

Meeting The Language Needs of International Students from Non-Native English-Speaking Countries: A Study of International Students from Selected Community-Based Universities in China.

Biney, Peter Agyeman.

Graduate Student

Teacher Education College, Huzhou Normal University, Zhejiang Province, China.

Email – kwabenabiney3g@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study seeks to help meet the language needs of some international students from non-native English-speaking countries studying in community-based universities within Mainland China. 208 international students took part in this study out of a population of 455 using the simple random and convenience sampling methods. The study adopted the descriptive survey design, using open-ended and closed-ended online questionnaire which was generated using the Microsoft form survey and sent via personal WeChat and WhatsApp platforms. The data was analyzed using means (including mean of means) and standard deviations (including mean of standard deviation) for the close-ended questions, while the open-ended questions provided some relevant suggestions in themes. From the findings, it was revealed that: most international students from non-native English-speaking countries agreed they were having a peculiar language need that limited their ability to function well in and outside the classroom such as difficulties in making and taking notes, reading, doing assignments as well as attempting examination questions very well, all in English language. Moreover, majority of the respondents agreed that English language as a medium of instruction was ideal. The study also revealed that they found the use of their local languages more convenient. Finally, they agreed that the use of translation aids, formation of nationality and program-based groups, English literature were some existing remedies, even though a significant portion of the respondents expressed disagreements and uncertainties regarding these remedies. In addition, the thematic responses from the open-ended section, revealed the need for the promotion of adaptational English language courses and special classification-tests, provision of special English language-aiding offices and services as well as creation of avenues for the purpose of bridging the gap between technicalities in various programs of study. The study recommended that; English tests for purposes of classification and formal compulsory English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses be organized for freshmen. Furthermore, it was recommended that various departments/colleges in community-based universities should run continuous 'Professional/Technical' (course content) short courses for both freshmen and continuing students and then English session workshops be organized periodically to address some key topics of common interest such as the writing of research papers.*

Key Words: *Meeting, Language Needs, International Students, Non-Native, English-Speaking, Countries, Community-Based Universities, China.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

China's internationalization of higher education in recent decades, has seen great progress and has moulded it into one of the most promising, largest and affordable educational systems in the world (Yang 2014). Currently, China, attracts a large number of international students from all over the world (Ma 2017). Statistics from China's ministry of Education (MOE) indicates that in 2018, the number of international students studying in China were about 492,185 (MOE April, 18 2019) from 196 countries, being hosted by over 1,004 institutions of higher education in China's 31 provinces/ autonomous regions/ provincial -level municipalities. This figure marks a 0.62% increase in international student enrolment as compared to 2017 figures. These estimates however do not include international students in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. In April 2019, the MOE unveiled some new policies to bring in more international students to study in China. China is being transformed into a leading "receiving" nation (Wei 2015). Currently, as a replica of the Confucian model, state-driven powers funds and manages most existing universities in order to shape them in globally competitive universities. (Marginson 2011).

1.1 Research Questions

1. What kind of language problem do some international students face?
2. Is the use of English language as a medium of instruction good enough?
3. Why do international students from non-native English-speaking countries struggle to fit into the regular school system?
4. How effective are the existing remedies?

1.2 Significance of the study

This study will help educational administrators and other stakeholders in international education address appropriately the long-term language needs of international students. This will help improve upon the experiences of international students, especially those from non-native English-speaking countries. Findings from this study, can also be a reference material for future studies.

2. METHODOLOGY:

This study used the simple descriptive survey, since its one good means for describing existing conditions just as they are. According to Dr. Y.P. Aggarwal (2008) descriptive research is devoted to the gathering of information about prevailing conditions or situations for the purpose of description and interpretation.

2.1 Population

The study's population was a total of 455 international students from non-native English-speaking countries, currently studying at different parts of Mainland China. These were students of both public and private community-based universities.

2.2 Sample and Sampling Procedure:

The sample size for the study was 208 international students from some parts of Africa, Asia, America, Australia and Europe, who are from non-native English-speaking countries or territories where English language was not their first language or regarded as a national language for communication. This met the norm as indicated by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). The simple random sampling technique was employed for 150 respondents, while the convenience sampling technique was employed for the remaining 58 respondents.

