Experiences of Communication Obstacle of International Students of Northeast Normal University China

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ARTICLE DETAILS

History
Revised format: Aug 2023  
Available Online: Sep 2023

Keywords
Communication, Barriers, Obstacles, International Students.

JEL Classification
A20, A24

ABSTRACT

Objectives: China now offers top-notch postsecondary education to students worldwide. Similar problems develop every year when hundreds of international students come to China for further education, creating new difficulties. This study looks into the challenges and obstacles international postgraduate students face while spending a full academic year at NENU in Changchun, China.

Methodology: A qualitative process was used to choose 86 international students, both male and female. Six foreign students, all nationals of different countries, were recruited from various Northeast Normal University schools. After gathering the data through a thorough process of in-person interviews, a thematic analysis method was applied.

Findings: Emerging themes were examined in both the individual interviews and the aggregate for more examination. The findings demonstrated how a number of issues, including the academic barrier, the cultural barrier, and adjustment strategies, affect the lives of recently arrived students. Incorporate issues related to diet, communication, and other psychological factors.

Implications: Conversely, these obstacles also spur international students to create problem-solving solutions. They create novel learning strategies to overcome obstacles as they grow into autonomous learners. Time, effort, and a great deal of support from various sources are required for the adjustment and adaptation.

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Introduction

Government support has made international education a vital component of Chinese universities, and its significance is only increasing. Collaboration and academic exchange with foreign colleges are becoming more important in Chinese universities. China’s top universities are noteworthy for their ability to draw
large numbers of foreign students, their agreements with other foreign universities, and their promotion of international exchange in higher education. China has started to engage in the import and export of higher education to society and market expansion in order to adapt to the global knowledge-based economy (Thomson et al., 2006). The World Trade Organization (WTO) has an impact on the Chinese higher education market. As a result, Chinese higher education institutions are introducing cutting-edge teaching tools, helping China close the gap with higher education in developing nations (Li & Zhao, 2010, p.1).

China has emerged as the world's second-largest economy and has been participating more and more in international issues. It is becoming more and more necessary to use soft power to counter this growth. China is emerging as the second most popular country for overseas students to study. China's 31 provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities are home to 1,004 higher education institutions that served 492,185 international students from 196 countries and territories in 2018–2019, according to data issued by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Over the previous year, there has been an increase of 3,013 pupils, or 0.62%.

**Indicate Total Number and Percent of International Students by Continent**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continent</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>295,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>81,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>73,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>35,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>6,229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Number of International Students by Country of Origin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>50,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>28,608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>28,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>23,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>United states</td>
<td>20,996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As to the data, there were 258,122 international students registered in degree programs, making up 52.44% of all foreign students. This is a 6.86% growth over 2017 of 16,579 students. There were 85,062 international postgraduate students enrolled, up 12.28% from the previous year. Of these, 25,618 were pursuing doctorates, while 59,444 were pursuing master's degrees. There were 234,063 foreign students enrolled in non-degree programs. Of the international students studying in China, 429,144 (87.19%) paid for their own education, while 63,041 (12.81%) received financial aid from the Chinese government.

A metropolis of 4,789 square kilometres and a population of 7.54 million people, Changchun is the capital of Jilin Province and is situated in north-eastern China. Numerous thousand pupils are enrolled in various
courses here. In order to better understand why international students, pick Changchun, this paper will look at the main considerations and underlying causes. Interviews with overseas students attending Northeast Normal University serve as the primary method of investigation. Communication challenges are just one of the many issues that international students face. Every living being has the innate ability to communicate. Communication is the transmission of information between two entities at its most basic level. Between microorganisms and, on a larger scale, between individuals of a herd escaping a predator, it has been seen to occur at the cellular level.

