

A Grounded Theory Study of Learning Patterns of Asian Students in Higher Education

Abu Bakar

Institute of Education, University of Worcester,
United Kingdom

Abstract. A large chunk of studies has focused on variations in students' learning approaches and issues in higher education (HE). The issues to learning in HE have been extensively investigated from perspective of Chinese students. However, the question is to what extent studies exist which can identify the patterns in which other Asian students alongside those with a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) find themselves comfortable when learning in HE in the United Kingdom (UK). The current study examines the learning patterns of Chinese (CHC), Indian and Pakistani (non-CHC) students from their prior learning (PL) experiences, the major academic issues they face, and how differently they consider the very process of learning in the UK. Data was collected through 3 phases of semi-structured in-depth interviews (and interpreted with personal narratives) from 24 students from the three sample countries, currently studying in the UK. Qualitative-narrative analysis of data using Grounded Theory (GT) revealed that Indian and Pakistani students along with other Chinese face similar challenges in coping with learning (patterns) independently in the UK. Similarly they equally feel the need towards lingual inadequacy and lack of academic writing support, surrounding their learning patterns. Asian students also consider HE learning as part of a process that require essential teaching. The key to the study is based on students' own perceptions of the learning patterns they find significant in HE in order to promote the process of learning.

Keywords: Confucian; higher education; language; independent learning; learning patterns.

Significance

A record number of international students have entered the UK to study in the past few years (Coughlan, 2011). An overwhelming number of these international students arrived from Asian countries (HESA, 2010) where Chinese, Indian and Pakistani form the overall majority of Non-EU students (2011). The HESA statistics (2011) indicate that during the year 2009/10, the number of Chinese students in the UK was 56,990 and increased to 67,325 in

2010/11, while the number of Indian students was 56,990 and increased to 67,325 in 2010/11. At the same time, the number of Pakistani students was 9,815 in 2009/10 which increased to 10,185 in 2010/11. