

The Induction Needs of International Students at Postgraduate Level

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Abstract

Thames Valley University, like most new universities, is actively seeking to increase the number of international students it recruits to its programmes, and, once the students are studying with us, to maximise their retention rates. It is the contention of this paper that an important factor affecting the opinions of international students concerning their British higher educational establishment is the ease with which they become accustomed to the culture of the institution, both in terms of the overall culture and the specific learning environment in which they are to operate.

This pilot stage of the research project was undertaken with students from the Pre-MBA programme at TVU who were from Mainland China or the Indian subcontinent. Structured interviews were undertaken with each student at the beginning of their programme, and the analysis of these interviews, and the implications of the findings, forms the basis of this paper.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors influencing the choice of overseas university of our international students?
2. What aspects of the pre-arrival process did the international students consider to have been effectively and ineffectively handled?
3. What aspects of the encounter process did the international students consider to have been effectively and ineffectively handled?
4. What aspects of the metamorphosis process did the international students consider to have been effectively and ineffectively handled?

The findings from this pilot study are contrasted with those from existing research, and a set of tentative recommendations is provided, along with an indication of future work to be undertaken.

Introduction

The assertion of Rees and Porter (1998) that the provision of education to international students has become an increasingly important source of income for British universities would be vigorously supported in Thames Valley University. Like

most new universities, it is actively seeking to increase the number of international students it recruits to its programmes. The success of this process depends on a number of factors, such as the nature and range of programmes on offer, the effectiveness of the marketing of these programmes and the recommendations of international students already on the programmes. It is the contention of this paper that an important factor affecting the opinions of international students concerning their British higher educational establishment is the ease with which they become accustomed to the culture of the institution, both in terms of the overall culture and the specific learning environment in which they are to operate.

A further issue of importance, of course, is not just the recruitment of international students, but also their retention. It is possible to suggest that improved acculturation would reduce the number of international students who are unsuccessful in their studies due to a lack of understanding of the learning culture at the university, or a lack of skills in benefiting from it.

The research on which this paper is based concentrates on international students from Mainland China, who are currently enrolled on a post-graduate programme of study. The responses from this group are contrasted with those from another, namely those from the Indian subcontinent. These groups have been selected because they have significantly different historical relationships with the British higher education system and because they constitute a significant proportion of the postgraduate international student body at TVU.

The research aims to establish the nature of the specific enculturation needs of these international students so that these needs can be met in more creative and innovative ways than has been the case in the past. Not only are academic and support staff development opportunities likely to be identified, but also opportunities for the creative redesign of induction programmes.

Background to the research

Leaving aside the economic advantages that the recruitment of international students provide for the British university system, it is our contention that the participation of such students in the system, particularly in TVU's post-graduate management programmes, is potentially a benefit to all participants. Baron *et al.* (2001:314) claim that

There is no doubt that international students enrich the learning process through sharing cultural norms and life experiences, differing communication styles, and distinct learning styles.

Unfortunately, however, the enthusiasm for attracting such students is not always met with a similar enthusiasm for optimising the conditions in the University environment that will permit them to both maximise their own learning opportunities and the benefits they might offer to other participants. This paper discusses work undertaken by the authors in their efforts to investigate and optimise such conditions. The approach taken is essentially one of tracing the socialization process encountered by our international students on entry to the TVU system.

Socialization may be defined as "the process through which an individual's pattern of behaviour, and their values, attitudes and motives are influenced to conform with

those seen as desirable in a particular organization, society or sub-culture" (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001:122). They use a three-stage model of the socialization process (*ibid.* 634) comprising pre-arrival, encounter and metamorphosis, and our research investigated the experience of selected groups of international students at these three stages. A partial validation of this model may be found in the work of Pascale (1985), who emphasised the role of the selection process, the efficacy of instruction on appropriate ways of thinking and behaving, and the successful reinforcement of desired behaviours in the socialization process. An endorsement of the first stage is also found in Mullins' (2002:754) work

Effective induction is a continuous process covering the first few months... but it can be viewed as an extension of the recruitment and selection procedure starting with the selection process.