2.3 Research Instruments:

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire because it was found to be a time-saving method and also ensures the accuracy of the information which is given since they were to be completed at the convenience of the respondent. Again, it guarantees confidentiality and may elicit more truthful responses than most other methods. The questionnaire was generated via Microsoft form survey platform and contained 23 open-ended and closed-ended questions and was divided into three main sections. Section 'A' was about the demographic information of the respondents. Section 'B' was on the language concerns of respondents using closed-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale and section 'C' was about possible suggestions from respondents on lasting remedies to meet their language needs using an open-ended question.

2.4 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument:

To ensure validity, experts in the field of education, had gone through the instrument to thoroughly check it. Also, to ensure reliability, a pilot study was conducted involving 40 international students from non-native English-speaking countries studying all over China. The internal consistency coefficient of each item was computed by using the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient Model (SPSS) and a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was determined subsequently. This confirms the internal consistency of the instrument is acceptable according to Hair et al. (2010).

2.5 Data Collection:

Before beginning the data collection exercise, the researcher personally visited and, in some cases, called the respondents and sought their kind permission and also explained the purpose of the study. The link for the questionnaire was then sent via WeChat and WhatsApp platforms to international students personally all over Mainland China for the completion and submission of the online questionnaires at their own convenience. The response rate was 100% due to the flexibility of the means of submission and their constant online presence. Fortunately, all responses were received within a few days' time.

2.6 Data Analysis:

The data gathered from respondents were edited, coded and analyzed statistically, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Being a descriptive survey, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. By implication, percentages and frequency tables were used to support the analysis of major responses. The research questions were analyzed using means and standard deviations, with responses for the close-ended questions being measured on a five-point Likert scale. The values assigned to the responses ranged from 0.00 (Strongly Disagree) to 5.00 (Strongly Agree). The mean of means and the mean of the standard deviation were computed and their numerical values gave the direction of the response to each research question, while the possible suggestions from the open-ended question, were put in themes. These all contributed to offer relevant recommendations for the study.

2.7 Ethical Consideration:

To meet the ethical standards in research, respondents' permission was sought and their confidentiality assured. Furthermore, the main objective of the study was explained to each respondent and they were made to participate in the study willingly.

3. ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS:

The data was analyzed using SPSS software. Presentation and analysis were done based on the sub-themes created by the research questions. This begins with the analysis of demographic data of the respondents. The analysis of the main data include: The kind of language problem international students face, English Language as a medium of instruction, how international students from non-native English-speaking countries struggle to fit into the regular school system, and the effectiveness of existing remedies. Also, a section was dedicated for the thematic responses (suggestions) from respondents.

3.1 Demographic Data of Respondents:

Items 1, 2,3, 4 and 5 of section ‘A’ on the respondents’ questionnaire, were used to collect relevant information on the demographic characteristics of the 208 respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

Gender	Male	56.25%
	Female	43.75%
Age	<24yrs	27%
	25-34yrs	56.7%
	35&>yrs	16.3%
Current Academic Level	Bachelor	36.0%
	Masters	43.8%
	Phd	20.2%
Continent of Origin	Africa	53.84%
	Asia	33.65%
	America	0.5%
	Australia	0.96%
	Europe	11.05%
Preferred Language Spoken at Home	English	6.73%
	Native Language	59.62%
	Both	33.65%

3.2 The Kind of Language Problem International Students Face:

This aspect under section ‘B’, consist of five questions (items 6,7,8,9 and 10).

The responses do indicate the kind of language problem international students from non-native English-speaking countries do face. The mean of means (4.38) and mean of standard deviation (1.35) indicate in agreement the existence a kind of language problem faced by international students of all levels.

Table 2: The Kind of Language Problem International Students Face

Statement	SA N (%)	A N (%)	U N (%)	D N (%)	SD N(%)	Mean	St. D
Difficulty in making and taking Notes	65 (31.25)	59 (28.4)	1 (0.48)	35(16.8)	48(23.1)	4.80	1.577
Difficulty in doing Assignments	58(27.9)	68 (32.7)	1 (0.48)	28(13.5)	53(25.5)	4.83	1.600
Difficulty in Reading	68 (32.69)	62 (29.81)	2(0.96)	26(12.5)	50(24.04)	4.81	1.575
Difficulty in Answering	77 (37.01)	52 (25.0)	1 (0.48)	26 (12.5)	52(25.0)	4.82	0.605

Questions								
Difficulty in Understanding Oral English	33 (15.9)	25(12.02)	2(0.96)	69 (33.2)	79(38.53)	2.63	1.380	

Mean of means = 4.38 Mean of Standard Deviation = 1.35

Mean ranges for tables 2, 3, 4 and 5:

Strongly Disagree (SD) - (0.0 – 1.0); Disagree (D) – (1.1 - 2.0);

Uncertain (U) – (2.1 - 3.0); Agree (A) – (3.1 – 4.0); Strongly Agree (SA) – (4.1 – 5.0).