Every day, we interact with the public through communication. We converse with each other. Through social media, email, phone conversations, body language, and other means, we depend on our communication abilities to strengthen our friendships. Order food, make purchases, etc.; voice our opinions; seek assistance in negotiating; accept offers; etc. Whatever the mode of communication written, spoken, nonverbal, listening, or visual if we don't have good communication. We put others and ourselves at danger. aside from technological and structural obstacles. Communication barriers are obstacles or challenges that arise throughout the communication process and prevent messages from being effectively sent or comprehended by the recipients, according to the researcher. The most well-known theory that highlights the impact of potential barriers during communication is most likely the Shannon and Weaver Model of Communication.

**Language Barrier for International Students**

The term "language barrier" is a metaphor that is mostly used to describe the challenges that students encounter when attempting to interact with one another in the absence of a common language. Unless one or both sides learn a new foreign language, which requires time and effort to acquire, there is limited communication. Language problems are a common problem for tourists visiting other countries. Learning a new language is a challenging process, and "overcoming the language barrier" can be especially difficult for an adult who moves to a new nation. Similar issues arise at international conferences, where it can be expensive, difficult, and error-prone to secure translation services.

Language barriers affect people's capacity to obtain information as well as their willingness to ask for assistance. With so many students studying abroad these days, poor English competence could be a big concern for international students. "Language barriers" end up being the largest issue of international students studying abroad, particularly in China, among all the issues they face. Many students also experience helplessness and excessive stress as a result of this. Several studies show how challenging the language barrier is for international students, noting that the climate of the classroom and the interaction between teachers and students are the main factors contributing to these challenges. He hypothesized that, of all the variables, language is "the first barrier encountered by international students." International students have three main hurdles, not just language barriers: anxiety related to learning a second language, educational pressures, and societal stressors.

**Initial Transition**

Upon their arrival in a foreign country, international students are required to complete several activities such as locating housing, obtaining a social security number, enrolling in classes, and becoming proficient in using the most convenient mode of transportation. International students report higher academic and professional needs and, in comparison to their domestic counterparts, tend to have more adjustment challenges and distress during their initial move to university. Language hurdles in particular can have a detrimental effect on pupils' adjustment and well-being during this shift. Their inability or difficulty speaking English may cause them to interact with the new society more slowly while they try to meet their immediate requirements.

**Academic Life**

In the academic environment, obstacles like the difficulty foreign students have speaking English can foster relationships with instructors and other people they interact with on a daily basis. In most cases, it
also helps to adjust to new teaching styles and curriculum, such as the requirement for in-class discussions or asking questions of the professor. Proficiency in the English language is a crucial component in forecasting pupils' academic success. For instance, there is a positive correlation between first-year students' academic success and linguistic competency. Another area that worries international students about assimilation is the curriculum and teaching methods. These issues cover test-taking strategies, classroom education, and oral communication in contexts like class discussions. Research and exploration indicate that helping overseas students cope with these fears during their first semester of study can help them acclimate to their new academic environment.

Social Life
Making new acquaintances, adjusting to the lack of social support at home, and creating a new network of social support are additional challenges faced by international students. Studies have shown that lower academic success and unpleasant psychological experiences like bewilderment, tension, and despair are specifically caused by loss and a lack of social support. Specific responses to the host nation and culture may differ after the students are in the new country. While some students immerse themselves deeply in the culture of their host nation, others could experience unfavorable feelings and grow aloof.

Psychological Understandings
Events like homesickness, confusion, depression, and emotions of helplessness, alienation, and loneliness are all considered psychological explanations. Academic stress is something that both international and native students deal with. Unfortunately, foreign students typically lack access to comparable stress-reduction tools. Stress-related diseases including depression or anxiety may result from these strains combined with a lack of resources. According to certain research, pupils' psychological reactions vary in terms of intensity and kind depending on where they are from. According to their reports, students from Europe, Asia, Central/South America, and Africa, for instance, have less acculturative stress. International non-European students may face prejudice, which can result in sadness, low self-esteem, and other mental health issues. Additionally, it might prod them to associate with foreign organizations instead of those from the host culture.

