables	MD	t	df	Sig.
Academic adaptation (female-male)	-0.002	-0.009	121	0.993
Academic adaptation (undergraduates -graduates)	0.479	1.833	121	0.072

The results of a One Way ANOVA on the academic adaptation by the length of stay in the U.S (see Table 4) showed that the length of stay in the U.S. influenced the Chinese students' academic adaptation significantly (F = 6.007, p = 0.004<0.05）. The longer the Chinese students stayed in the U.S, the better they adapted to the American university.

Table 4. One Way ANOVA on academic adaptation by the length of stay.

Variables	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Academic adaptation					
Between groups	7.500	2			
Within groups	36.210	120	3.750		
Total	43.710	122	0.624	6.007	0.004

4.2. Interview

4.2.1. Academic Adaptation

The literature review suggested that the challenges of adapting to a different academic culture could be more acute and overwhelming than settling into a different cultural and social environment (Jin & Cortazzi, 2012) and this was proved by the Chinese students involved in this study.

After their first arrival at the U.S, most of the Chinese students interviewed agreed that they had experienced an adaptation process in the American university from curiosity to loneliness. Some Chinese students in this research regarded the academic adaptation in the U.S as a kind of "suffering" experience. A Chinese student described his academic adaptation as the following:

"My learning life in the U.S is a transition from Chinese education to western education. It is a hard process... When I first came to the U.S, I met a lot of academic problems. I could bear the loneliness and homesickness, but I did not know how to deal with the new foreign teaching methods, it seemed that everything was very strange to me. Sometimes I felt helpless and cried silently in my apartment. Sometimes I could not sleep for whole night because of the academic pressure. I forced myself to study harder, because I knew it was not easy for me to have this chance to study abroad".

The thirteen participants among the fourteen interviewed students in this study reported that, shortly after their initial arrival in the U.S, had difficulties in classroom communication, fully understanding American teachers and students, team projects and group discussion with the American students; some of them felt they *"could not adapt to the American class completely."* And others mentioned that they *"had no idea about the teaching aims of the teachers, even did not understand the assignments".* Another challenge participants encountered was that *"the different thinking ways and the learning habits"* and lack of the American cultural

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background made them feel puzzled and they regarded it as *"a threshold difficult to cross"*. One of the students said:

"The American teachers often use some American culture-loaded examples in the class. It was hard to me. Each time, when the American teachers and students were laughing at the humour and jokes, I felt confused and stupid. In order to be able to laugh together with them, I worked hard after class to get the information and cultural knowledge from internet, TV, even in my daily life".

Five of the interviewed students reported that they could not follow the teachers' rules and regulations because of the unfamiliarity with the American classroom culture. Compared with the Chinese university class behaviour, Chinese students in this study experienced the following educational cultural differences between the Chinese and American classrooms: the students' ability to solve problems, practical and team cooperation were more emphasized in the American class; American students liked to ask more questions in class than the Chinese students; American teachers listed more formulas while the Chinese teachers focused on deducing the formula; the American class focused more on practical application while Chinese class paid more attention to the theory comprehension; more of a "spoon-feeding" approach in China while in the American class a lot of question-answer activities and thinking critically are encouraged; more assignments to do and more quizzes in the American class than in China.

4.2.2. Language Adaptation

The most unpleasant feelings and difficult experiences that the Chinese students encountered in the American university were caused by the language barrier. The participants reported problems and issues associated with their competence with the English language, and how the academic environment compounded these difficulties.

The major English language challenges faced by the Chinese students in this study were their listening comprehension and oral proficiency after their first arrival. The listening comprehension challenge for Chinese students were due to the speed at which the professors talked and their accents. Participants in the study said, *"It's difficult to understand their talking, especially terms and phrases", "Some professors spoke too fast and it was hard to keep following him/her", "The accent of some of the professors and American students was a challenge for me. I had difficulties understanding them".* One graduate student shared, *"After two days' orientation education, it seemed to me I completely understood not more than 20 sentences. I felt very bad and depressed. Before I came to the U.S, I had got a high score both in my Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL) and Graduate Record Examination (GRE). I had no problems communicating with my foreign teachers in China…"*.