From table 2, it can be observed that, out of the five items provided, only one item recorded a higher level of disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree) than agreement (both agree and strongly agree). The other four statements concerning difficulties with: making and taking notes, doing assignments, reading and answering questions in English language, all recorded higher levels of agreement than disagreement. 59.65%, agreed to the challenge of having difficulty in taking and making notes, while 39.9% disagreed. The mean value for this statement was 4.80, implying most respondents strongly agree they cannot take or make good notes in English language. It was also observed that 60.6% of the respondents agreed on the difficulties they encounter to do assignments in English language, compared to 39% who disagreed. The mean value was 4.83. This implies most respondents strongly agree that they find it a daunting task to do assignments in English. The findings on difficulty in reading and answering questions in English language revealed 62.5% and 62.01% respectively agreed to having such challenges but 36.54% and 37.5% disagreed. The respective mean values were 4.81 and 4.82 respectively. This implies most respondents strongly agree to having difficulties with reading and answering questions in English language. However, the last item indicated 71.73% disagreed on having much difficulty in understanding oral English as against 27.92% who agreed. The mean value was 2.63. This implies most respondents did disagree or were even quite uncertain on having difficulties with oral English. A few respondents also indicated uncertain positions for the items above. This is not a good sign because learning a language comprises the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Furthermore, according to the theory of linguistic turn, language is everything (Gustav Bergmann,1954). Therefore, such students may have negative experiences right from the onset.

3.3 The Appropriateness of English Language As A Medium Of Instruction

This part under section ‘B’, consist of three questions (items 11,12 and 13).

The responses indicate the appropriateness of English language as a medium of instruction.

Table 3: The Appropriateness of English Language As A Medium Of Instruction

Statement	SA N (%)	A N (%)	U N (%)	D N (%)	SD N(%)	Mean	St. D
English Language as a medium of Instruction is Appropriate	131 (63.0)	61(29.33)	1 (0.48)	6(2.88)	9(4.33)	4.38	0.748
Familiar with English Language	66(31.73)	28 (13.5)	1 (0.48)	15(7.21)	98(47.1)	1.84	1.820
English language Bridges the Gap In Learning Other Languages	98 (47.11)	93(44.71)	1(0.48)	9(4.33)	7(3.4)	4.35	0.984

Mean of means = 3.52 Mean of Standard Deviation = 1.18

From table 3, it can realized that the mean of means (3.52) and mean of standard deviation (1.18) indicate in agreement the need to appropriately have English language as the prescribed medium of instruction in this era of globalization. It can be observed that, two out of the three items presented for respondents to indicate approval for English language as a medium of instruction, recorded a higher level of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree). On the issue of English language’s appropriateness as a medium of instruction, 92.33% agreed while 7.21% disagreed. The mean value for this statement was 4.38, implying most respondents strongly agree to having English language as the prescribed medium of instruction. This lends credence to the assertion of the increased use of English in higher education as a medium of instruction (Tsui.2008). However, it was also observed that 54.31% of the respondents expressed disagreement on being familiar with English language, compared to 45.23% who agree. The mean value was 1.84, implying most respondents strongly disagree on being familiar with English language. The last item indicated that 91.82% agreed on seeing English language acting as a means to bridge the gap in learning other languages, for example Chinese, while 7.73% disagreed. The mean value for this statement was 4.35. This implies that most international students strongly agree on seeing English language not as an end but as a good means to learn other languages, that is English is a tool rather than a subject. However, a few respondents did indicate uncertain positions for English as an ideal medium of instruction. Indeed, globally institutions of higher learning now admit students from diverse backgrounds, who have different levels of preparedness than previously. (Baldwin & James,2010). Therefore, the best means to help impart knowledge to all students from various backgrounds will be the use of a common language, hence English language.