Cultural Differences for International Students
Beyond language barriers, international students' interactions with different cultures may still have an impact on their academic achievement and learning styles. Students from several Asian, European, and Latin American cultures, for example, might have been taught that it is impolite to look directly at lecturers during their talk, to ask direct questions of them, or to disagree with their ideas and emotions. Different cultures also have different tolerance levels and understandings of their audiences. For example, students may have been taught that it is disrespectful and egotistical to express their thoughts forcefully and explicitly in writing or during conversations. They likely have also been shown not to speak in class unless called upon. Depending on their school culture, they may have had more practice memorising information than asking questions or sharing their point of view. The sender of the message who possesses the notion is the information source, according to the Shannon and Weaver model (1963). The brain transmits the message to the lips, where it is conveyed and disrupted reaches the recipient before continuing on to additional recipients.
The aforementioned loophole demonstrates the method by which a message travels to its intended recipient, where it occasionally gets misinterpreted or twisted before being sent, altering the meaning of the message in the end. Due to the restricted feedback in face-to-face training, this may occur more in distant learning. According to Gould (1969), inadequate preparation, linguistic incapacity, time and distance, among other individual characteristics, are the causes of inefficient communication. According to Hahn (2005), for the sender and the recipient of the communication to comprehend one another, there needs to be a shared understanding of the meanings of words, gestures, tone of voice, and other symbols. People must get beyond obstacles that stand in the way of effective communication, including disparities in perception, improper filtering, language difficulties, inattentive listening, divergent emotional states, and different backgrounds.

Communication difficulties were categorized into seven groups by Tanwar et al. (2009). Physical barriers, such as those caused by distance, poor hearing, personal physical health, and environmental disruptions, are among them. (a) Mechanical impediments associated with malfunctioning machinery, a lack of communication channels, radio and television disruptions, a lack of appropriate machinery, the existence of malfunctioning machinery, power outages: (c) Mental barriers, which include attitude-based social evils, bad pronunciation, disorganized thought processes, communication overload, and needless repetitions; (d) Cross-cultural barriers, which include social, religious, and ethnic distinctions, customs, and obstacles to group membership; (e) Perception hurdles, such as a lack of shared experience, a vocabulary and language gap, a lack of understanding, an excessive use of abstractions, interrupting the speaker, asking too many questions, sending mixed signals, using unfinished sentences, and failing to provide clarifications; (f) Interpersonal barriers, which include rituals, hobbies, and, in the end; (g) Gender barriers: women are more accommodative, prioritize courtesy, desire empathy, and prefer dialogue for establishing rapport. However, men talk to maintain their status and independence by showcasing their knowledge and abilities, solving problems individually, being more directive in conversation, being more intimidating, drawing attention to their accomplishments, and controlling meetings’ conversations.

According to Graham (2012), barriers to communication will always exist no matter how effective the communication system. These barriers can be caused by a variety of things, including system designs, physiological barriers, individual linguistic abilities, psychological factors, different languages, physical barriers, and barriers based on attitudes and attitudes. The surroundings’ inherent qualities provide physical hurdles, such as distance, inadequate equipment, staff storage, background noise, and ambient conditions.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were posed to guide the conduct of this study.

1. What is the main obstacle/Challenges/Barriers of international students in (NENU) china?
2. How can international students overcome communication gap?
Literature Review

Asia makes up more than 85% of New Zealand's student body, according to Campbell and Li (2007). There are rumors that the New Zealand educational system is trouble-free for overseas students. To put it another way, the programs, educational principles, and learning support provided to overseas students are satisfactory to them. Narration and voice, which are a component of language barrier, therefore represent their only obstacle. Most overseas students have communication issues due to language and cultural barriers, which can be difficult to overcome and lead to challenges in establishing friends back home and interacting with instructors and subordinates in the classroom, among other things (Campbell & Li, 2007). As a result of globalization, English has become a crucial component of all international studies, whether the focus is on writing, speaking, or listening. The study claims that a large number of international students from Asian, European, or Western nations struggle severely with language comprehension when learning and speaking. As a result, it increases their lack of confidence and lowers their level of participation in class (Sawir & Erlenawati, 2005).