Participants also reported that the most difficult English skill was *"taking notes in class and academic writing."* Ten of the fourteen participants mentioned that they had difficulties in academic writing. Furthermore, the writing styles and standards were different from what Chinese students were used to, and to meet the expectation of different professors caused Chinese students to be frustrated.

With regard of the English improvement in the U.S, twelve of the fourteen Participants reported that they improved their listening and ten of them improved their speaking during their study in the U.S, they were able to comprehend most conversations by the end of the first semester. Ten of the fourteen participants thought the easiest English skill to be improved during their study was *"to understand the professors' lecture and students' discussion in class".* Half of them thought that they could *"express their ideas freely using oral presentation"*.

As for how to improve English skills, many participants relied on radio, television, magazines, movies, music, etc. to improve their listening, and acquire information as well. Participants also agreed that they had to motivate themselves to look for the chances to practice and improve their English. They shared different practical ways to improve English, for example, *"taking an English language course"* and *"joining the local people's English learning class"* as very common for Chinese students. Participants also indicated that internal motivation played an important role to improve English and Chinese students needed to look for the chances actively to practice English. Participants shared the idea that *"part-time work can help make American friends and get in touch with the local people in order to understand American culture and improve English"*.

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4.2.3. Class Adaptation

In addition to the language difficulties in class, participants reported challenges associated with major systemic differences in Chinese and American higher education, class culture and course arrangement, especially at the beginning of their study in the U.S.

Most of the interviewed students repeatedly mentioned that presentation in American class is *"the most difficult"* and *"gives them headache"*. Ten of the fourteen interviewed students reported that they had had a hard time and difficulty in giving oral presentations during their study in U.S. One of the participants said,

"For me, the most difficult challenge was to give presentation in class. I had never had this experience in China. But here, giving presentations in class is quite common. I had no idea about how to prepare and how to give the presentation at the beginning. Different teachers had different requirements for giving presentation. I had to learn how to collect the data, how to analyze the data and how to comment on the data, then to give the presentation".

Another theme in class adaptation that participants reported was the group discussion and team project in the American class. Ten of the interviewed students agreed that they could not join the group discussion confidently and joined the discussion passively in the American class. They thought the American class focused more on practical ability training and encouraged students to express themselves and question the teacher freely. Participants often reported that critical thinking was new to them, and that they felt challenged by the task of criticizing others' work. However, they benefited from it, as one of the participants noted,

"In the group discussion, the students from different countries worked together. We helped each other and benefited each other. At the beginning, it was a great challenge to me. Because I need to understand the English with different accents and I have to use English to make them understand me. I needed to communicate and work with the people from different cultures. It made me learn how to cooperate with them".

4.2.4. Assistance Seeking Behaviors

When the Chinese students were asked who they often sought for help when they had problems in their study, eleven of the interviewed students said they asked help from other Chinese students; eight said they asked for help from American teachers; only four of them asked help from American students and one of them asked for help from the university learning resources. Most of the students reported that it was convenient to ask Chinese students and it was easy to understand in Chinese. Some of the students reported that they were not familiar with the campus learning resources and did not know how to find those learning resources on the campus.

5. Discussion

5.1. Language Barrier

According to the statistics, a widely acknowledged initial language shock was experienced by the Chinese students involved in this study, especially at the early stage of their stay in the U.S. Though the Chinese students passed a TOFEL(Test of English as a Foreign Language) test to meet the standard criteria for the international students in American universities before they were admitted, TOFEL scores cannot guarantee the international students' academic success. In fact, studies have found there is no statistically significant correlation between the TOFEL and earned GPA (Grade Point Average) (Thannisch, 1992). While the TOFEL exam mainly measures the comprehension skills and formal knowledge of grammar and syntax, it does not measure knowledge of academic language in relation to the ability to speak and write in English for particular academic content areas in which students major. The language proficiency in specialized discourse and communicative skills acceptable in specific social academic groups 'rhetoric is what the Chinese students need to achieve success. In short, "One can have a high TOFEL score but still experience a high level of academic difficulty" (Xu, 1991).