At the pre arrival stage, one of the aspects of interest to British educators is the range of variables that might influence the decision to study at a particular University. Mazzarol and Souter (2002:82) have commented on the importance of historical or colonial links in determining the direction of international student flow. An earlier paper by Mazzarol *et al.* (1997) identifies six factors that have been found to influence student choice of an international higher education institution. Firstly, they emphasise the importance of **knowledge and awareness of the host country**. The international standing of the potential host country's qualifications is an important component of this factor. Secondly, they report the impact of **personal recommendation**, whether this is from a friend, family member or sponsor. Thirdly, **cost considerations** are raised. This includes obvious components such as exchange rates, cost of living, as well as fees, but also aspects such as the availability of part-time work and social costs such as crime and racial discrimination. The fourth factor identified is **the environment**, which relates to the physical climate and lifestyle of the potential host country. Fifthly, they identify the **geographic proximity** as a factor, and particularly the ease of transport. Finally, they discuss the **social links**, by which they mean whether or not the intending student has family or friends already living in the country. The questions raised by Mazzarol *et al.* are repeated in this study, to ascertain the extent to which their Australian based findings are replicated in the UK.

Returning to the topic of socialization *per se*, some of the traditional theoretical perspectives may be seen as rather ethnocentric. The work of Bandura (1977; 1986), for example, concentrates on social learning, by which he means learning new behaviours through observing and copying the behaviour of others. Interpersonal positive or negative reinforcement is used in the consolidation of this learning into one's behavioural repertoire. Huczynski and Buchanan (2001:124) assert that

"The 'rewards for good behaviour' method appears broadly consistent with American.. cultural values and aspirations. The transfer of this to other cultures is questionable."

It is possible to suggest that some conventional induction methods used with international students have followed the socialisation approach based on Bandura's work. Constructing seminar groups or learning sets where there is a designed multi-cultural mix could be seen as an example of this, as there is the intention of the students learning appropriate approaches to student life from one another. Even the

provision of a "buddy" system may have such principles of socialisation at its root. If, as stated above, this is an essentially ethnocentric approach, how can effective induction opportunities be provided for the international student? The issue of mentoring is addressed in the research project, and will be discussed below. Suffice it to say at this stage that the international students appeared to find it a positive rather than a negative aspect of their induction, and calls into question the problems of ethnocentrism referred to above.

In this paper, the perceptions of students from China about their experiences of induction and socialization into the British university environment are examined, with the aim of ascertaining the extent to which transference of traditional models of socialization is effective. Students from China constitute an increasing proportion of the post-graduate management students at TVU. This may be due to the trend that Chan (1999:294) discusses, namely that

"There has been a renewed interest in Western management expertise and techniques by the Chinese with increasing emphasis placed on higher level learning for managers "

Chan (1999:295) also comments on the expectations of the Chinese about "the high expectations about the quality of education provided by host countries such as Britain and America". The high female composition of the Chinese cohort at TVU confirms the point made by McKeen and Bu (1998:171) that "the education of women has also improved drastically in China, with the enrolment of females in post-secondary education increasing tenfold in the last 50 years."

McKeen and Bu (1998) compared Chinese students with Canadian students in terms of their occupational focus, and found that the former were more career focussed than their Canadian counterparts. They attached more importance to their career, devoted more time to it, and would interrupt it primarily to further their education. This suggests that they will have high expectations of their educational experience, given the perceived opportunity cost entailed. The extent to which these expectations are met is one component of this project.

Martinsons and Martinsons (1996) indicate a range of other ways in which cultural differences between Chinese students and their Western counterparts may influence their experience of the British higher education system. They point out the importance of Confucianism as the overriding cultural influence in Chinese society, and the impact that this has on classroom behaviour.

"Confucianism is based on authoritarian principles, with technical expertise and positional power being the basis for this authority. Social stability is based on unequal relationships between people. Subordinates are expected to follow, without questioning, the decisions of their superiors. Thus, rote learning is consistent with Confucian values. It is based on great respect for those teaching and passive subordination by those being taught. Students are expected to assimilate knowledge from their teachers, without questioning it". (1996:19)

This is supported by Chan (1999:298), who claims that the acquisition of "a vast store of knowledge through rote memorisation" is the main focus of the Chinese education system. This learning style has significant implications for Western attitudes towards plagiarism. She reinforces the fact that Chinese learners have

been "brought up to respect wisdom, knowledge and expertise of parents, teachers and trainers". All of these cultural dimensions lead to the inevitable conclusion that "the participative approaches commonly used in Western teaching may therefore cause a problem for Chinese learners."