Around the world, studying abroad is regarded as beneficial for both students and host nations. In order to address these needs, students all over the world choose to pursue their postsecondary education abroad (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). While obtaining subject-specific knowledge and abilities is necessary to take advantage of educational chances abroad and get ready to compete in an international platform (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019). International students may encounter several challenges in their host countries while pursuing their education, including but not limited to academic, cultural, language, social, lonely, and living management issues in an unfamiliar and novel setting (Mohamed, 2020). Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the difficulties and strategies for adjustment faced by international students. For example, Tuerxun et al. (2020) studied six foreign students from three different Malaysian universities. The main obstacles were identified by the study as being homesickness, food, weather, social contact, and ongoing expenses.

According to Lee (2017), among other things, communication barriers are linked to the academic challenges faced by international students, and these can have a detrimental impact on their emotions, such as embarrassment, disappointment, and boredom. The language barrier is identified as the main issue these students face. Moreover, international students exhibit a high degree of Chinese language speaking anxiety, according to Akram et al. (2019).

Similar to this, Australian institutions reported that perceived prejudice, budgetary concerns, and adjusting to new pedagogical approaches were all major problems (Sanagavarapu & Abraham, 2020). A comparative study between domestic and international students at a US public university was done by Jones (2017), and the results showed that, in comparison to domestic students, international students had a significantly larger problem with a lack of social support. According to Lee et al. (2019), an additional study revealed that while local students do not experience loneliness or homesickness in their host colleges, overseas students do. Furthermore, research indicates that international students' adjustment problems are significantly influenced by factors such as gender, country of origin, and grade/year in school (Chavoshi et al., 2017).

Methods

The study's goal was to comprehend the experiences of overseas students at Northeast Normal University Changchun, China, with regard to communication difficulties, hence a qualitative case study methodology was chosen. Given that case studies are essentially narratives about the topic being studied, they represent the most suited qualitative research method for this particular study. Research that examines a few cases in great detail is referred to as a case study, according to Gomm et al. (2000).

The number of respondents was chosen using the purposeful sampling technique. The selection of a sample "based on your own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of your research aims" is known as purposeful sampling (Babbie, 97). According to Frey et al. (132), the population is thus
"non-randomly selected based on a particular characteristic." The specific traits are chosen to address pertinent queries on a "certain matter or product" (Mac Nealy, 157). The researcher can then choose individuals by using their internal knowledge of that particular attribute. This approach is helpful for studying "a small subset of a larger population in which many members of the subset are easily identified but the enumeration of all is nearly impossible" (Babbie, 97).

**Study Process**

Out of the 110 students enrolled in the university, six were chosen to participate. They are enrolled in various majors and programs at Northeast Normal University. The researcher saw himself as an insider researcher because of his friendships with each subject. I was able to perform research with a population that I am a member of thanks to this insider status. The students and I are in the same class. I was also able to gain the participants' acceptance more quickly and fully because of my insider position.

Due to the participants' academic obligations, interview sessions were conducted at their apartments in the Shixun building and international student dormitories. There were ten to fifteen minutes in each interview. The audio recording of the interviews was done. The interview questions pertain to overseas students since during this time they were having trouble communicating at the institution.

In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, so all participants answered the identical research questions, allowing us to delve further into the data provided by their answers. This method is justified by the need to comprehend the respondent's perspective as opposed to drawing broad conclusions. This kind of interview was valuable since it gave me the chance to think about topics I hadn't previously thought of. Tanveer (2007) said. The following are some additional benefits of interviews as presented by Dowsett: "Control and power" for interview subjects, "flexibility" for researchers, and "access to other peoples' lives" (quoted in Nunan, 1992, p. 150). The language of the interviews was English. After an interview, transcripts were made right away. The table that follows displays the demographic details.