5.2. American Classroom Culture

Unfamiliarity with the American classroom culture and the teacher-students' personal relationship in an American class is another important factor to cause the Chinese students academic adaptation difficulties. The different education style of America from that of China (e.g., instructors' expectation, class dynamics, class

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assignment formats) led to the Chinese students' improper performance in class. For example, the Chinese students, traditionally and culturally immersed in an environment which places more emphasis on the virtues of humbleness, emotional restraint, self-effacement, and saving face, had difficulties in fitting into the American style of classroom conversation and discussion, which features more direct expression of feelings, assertive expression of opinions, and direct communications. Since Chinese students are expected to be a quiet listener in class and not expected to speak up in class without the teachers' permission in China, they were not aware that they were expected to be active in engagement in class by their American professors. This can be partly explain why the Chinese students in the interview participated only minimally in class discussions, had difficulty in giving presentations, and could not follow the teacher's rules and regulations in class (though English language limitation is another part of the difficulty). Most of the Chinese students thought the class presentation was the most difficult challenge in the American class, because there are few chances to practice this in China. The unfamiliarity with the American teachers' expectations regarding students caused the Chinese students to be puzzled at the American teachers' requirements, assignments and expectations. This coincides with the research results on the main problems of international students in the American classroom by Gbruek and Dunnett (1997).

5.3. Learning Strategies, ways of thinking and Academic Writing Difficulty

The different cultural thinking patterns and cultural differences caused the major obstacle to the Chinese students' academic adaptation. The cultural differences between the Chinese and American classrooms that the Chinese students in the interview mentioned indicate that the different classroom interaction style greatly affected Chinese students' academic performance. Cultural thinking patterns influence how people respond to the individuals from different cultures and how to understand them (Kaplan, 1996). The specific written language structure and oral communication pattern in each culture reflects its unique thinking pattern which influences the international students' academic writing style, the same scientific and philosophic model may be expressed in differently in different cultures (Reid, 1988). This can explain why the Chinese students could not understand the American teachers and students' humor and jokes with local culture and why the Chinese students had great difficulty in the academic writing in English. One of the participants explained this as "the Chinese students are good at technical knowledge, but lack training in technical writing and do not know how to put things into American writing in a persuasive way".

5.4. Factors Affecting Chinese Students' Academic Adaptation in the U.S.

Both males and females have difficulty in academic adaptation; however, there is no statistical significance in the academic adaptation between males and females. The results are similar to some of the previous studies in the reviewed literature (Moffett, 2006; Rhine, 1989), but not consistent with the others (Dao et al., 2007; Fatima, 2001; Sanner, Wilson, & Samson, 2002; Ying & Han, 2006). Graduate students are better in academic adaptation than undergraduates. The differences in the academic adaptation between graduate students and undergraduates were close to statistical significance in terms of academic adaptation. This is consistent with the previous studies (Dunn, 2006) but inconsistent with others (Fatima, 2001; Kwon, 2009; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006). The longer the Chinese students stayed in the U.S, the less difficulty they encountered in academic adaptation and the better they adapted to the American university. This is consistent with some of the studies (Cheng & Erben, 2012; Dunn, 2006). This is typically because the international students are on a step-by-step psychological journey from a periphery of a culture to the centre, from a state of ignorance and resentment to a position of understanding or empathy (Lewthwaite, 1986). This can also account for the interview results that, upon arrival in the U.S, most of the students in this study had difficulties in classroom communication, fully understanding American teachers and students, team projects and group discussion with the American students, but over time, most of Chinese students reported progress in understanding the professors' lecture and students' discussion.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research findings in this study, the practical strategies to deal with the academic adaptation are suggested as the following.