3.4 How Students from Non-native English-Speaking Countries Struggle with The Regular School System

This construct under section B, consist of four questions (items 14,15,16 and 17).

The responses obtained here indicates the struggles that international students from non-native English-speaking countries encounter in their quest to go through regular school system where they have to learn English language by default.

Table 4: How Students from Non-native English-Speaking Countries Struggle with The Regular School System

Statement	SA N (%)	A N (%)	U N (%)	D N (%)	SD N(%)	Mean	St. D
English course is Needed for non-native English-speaking students	81 (38.94)	95(45.67)	1 (0.48)	20(9.6)	11(5.3)	4.75	1.207
In Groups, its comfortable to interact In English	21(10.1)	18 (8.7)	1(0.48)	76(36.54)	92(44.23)	2.05	1.269
English Language is An Obstacle To Understanding Lectures	113(54.3)	19(9.14)	2(0.98)	29(13.94)	45(21.64)	4.26	1.501
Exam Questions in English can be Understood and Attempted	64(30.77)	25(12.01)	1 (0.48)	20 (9.62)	98(47.12)	2.60	1.800

Mean of means = 3.42 Mean of Standard Deviation = 1.44

From table 4, it can be observed that the mean of means (3.42) and mean of standard deviation (1.44) indicate in agreement the unavoidable struggles most international students from non-native English-speaking countries face. It can be observed that, out of the four items provided, two recorded higher levels of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree). In looking at the need for an English language course for non-native English-speaking students, 84.61% agreed while only 14.9% disagreed. The mean value for this statement was 4.75, implying most respondents strongly agree to having an English course during their period of study to reduce the struggles they face. 63.44% of the respondents expressed agreement on English language as an obstacle to understanding lectures, compared to 35.58% who disagree. The mean value was 4.26, implying most respondents would rather prefer to have lectures in their various known native languages rather than English language since English language reduces their functionality in the classroom. However, the other two items on respondents being comfortable to interact in English language when in groups and their ability to understand and attempt examination questions in English language, recorded a higher level of disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree) than agreement (both agree and strongly agree). On the statement of being comfortable to interact in English language when in groups, 80.77% disagreed while 18.8% agreed. The mean value was 2.05, implying most respondents, would find using their local languages in groups more convenient because command of English skills is known to be related to social satisfaction, and overall satisfaction with experience in the host country (Fletcher and Stren, 1989).

In addition, on the issue of their ability to understand and attempt examination questions in English language, 56.74% disagreed while 42.78% agreed. The mean value for this statement was 2.60, implying most respondents may not understand examination instructions in English language very well enough to give good answers, since English language ability has been found to be related to academic achievement (Marion 1986). Nonetheless, a few respondents also did indicate uncertain positions.

3.5 The Effectiveness of Existing Remedies

This last part under section ‘B’, consist of five questions (items 18,19,20,21 and 22).

The responses do indicate the effectiveness of existing remedies according to respondents.

Table 5: The Effectiveness of Existing Remedies

Statement	SA N (%)	A N (%)	U N (%)	D N (%)	SD N(%)	Mean	St. D
Translation aids	58(27.88)	33(15.87)	70(33.65)	17(8.18)	30(14.42)	4.50	1.517
Nationality-based group discussions	88(42.31)	30(14.42)	50(24.01)	29(13.94)	11(5.32)	4.14	1.109
Program-based group discussion	97(47.32)	25(12.02)	61(29.33)	12(5.77)	13(6.25)	4.64	1.035
English literature from the library	34(16.34)	32(15.38)	55(26.45)	43(20.67)	44(21.16)	1.74	1.104
English-speaking friends	10(4.81)	13(6.25)	95(45.67)	56(26.92)	34(16.35)	1.53	0.884