**Table- Demographics of the Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Mr. A</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ms.T</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ms Y</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Master</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Analysis**

The majority of the data analysis, which was informed by numerous qualitative studies and led by the literature and research questions, was inductive. Review and transcription of individual interviews were done. The data were classified using a thematic coding procedure, and for additional analysis, emerging topics were examined separately and in relation to other interviews. These categories, which were listed in the order of the coded transcripts, represented the challenges and obstacles that the participants faced in various contexts (academic, social, and cultural approaches used to overcome these challenges and suggestions for higher education institutions). Every theme is covered under each category, and then participants' suggested and possible tactics are listed.

**Findings and Discussions**

The results showed that overseas students in China faced a variety of obstacles. It is up to them to adjust to the people, society, university, psychological state, and behavioural shifts in their new surroundings. The categories for the findings will include social, cultural, and academic factors. Four themes pertaining to their challenges were found under academic hardship.
Academic Barrier
During the interviews, participants spoke about study-related topics for a considerable amount of the time. Every participant, irrespective of cultural background, expressed satisfaction with their teachers' kindness, professionalism, and approachability. However, many mentioned that linguistic obstacles, cultural disparities, and differing expectations from instructors made it difficult for them to communicate with their professors.

Theme (Interaction with Teachers)
In the classroom where students were learning Chinese, there were particular problems with interaction and communication. Students from societies where individualism and collectivism are valued both experienced this. An example of such behaviour would be someone who interrupts a professor in the middle of their statement (Excerpt 1). Furthermore, foreign students are concerned of being identified as such. As a result of their need for greater accommodations from instructors and peers, students stated that receiving acknowledgment is important to them.

Excerpt 1
In an attempt to ask a question, I also attempted raising my hand. However, I kept quiet until the instructors noticed me. I have to persevere. In my country, it's considered improper to interrupt a lecturer from a university. If the topic is passed and I am ignored, then I may participate. Students did not raise their hands, but the lecturer went on talking to other students. I choose not to respond to the professor's queries by simply not voicing my ideas. I'm not going to wait on anyone. Just talking goes on between them.

Excerpt 2
I wanted to know if the lecturer was aware of my status as an international student. He might not be able to comprehend me, which is why I'm hesitant to join. Assuming I can articulate myself well, I suppose he could wonder if I didn't study very hard. Writing and grading can differ greatly at times as well. It differed greatly from what I knew how they had rated the paper. As an illustration, they requested that I write my concept in a simpler, more straightforward manner. Despite my best efforts, I occasionally require more time to adjust to the material we covered in class.

Theme (Isolation from Classmates)
When one fits in and makes friends, one becomes isolated. In this study, international students experienced varying degrees of social and academic isolation. These kids typically begin by playing a more passive role, but they gradually learn new ways to participate in class discussions and social events.

Excerpt 3
My greatest obstacle right now is making friends in both school and in daily life. I make most of my friends from Japanese student associations these days. I don't know how to make friends with my classmates. To talk with my students, I'm waiting for them to arrive.

Theme (Language Barrier)
One major barrier to participants' adjustment to academics is language. Even though they had studied English for several years in their native countries, many participants said that studying abroad presented challenges for them. Distinct accents, speech rates, and pronunciations are the causes of the language barriers. For numerous individuals, it takes more time to get their English better.

Excerpt 4
Many words are difficult for me to understand when I'm listening, especially when it comes to speech tempo and pronunciation. I am enrolled in a course in China. In my native country, I attend English classes as well. They differ greatly from one another, though. In my native nation, I have excellent comprehension of English. It seems to be an easier version to understand, in my opinion. It moves really quickly here. I can only hear that portion of the talk right now. I could occasionally interpret things incorrectly. I'm not
laughing, but my classmates are.

**Cultural Barrier**
Participants came from a variety of backgrounds, not all of which were Chinese. The participants thus suffered from culture shock as a result of their disparate belief and value systems. They had to adjust to new communication styles, value systems, social contact signs and symbols, and patterns of interpersonal relationships as they entered a new society. International students had to deal with the cultural conventions about time management, for instance. It can occasionally easily lead to misunderstandings and anxiety. The following discusses more pertinent specific themes.