Chan (1999:299) also points out that "the Chinese prefer not to express their true opinions so as not to embarrass or offend others". The nature of the learning experience in British management programmes is likely to provide uncomfortable challenges to this preference. This is exacerbated by the fact that many Chinese students would feel that "ineffective teaching is taking place if they are continually asked in class to express their opinions or to solve a problem by themselves" (Chan, 1999:301).

Rees and Porter's work (1998:211) suggests that this is a wider issue. They claim that management students from a range of developing countries may be more accustomed to prescriptive teaching than to experiential learning, for example. However, the need for these students to apply the management concepts and techniques acquired on management courses to their own national context renders the prescriptive approach, while reassuring to such students in the short-term, "of little use in practice when they have to deal with the actual problem in their own country". Rees and Porter are adamant that

"As management involves accepting responsibility it is particularly important that students be encouraged to develop their ability to handle responsibility. A way of doing this is for them to accept a significant responsibility for their own learning about management and to develop an interactive and participative relationship with their tutors." (1999:211)

Again, it is important to consider the extent to which the induction or socialization process for international students prepares them for such a "responsibility", and in what ways they acquire the study skills required of them to operate in this manner in the classroom.

An analysis of the literature above will demonstrate the wealth of information available on the Chinese student, and the dearth of parallel literature on students from the Indian sub continent. Nevertheless, the authors considered that these two groups of international post-graduate students would form an interesting contrast. There have been important different historical connections between Britain and China and Britain and the Indian sub continent, for example in the similarities of educational qualification nomenclature in the latter case, but not in the former. It was anticipated, therefore, that these might be factors affecting the immediate socialisation processes experienced by these two groups of students. The choice of these two groups also allowed us to compare our findings with those of Mazzarol and Suter (2002).

Methodology

The research on which this paper is based is essentially a pilot survey. It is anticipated that the findings will enable a programme of structured interviews to be undertaken in the future, leading to the formulation of a questionnaire that can be used with a wider sample of international students.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors influencing the choice of overseas university of our international students?
2. What aspects of the pre-arrival process did the international students consider to have been effectively handled?
3. What aspects of the pre-arrival process did the international students consider to have been ineffectively handled?
4. What aspects of the encounter process did the international students consider to have been effectively handled?
5. What aspects of the encounter process did the international students consider to have been ineffectively handled?
6. What aspects of the metamorphosis process did the international students consider to have been effectively handled?
7. What aspects of the metamorphosis process did the international students consider to have been ineffectively handled?

At this pilot stage we considered it to be essential that the issues, and, indeed, the language used by the students to describe their experiences, were not prescribed. Therefore an unstructured interview method was employed, whereby students were encouraged to talk about their experiences and decisions in their own terms. A copy of the interview prompts can be found in Appendix 1. Interviews were of approximately one hour's duration and were tape recorded, with the permission of the interviewees. The tapes were then transcribed and a basic content analysis was undertaken. The quotes provided in this paper are *verbatim* rather than in "corrected" English.

Due to limited resources, especially of time, the interviews were conducted with two groups of international students, namely students on the Pre-MBA programme from China and the Indian sub-continent. These groups were chosen because they are numerically significant sub-groups from this population, and because their information could be compared to data obtained by Mazzarol and Souter (2002). There is also a significant body of literature on the issues faced by Chinese students in studying in a western academic environment, as outlined above.

Analysis of Findings

Our findings are analysed under the headings of the seven research questions posed above.

What are the factors influencing the choice of overseas university of our international students?

An analysis of the responses relating to reasons for choosing TVU was undertaken, using Mazzarol's (1997) six factors as a template. Where appropriate, comparisons are also made with Mazzarol and Suter's (2002) findings.

Knowledge and awareness of the host country.