Mean of means = 3.31

Mean of Standard Deviation = 1.13

From table 5, the mean of means (3.31) and mean of standard deviation (1.13) indicate some level of agreement on the effectiveness of existing remedies although some respondents have their personal reservations. It can be observed that out of the five items provided three recorded some higher levels of agreement (both agree and strongly agree) than disagreement (both disagree and strongly disagree). From items 18, 19 and 20, its observed that 43.75%, 56.73%, 59.34% agreed respectively, while 22.60%,19.26%, 12.02% disagreed respectively. The respective mean

values were: 4.50, 4.14 and 4.64, implying more respondents agreed on how useful translation aids, nationality-based and program-based group discussions were. Notably, a significant rate of 33.65%, 24.01% and 29.33% respectively expressed their uncertainty on how helpful these remedies were. However, for items 21 and 22, a greater record of respondents disagreed than agreed on the impact of the use of English literature and English-speaking friends. 41.83% and 43.27% respectively disagreed while 31.72% and 11.06% agreed respectively. Their respective mean values were: 1.74 and 1.53, implying, most respondents strongly disagreed than agreed, on the impact of English literature and English-speaking friends in addressing their language needs. Again, 26.45% and 45.67% respectively still remained uncertain, which is quite significant. Indeed, the absence of lasting solutions can deny international students the chance of having a nice stay since when they find themselves in a new social setting characterized by new and personally challenging and disrupting experiences, they tend to lose self-esteem and mastery of what is to be taught (Pearlin et al., 1981).

3.6 Thematic Suggestions From Respondents

This part under section 'C', consist of the open-ended question (item 23). The responses do indicate in themes, the suggestions of respondents on how to meet their language needs. These thematic responses include:

- The promotion of adaptational English language courses and special classification-tests for international students from non-native English-speaking countries.
- Provision of more special English language-aiding offices and services by the various international colleges as well as departments/schools/colleges in community- based universities.
- Creation of avenues for the purpose of bridging the gap between technicalities in various programs of study via the use of English language.

4 SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION:

Summary of Findings

From the study, the following findings emerged:

- It was observed that only 58(27.92%) agreed to having difficulty in understanding oral English but 148(71.73%) disagreed. More respondents agree on having challenges with taking and making notes, doing assignments, reading and answering questions in English. In all a mean of means value of 4.38 indicated that international students from non-native English-speaking countries strongly agreed they were having a peculiar language need that had to be met.
- The mean of means (3.52) indicates that English as a medium of instruction is ideal. Majority of the international students agree on this.
- A greater proportion of respondents agree than disagree on having an English language course (84.61%) and seeing lectures in English as an obstacle (63.44%). However, majority also disagreed than agreed being comfortable to interact in groups using English (80.77%) and being able to understand and attempt Examinations in English language (56.74%). The mean of means (3.42) clearly indicates that international students from non-native English-speaking countries agree they do go through struggles in pursuit of international education.
- Most international students agree on the effectiveness of some existing remedies. However, some disagree on the use of English literature (41.83%) and associating with English-speaking friends (43.27%). A significant rate of 33.65%, 24.01%, 29.33%, 26.45% and 45.67% were still uncertain regarding the helpfulness of the existing remedies. A mean value of 3.31 was obtained suggesting even though respondents may agree than disagree and vice versa on different remedies, amidst uncertainties, yet they generally agree that at least there are some existing remedies but they would prefer more effective and long-lasting ones.
- The thematic valuable suggestions from most respondents did indicate the need the for the promotion of adaptational English language courses and special classification-tests, provision of special English language-aiding offices and services as well as creation of avenues for the purpose of bridging the gap between technicalities in various programs of study.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were enumerated:

- School administrators must organize Initial English language tests for freshmen. The objective of this, is to ascertain their levels of English language exposure so they can be placed in their rightful classes for the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) short courses and ensure easy acclimatization to their new environments and programs of study.

- There is the need to start compulsory beginners' preparatory short English courses. An example is the EAP program. This will help equip new students with the basic English language skills needed to start their various programs of study on a good note.
- It is recommended that various departments/colleges introduce continuous Professional/Technical (course content) short courses for both freshmen and continuing students. This will help them to be kept abreast with the technical terms and field experiences of their various programs of study.
- It was also recommended that the various departments and international colleges in the community-based universities within the study's territory, work together to provide English session workshops periodically to address some key topics of common interest, for example how to write research papers including: proposals, thesis, dissertations and others.

6. CONCLUSION:

It was concluded based on the findings and recommendations of the study that; the concept of international student education has come to stay. Indeed, globally, higher institutions are all experiencing gradual transformation with reference to several factors, key among which is the elevation of English language as an international language for communication (McKay & Bokhorst-Heng, 2008). Therefore, school authorities within Mainland China and all other centers of international education globally, must try to meet the language needs of international students, especially those from non-native English-speaking countries.

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