**Theme (Responding to Discrimination Against Foreign Students)**
Prejudice and discrimination at work and in social settings were reported by international students. They were so excluded from social gatherings and classes. Peers may not have understood their origins, according to participants, and they may have drawn judgments about them. According to the participants, they would be open to sharing their background information with their peers. This assertion highlighted the willingness of international students to speak up in order to foster cross-cultural understanding.

**Excerpt 5**
According to what I've heard from several of my acquaintances, some foreigners dislike other international students. Why is beyond me. I so get the impression that i might not be very popular with them. I don't get many opportunities these days to meet new individuals. I will actually be happy to talk about my past. After that, they could have second thoughts. Since i am having a lot of trouble communicating here.

**Adjustment Strategies**
There is evidence that a variety of adjustment problems that affect international students might affect their studies and general experience make studying abroad far from easy. The personal accounts of international students, their ability to recognize obstacles and devise solutions, can be beneficial to other international students, even if colleges frequently offer support services for international students. The university has been instrumental in helping international students adjust, as seen by the themes that follow.

**Theme (Campus Activities and Dormitory)**
Participants actively explored the new community and culture in try to overcome these obstacles. To increase their communication and English proficiency, for instance, a small number of participants began looking for a roommate who spoke the language fluently. An individual involved became a member of an alternative student organization. In order to socialize, she enjoys immersing herself in the company of other English-speaking students and sharing her cultures with them on campus. That is to say, they actively participate in various university events to expand their social networking.

**Theme (Language Support)**
Even though the majority of overseas students demonstrated fluency in written and comprehension English upon admission to universities, they encountered several challenges when it came to oral communication in a learning environment. He had anticipated receiving more language support while he studied for his degree.

**Excerpt 6**
In my native nation, I have completed numerous reading and writing English courses. I'm anxious to speak when I have to interact with others. Sometimes, they spoke so quickly or I had trouble understanding their lingo. There are two things I can do: schedule additional time with my discussion partners or visit a writing center to practice speaking with tutors.

The results are shown in this section along with additional explanations. The results showed that foreign students had distinct difficulties and employed various coping mechanisms.
Reliability of the Results
The researchers reevaluated the coding and transcribed the data using a different coding in order to guarantee the reliability of the results. It is allowed to code the same data twice or more for researchers in order to assure the quality and dependability of the results (Miles et al., 2013). Thus, a seasoned colleague reevaluated the coding to guarantee the accuracy of the outcomes.

Conclusions
International students' academic, social, and cultural adaptation was investigated in this study using qualitative research methods. International students from several nations are included in this study in order to uphold the generalization. Based on the research, it was found that foreign students who enrol in Chinese university frequently experience a number of transitional challenges. Conversely, these obstacles also spur international students to create problem-solving solutions. They create novel learning strategies to overcome obstacles as they grow into autonomous learners. Time, effort, and a great deal of support from various sources are required for the adjustment and adaptation. Given that universities are typically the first places where resources may be supplied, they should pay special attention to the difficulties experienced by overseas students and make additional resources available.

Limitation and Suggestion
Given that this study concentrated on a particular subset of international students at a single university, its conclusions should be carefully evaluated. As a result, there is little chance that the results will apply to other groups of foreign students. Other factors, including motivation, cultural background, personality, and attitude about living and studying in China, were not reported in this study due to time and word constraints. Other determinants for these populations should be extensively examined in future research.

Ethical Considerations
The subjects have been treated with dignity, their privacy has been maintained, and no negative consequences have resulted from the researchers' actions. The respondents' informed agreement was obtained before any interviews were carried out. Initials such as AJ, TY, R, and A.H. were used in place of the participants' names in order to protect their privacy.

Conflict of interest: Authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

Funding: This study has not received funding from any source.

Acknowledgment
With special appreciation to Professor Wang Lijuan for her supervision of this work and to all the participants who took part in the study. Her enthusiasm, knowledge, and tender attention have inspired and guided this effort.

References