As Mazzarol and Suter (2002) discovered, the high status of overseas qualifications was paramount in influencing international students to study abroad. In their sample, 93% of the Indian students claimed that the perception of overseas courses being better than local courses was fundamental to their decision. On the other hand, 91% of the Chinese students claimed that the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the West was their prime motivation. In our research this distinction was not apparent, all of the Chinese respondents and all of those from the Indian sub-continent mentioned the status of British qualifications as important to their studying here. The following quote is indicative of the responses received:

“I can improve my English language and also because for China, if you get a Certificate or degree, Masters or something like that in UK, so it will be useful for you to develop your career.” (RC1)

Unlike Mazzarol and Suter's (2002) sample, which comprised students studying in Australia, our sample considered UK qualifications to be more highly regarded in their respective home countries than Australian qualifications – hardly surprising since they had elected to study here rather than in Australia!

Personal recommendation.

The majority of the students from the Chinese sample knew people who had studied at TVU, which bears out Mazzarol and Suter's (2002:85) finding that “word-of-mouth referral is one of the most powerful forms of promotion that international education institutions can use”. However, none of the students from the Indian sub-continent knew a former or current student. A larger survey will test this finding further.

Cost considerations.

It is interesting to note that only one of the respondents reported that cost was a factor in choosing TVU. Mazzarol and Suter (2002:86) found that postgraduate students from India viewed part-time work as an essential component of their studies, while none of our sample mentioned this. A possible explanation of the differences in these findings could be the perception the respondents in our sample had of the interviewer, who admitted to being a lecturer, and who might, therefore, be perceived as having a negative attitude towards full-time students engaging in paid employment.

The environment.

The image of London was clearly influential in both the Chinese and Indian sub-continent students' choice of study location.

“I preferred London to stay here and do my studies” (ISC4)

“Well, the first thing that came into my mind is that I need to base in London. I don’t want to be in other city” (RC3)

The sense of history and the “kind and gentle” people were explicitly stated as powerful components of the image of the UK. Again, the difference between Mazzarol and Suter’s (2002) Australian based sample and our own is evident, in that 87% of their Chinese sample mentioned climate as being a positive incentive, while the British weather was only mentioned in a negative sense by ours!

It is clear that the image held of England in general, and London in particular, was not extensively supported by their perception on arrival. The extent of litter was disappointing to those who had envisaged a clean environment, the traffic congestion was an unpleasant surprise to many, and there were some interesting variations between those who had expected a very modern city with sky scrapers, who considered London to be rather old and run down, and those who had anticipated being steeped in history, who found it to be too modern!

As will be discussed below, there was unanimous support from our sample for guided trips to London, and other parts of Britain so as to obtain a better perspective.

Geographic proximity.

This was obviously not a factor of significance for our sample.

Social links.

This aspect of factors affecting choice of country and university considers the role of an existing network of family and/or friends. In Mazzarol and Suter’s (2002:87) sample, 75% of the Indian sub-continent students had friends or relatives who had studied in the host country, and 62% had friends/relatives living there. The figures for the Chinese students in their study were 47% and 41% respectively.

The majority of our Chinese sample and all of our Indian sub-continent sample had friends and/or relatives living here, although in only two cases was this rated by them as an important determinant of final study destination. This is interesting when we consider that there were few relationships with former students of the university. This issue of course/university specific links, as opposed to more generalised family or social networks, will be examined at a later stage in the project.

What aspects of the pre-arrival process did the international students consider to have been effectively handled?

The quality of the TVU web site was mentioned as being a particularly effective information provider, especially by the Chinese sample.

“The Internet is perfect”(RC1)

“I used the Internet to do that research”(RC3)

For our interviewees from the Indian sub-continent, the quality of the prospectus appeared to be more important.

“I think on your prospectus you have mentioned a lot of things...more or less everything for international student to know”(ISC4)

The quality of the TVU representative who visited the English Language College attended by one of our Chinese sample was commended.

“TVU sent a lady to there to give a presentation and let us ask all the kinds of questions we had.....I think that is quite good” (RC2).

The speed with which queries were dealt with at the application stage, and the quality of the attention received, was praised by both groups within our sample.

“I would say TVU are quite concerned about overseas students, all the different kinds of service and they tried their best to help the student get the visa to come to England – everything.” (RC5).

What aspects of the pre-arrival process did the international students consider to have been ineffectively handled?