Research in Social Sciences
ISSN: 2641-5305
Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 43-53.
2022
DOI: *10.53935/26415305.v5i1.231*
Email: ofonadolf@gmail.com
Funding: *This study received no specific financial support.*
Article History:
Received: 6 July 2022
Revised: 19 August 2022
Accepted: 30 August 2022
Published: 16 September 2022
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6.1. Developing Cross-Cultural Auxiliary Projects at both Chinese and American Education Institutes

Based on the findings that unfamiliarity with American culture and learning concepts in class can cause Chinese students' academic adaptation difficulties at the early stage of the Chinese students' study in the U.S, both Chinese training institutes and American universities should design and implement cross-culture academic adaptation programs or orientation programs to introduce the American education system and policies, basic learning requirements, the possible learning difficulties and coping strategies etc., to make students aware of the characteristics and education concepts in the American higher education, to reduce the gap between the students' expectation and reality. An increase in our understanding of similarities and differences between our groups and strangers' groups will produce a decrease in our anxiety and an increase in our ability to accurately predict their behavior.

6.2. Improving International Cross-cultural Communicative Skills and Cross-cultural Awareness

The common problems that Chinese students encountered in their academic adaptation are a lack of efficient communicative competence. Chinese students need to develop their communicative skills in the foreign academic environments such as the scientific writing skills, oral presentation skills and cooperative skills in team projects. Taking part in local parties, clubs and different students associations are good ways for the Chinese students to improve their cross-cultural communicative competence and to become familiar with American culture and language. Better communicative skills can also help to develop a good professional relationship with American teachers and students. Therefore, in cross-cultural training, the focus should be on improving the ability to deal problems through active communication; learning different strategies to collect foreign cultural information, learning to communicate actively with the local people in the foreign culture, improving the ability to use and understand foreign language appropriately in specific situations.

6.3. Training Chinese Students in Adaptive Skills and Learning Strategies

Learning strategies and learning adapting skills of the international students are closely related to their academic success. Chinese students need to be trained to have a better understanding of the American university academic life and educational system such as the general educational structure of the American university, undergraduate education and graduate education, the role of the supervisors, choosing a major, and evaluation and testing systems. To guarantee academic success, Chinese students have to improve the following skills: 1) functional language skills, e.g. skills in taking notes and skills of communicating with the American teachers and students ; 2) skills in group discussion and team projects ; 3) skills of scientific writing ; 4) mastery of the performance strategies or meeting the American teachers' expectations ; 5) skills for generally adapting to the American way of life. To lessen the pressure and anxiety in the academic adaptation, Chinese students have to fully understand the learning requirements of American universities (e.g. strategies of study and review) so as to reduce the academic adaptation difficulties due to the limited language proficiency.

6.4. Making Good Use of Learning Resources

Student counseling services and learning resources are potential positive coping resources for international students when faced with academic adaptation and acculturative stressors. However, this research suggests that not many Chinese students ask help from American students and from the university learning resources when they have problems. Chinese students need to be trained to learn how to utilize a variety of social support sources and learning resources such as the academic help room, reading room, academic success centre, academic consulting, academic intervention, writing centre, and supplemental instruction as well as taking academic learning skills course, etc. These learning resources are of great help for international students to know how to achieve academic success and help them better adapted academically.

6.5. Providing Two-way Cross-cultural Adaptation Training for the Faculties in the U.S Universities

Faculty and administrators who are in strategic positions to educate and support international students are not sufficiently and accurately aware of these students' perceptions of, and satisfaction with, their educational experiences, including the challenges and needs they have during their study in the U.S. Therefore, besides developing cross-cultural adaptation training program for the Chinese students and improving their English communicative skills before and after they come to study in the U.S, American universities also need to

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implement two-way cross-cultural adaptation training for the faculties, administrators, librarians and laboratory technicians who work with the international students. Faculty in American universities need to improve their international awareness of cross-cultural differences and know more about the international students' academic adaptation situations and problems in order to adapt to the international students by developing specific cross-cultural adaptation programs, such as a special orientation education for the international students, role-playing, case studies, culture labs, field observations, library use training and so on.

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