



Review Article

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# Chinese Student's Proneness to Acculturative Stress in a Dual Degree Program

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## Introduction

In this article, the acculturative stress issues that Chinese students can encounter in a dual degree program will be presented. The objective is to create awareness of what international students go through during their college years and attempt to address the possible issues. Temporary complications can be encountered by students from other countries who decide to complete a degree in an American school [1]. However, students can work on their areas of strengths and weaknesses to overcome these challenges. This article will suggest ways to manage these difficulties and ways to avoid acculturative stress.

As an international student, the propensity to experience situations that are not desirable or pleasant is extremely high. The entire development when two cultures encounter with interaction, participation, adjustment, and struggle is called "acculturation" [2]. Consequently, acculturation can develop stress in an international student. [3] defines acculturative stress as "stress that directly results from and has its source in the acculturative process, often resulting in a particular set of stress behaviors that include anxiety, depression, feelings of marginality and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptoms, and identity confusion."

Students who are enrolled in an international dual degree program go through a different process of adaptation than those in a typical 4-year college degree. Chinese students need to figure out how college works in their home country during the first two years. Students are required to take numerous courses and they barely have time to finish their assignments on time. For most Chinese students' stress is mainly developed by the desire to make their parents proud and to be admitted in a high rated college. In addition, students need to figure out how to balance their social life

and academic life. Once those first two years pass, students have to get prepared to go to a new environment to finish their degree. In order to adapt to a new environment, a student needs time to familiarize and readjust to a new way of living. It can be argued that Chinese students who study in a dual degree program need to go through the process of adaptation twice. This is when acculturative stress might take place in their college journey. Individuals' health decrease in their body system, mind, and socialization can be caused by acculturative stress [3]. Therefore, it is very important to address this issue from its root, in order to make such programs successful.

## Second Process of Adaptation: Acculturative Stress Might Arise

Chinese students' health can be affected by stress, food, depression and some other factors caused by the acculturation process. Students who are enrolled in a dual degree program go through this process when they move to the designated country to finish their program. This is where the process of adaptation restarts for a college student. Once students are adapted and have developed their life skills, they need to change their minds and make it work in a whole new country. Therefore, the skills that they have already developed need to be readapted to be relevant in a whole new culture and environment. The following strategies to help Chinese students reduce or avoid acculturative stress are based on the 4 implications offered by [1].

## English Programs for Chinese Students

According to Burrows [4] "The Chinese student needs to acquire good communication skills and fluent written and spoken English in order to absorb the culture of western academic writing" (p. 22).



However, most students are not able to improve their language skills sufficiently. This is due to the fact that they might not have enough time in their rigorous schedules, or they have other priorities in life. During their first two years of college, administrators and professors should increase the awareness of the importance of practicing their English in order to succeed in an American college. By doing this, students will be more prepared to go through college with a good language level and stress can be reduced.

While it might seem logical to simply increase the credit hours of English language courses that students are required to complete, a better approach would be to provide a language lab. The reason this approach is superior is that language learning is highly individualized, and a language lab can provide one on one, face to face assistance that is impractical in a classroom environment. Also, in a language lab, the student can focus directly on the writing skill they wish to improve. This direct connection to their personal need for improvement is very motivating to students. By the time Chinese students arrive at Oklahoma State University, they should be encouraged to attend the Student Success Center – a center that supports students' academic improvement – in the Ferguson College of Agriculture [5]. By doing this, students will feel supported by the department and motivated to ask for help if needed.

### **Awareness of Cultural Differences for Faculty, Staff, and Students**

A suggestion that can be implemented to increase the success of Chinese students, is to increase the awareness, among all students, of the differences between local and international students. Those differences can be a factor that influences their academic and social development. For example, the fact that professors categorize Chinese students as shy or introverted can affect a student's motivation. Colleges can find methods to diminish the learning difficulties in a different culture with the implementation of workshops related to society, culture, and language that tackle acculturation issues, which might moderate the impact of acculturative stress [6]. By doing this, faculty members will be aware of what Chinese students are going through and will encourage them to be an example of how to respect international students by avoiding stereotypes and motivating them in their studies.

Some of the differences between U.S. and Chinese students can be identified as characteristics that the Chinese students can be proud of. For example,

Chinese students seem to be

- A. sincerely motivated by the desire to have success in their university programs and subsequent careers,
- B. deeply respectful of university faculty,
- C. strongly connected to their own nuclear families and
- D. desirous of having an impactful and meaningful life.

These characteristics have traditionally led to both academic and career success. On the other hand, they might not easily understand the U.S. students who are

- i. risk takers willing to try non-conventional career opportunities,
- ii. entrepreneurs with ideas that might lead to either prosperity or failure (with high levels of outcome uncertainty),
- iii. willing to move across the country to start a career where they have no family relationships and
- iv. more interested in experiences, teamwork and an impactful life than they are in traditional measures of success [7].

### **Reinforce Counseling Services**

Being so far away from home can make a student feel homesick. Many other situations can contribute to make a student feel stressed or anxious about being so far from home. For example, when their families are going through a rough time or family problems arise. In these situations, students would want to help as much as they can even if it is not "in their hands". In addition, academic challenges and social relations can be other factors that increase their anxiety or stress. A way to address this issue is to encourage Chinese students to attend counseling services. Although it seems easy, it might not be so easy to actually have them engage in the counseling process.

A way to promote this process would be that every Chinese student can be assigned to a person who can guide them and help them adapt to the new environment. This person can be a student, American or another nationality, who has been enrolled at least for two years in college and has been abroad. The role of this student would be to mentor the Chinese student through college by giving support and showing him or her where the services are located. Counseling would be a secondary method to help the student go through any more serious problem he or she is currently facing. Depending on an analysis of the issue, the student could be encouraged to work with either the mentor or a counselor [8].

### **Provide Specialized Readjustment**

Once Chinese students arrive at an American college, a way to provide comfort and immediate assistance is to offer them a special orientation based on American culture. This will help them adjust to the culture and avoid misunderstandings. It will also help them know a little bit more about their professors and classmates. This can be helpful inside and outside the classroom. It might help them create close relationships with international people and encourage them to ask more questions about anything they need. University society in the United States is one of the most culturally, ethnically

and racially diverse environments in the world, and it alone can require a significant adjustment.

Often, when an international student arrives on an American college campus, this is the first time they themselves have been characterized as “the Chinese student”, or as a cultural representative of whatever country they come from. They are not used to carrying the entire cultural baggage of their home country as their personal identity. Campus diversity programs that educate American students about internationalization can also help to reduce the tension level of this particular identity issue.

## Conclusions

When acculturative stress introduces itself into an international student's life, it might be quite hard to overcome. So many issues are going on in college life that students need to find ways to handle every single issue. By promoting English programs for Chinese students, the language factor can be addressed by assisting them in their academic development. This will make students feel less stressed about their assignments and deadlines. Therefore, students will be able to focus on social relations and avoid feeling lonely. When presentations related to cultural awareness and readjustment to a new country are provided, students will be able to focus on the aspects that they might not be comfortable with and attempt to address them. In Universities trying to implement

a successful dual-degree program with a counterpart university in China, faculty, staff, and students should be aware of the challenges that Chinese students have to overcome during their second stage of adaptation in order to help them succeed in their academic life.

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