The quality of the accommodation service was universally criticised. This may be because the students who made up our sample arrive in January, and the allocation of accommodation for the majority of students is done in September.

“TVU desperately needs student accommodation of its own so that a student don't have to run here and there.”(ISC4)

It is certainly the case that TVU does not have residential accommodation for students, and this has long been identified as a significant weakness in our offer. However, in light of the financial situation, this is unlikely to change in the near future, and extra effort clearly needs to be devoted to those students, particularly from overseas, who arrive at different times in the Academic year.

A further aspect of the pre-arrival process that was mentioned in a critical manner was the information about the courses and their links in terms of progression. This is peculiar to students making up our sample, as they had enrolled on a Pre-MBA programme, the successful completion of which would give them entry to the MBA course. Some felt that the precise nature of this progression was not made clear before they arrived.

What aspects of the encounter process did the international students consider to have been effectively handled?

The positive aspects mentioned related primarily to personal contacts and the helpful and/or caring treatment they received from members of the academic and administrative staff. One example given of good practice was that one of the administrative staff gave a personal, one-to-one guided tour of the University

facilities. The friendliness of the staff and the extent to which Administrators are concerned about students was frequently mentioned. Students praised the way in which they were made to feel comfortable with their tutors.

“TVU is concerned about International students” was a comment that was made by virtually every interviewee.

What aspects of the encounter process did the international students consider to have been ineffectively handled?

As might be expected, the majority of the points raised here relate to the opposite of the above, namely the dearth of personal, often one-to-one, attention.

The students from the Indian sub-continent were critical of apparent misinformation concerning the starting date of the course. The official start date was in late January, but there had been information from one source that there was a September start, which caused some considerable inconvenience. There were also cases of students believing that the International Students’ Induction, run in early February, marked the start of the course, in spite of an attached letter from the programme administrator to the contrary. While this was, we believe, a one-off problem, it does indicate the need for absolute clarity in the information provided for students, particularly from overseas.

A major cause of negative feelings occurred where Chinese students had requested that they be met at the airport, had received confirmation that this would occur, and then were let down. It was difficult to pinpoint the extent of this as a problem, as only one member of our sample could be identified as suffering from this problem. However, it has clearly been circulated widely, and needs positive remedial work to overcome the perception that this is a frequent occurrence.

It is difficult to overestimate the culture shock experienced by the international students. They all mentioned practicalities, such as registration at the police station, travel cards, and registration with a doctor, as matters which they did not understand when they arrived, and which, they felt, were not handled effectively at induction.

Another aspect of culture shock for those arriving in London for the first time was their expectation that they would be able to understand the English that was spoken to them and that their English would be understood. They were very unsettled by the variety of accents, and this undermined their confidence significantly. The need for additional English classes, to run alongside the Induction programme was mentioned frequently by both nationalities in our sample.

“Most of the teachers can speak good English ... but in terms of the International students, they have to speak very slow, very clear and in a little bit broad accent so that a student can understand” (ISC4)

“No, I don’t have problems understanding the tutors because, you know, they speak professional English. But I do have a problem understanding the staffs and when I go to the bank, you know, the way they talk, I do have a problem understanding accents,”(ISC6)

This issue of additional English tuition will be revisited late in this paper.

All the Chinese students in our sample mentioned feelings of loneliness in the early period of their study. While this is to some degree inevitable, some felt that this was exacerbated by the lack of organised sporting activities and social events. It was generally felt that there was a dearth of opportunities for the students to integrate into the social life of the university. Whether this is a problem relating to the January start date, or the lack of a vigorous social life in the university for whatever reason, should be investigated further.

Some of the students from the Indian sub-continent mentioned the desirability of formal time set aside, particularly in the early days of the programme, for students to meet on their own, in a designated and booked classroom, to discuss amongst themselves issues of concern. It was felt that this would overcome some of the problems of insecurity about language and study skills, to which we will return later.

The Chinese students also referred to other aspects of the British culture that they found alienating. One example of this was the expectations of one student relating Bank Holidays. Her first such holiday was Easter, and she was looking forward to learning about and participating in the celebrations. She was bitterly disappointed to find the “celebrations” for her meant closed shops and no one around. This, and other examples that were given relating to cultural differences could be remedied by the introduction of some type of “buddy” system, as a number of our interviewees mentioned, and which will be discussed further below.

What aspects of the metamorphosis process did the international students consider to have been effectively handled?

All of the students interviewed considered the lecturing staff to be good, and some who had friends studying at other universities made very favourable comparisons between their experience of lecturing staff and programme administrators at TVU and the experience of friends studying elsewhere.

The Learning Resource Centre was praised, both in terms of the resources it provides and the facilities for study it offers.

What aspects of the metamorphosis process did the international students consider to have been ineffectively handled?

In response to the question concerning the extent to which they now felt part of the university, there was some criticism, echoed above, about the need for a personal tutor, as well as some sort of “buddy” system to encourage the feeling of belonging.

“Obviously, if someone is from Pakistan, and if somebody who’s staying here from last two years and studying, obviously in a senior group from Pakistan, he can tell his juniors that I was from Pakistan and I feel that these topics were hard and you have to go through it and you have to give a little more time on these.”(ISC4)

As mentioned above, there was a concern about the lack of a social life on campus, although it was recognised that the students on their course were not young undergraduates, but older people, many of whom had significant responsibilities other than studying.

One comment of note, which indicates a lack of appreciation of the culture in TVU, its local area and, indeed, a significant proportion of the UK, was that some of the

students did not feel part of the English education system because of the number of non-English students in TVU. It should also be noted that one particular student believed, before her arrival here, that all British people had blonde hair, so perhaps the classification of those without blonde hair, let alone white skin, as international students, can be understood! One of the students from the Indian sub-continent stated

“I’m living in Hounslow and most of them are Punjabis or Sikhs ...it is quite confusing seeing black faces like me, I mean, without seeing a white one”(ISC6)

Differences in learning and teaching.

Following on from the work of Chan (1999) and others referred to above, questions were asked of our sample relating to any differences they perceived in learning and teaching between the country in which they had studied as undergraduates and TVU.

One difference mentioned by the Chinese students was TVU’s requirement that they read widely. They were used to having one text per subject, and found this emphasis on the need to read widely daunting.

“And then here, besides you studying in the class, you need to spend more time, even more than the lecture give you the time, spending more time learning.” (RC2)

The expectation that students would undertake pre-reading was also novel to these students. The reading issue was not raised in the Indian sub-sample.

Furthermore, the role of the lecturer was different in China, according to all of the Chinese students in the sample, as the following quote illustrates:

“The tutors (*in China*) will go through every chapter by chapter – something like that. But here it’s not. The tutor only gives you a guideline or something like that. It won’t go through the lesson chapter by chapter.” (RC3)

“In China, I mean you just accept whatever the teacher teaches you”. (RC3)

All of the Chinese interviewees confirmed the importance of rote learning in China:

“You have to memorise lots of things. But here we don’t need to memorise” (RC1)

A further difference was the greater use of group working in the UK as opposed to China:

“The difference is the group work in the class. There’s not so much group work in the class in China.” (RC1)

“It is different in China. When I was in university most of the time the teacher would teach you what to do.... You don’t have too many activities, no group work, no presentation.”(RC5)

While group work *per se* was not viewed as a problem for these students, there was considerable nervousness reported due to the possibility of using incorrect English in such an exposed environment.

“Sometimes I get nervous because you are afraid your English is not perfect and sometimes you make some grammar mistakes and sometimes you are afraid that you don’t understand their meanings because they say something, some new words that you don’t know and then you have to ask and sometimes your pronunciation is not perfect and then they don’t understand you.”(RC5)

The students from the Indian sub-continent reported a different range of experiences with regard to learning and teaching. There was some replication of the importance of rote memorisation, although this was by no means universal.

“Sometimes, what happens is that when examination comes, you are just studying just to memorise that thing and you are not understanding a single word of it. What happens in this case, you can get good marks, obviously, but you cannot be a good professional person.”(ISC4)

There was also some interest in the role of the lecturer in the UK as opposed to the home university, where it was allegedly common for tutors to point out the need for students to pay their lecturers for extra tuition in order to pass the course.

Depending on the location of the home university, some of these students were unused to OHPs, having been taught with the aid of a chalkboard only.

“Well, you use slides and things and they will only write on the board. Not this slides and everything. And the class is quite crowded. You can’t believe. A hundred, two hundred, people in MBA and in the same class. And some of them are standing too”(ISC6)

A strong and unanimous theme running throughout the interviews with both groups in our sample was their insecurity with respect to our expectations of them as postgraduate students, and their desire for significantly more guidance from their tutors with respect to these expectations.

In the light of these differences, it is apparent that any effective induction of students with a similar background to those in our study would need to include significant input on the culture of learning in the university, and on study skills.

Conclusions

Our findings in relation to reasons given by International students for choosing TVU as their UK University follow many of the factors reported by Mazzarol and Suter (2002). The importance of the perceived value of a UK qualification and the role of social networks and personal recommendation featured prominently in the responses we received.

While there were important differences in the higher education experiences of the students in our sample, these were not along the lines anticipated. The differences between the Chinese and Indian sub continent students were not as great as we expected, and this, naturally, reminds us that it is all too easy to stereotype

inaccurately international students, or their component sub-groups. This pilot study has demonstrated that there may well be greater intracultural differences than intercultural differences among postgraduate students in terms of their learning and induction needs. It is our intention to expand this project to include a much wider range of international post-graduate students in order to examine further these points.

Initial Recommendations and Further Research.

Rees and Porter (1998:209) suggested that

“Those providers who take an ethnocentric approach, who do not take account of the special needs of international students, and who do not fulfil their sales promises are likely to be just as much at risk as exporters in any other market.”

The areas that emerge from our findings to date, and which the next stage of the research will seek to explore more fully, are as follows.

1. The issues concerning training for tutors and administrators in differing cultural needs. This finding replicates that of Rees and Porter (1998).
2. The provision of pastoral care provided to the international students in the first weeks of their programme.
3. The provision of English classes for those with a diagnosed or perceived need. To what extent should these be supplemented with study skills sessions, covering specifically topics such as presentations and case study work?
4. Maximising the benefits that may be derived from a diverse group by ensuring that classroom time is available for students to share experiences. All of the students in our sample welcomed the opportunity to discuss the course and other matters with previous students, and it is proposed that this should be formalised at the encounter stage. Whether students would benefit from a mentor from the same cultural background as their own needs further investigation.
5. Reviewing assessment regulations, to ensure that international students have sufficient time to absorb and/or produce written material in English. One example of this being done at TVU is on a module where the assessment involves a pre-distributed case study, with unseen questions. This is an open book style of assessment, but the most notable feature is that students are allowed to take up to four hours to complete it, although there is an assumption that a native English speaker might take two hours.

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Appendix 1

Interview Schedule

Reference number:

Home country:

Hometown:

How long have you lived in England?

Current course of study:

Pre-arrival

What were the factors influencing your choice of TVU as a place to study?

Probe for:

Knowledge and awareness of the host country

Personal recommendation

Do you know someone who has studied at TVU?

Cost considerations

Did the amount of the fees affect your choice?

Environment/lifestyle

What was your image of England before you came here?

Ease of travel home

How often do you go back to your country?

Social links

Do you have family or friends who live near here?

What information about England and TVU would you have liked to receive before you left your home country?

What aspects of your dealings with TVU before you arrived were effective?

What aspects of your dealings with TVU before you arrived were ineffective?

Encounter

What problems did you have when you first arrived at TVU?

What would you like to have been shown or helped with when you first arrived at TVU?

What would have made your first weeks at TVU easier?

Tell me about the main differences between learning in China and at TVU.

Learning/teaching style

Unquestioning assimilation of knowledge from teachers

Rote memorisation

Problems with participative approach and experiential learning

Problems with being asked to express views in class

What aspects of your dealings with TVU when you first arrived were effective?

What aspects of your dealings with TVU when you first arrived were ineffective?

Metamorphosis

Do you feel part of TVU now?

If not, why not?

What could TVU do to help you?

Is studying at TVU how you expected it to be?

If not, why not?

What could we do to help?

What are the main problems you have now as a student at TVU?

What aspects of your dealings with TVU, now you are an experienced student here, are well handled?

What aspects of your dealings with TVU, now you are an experienced student here, are poorly handled?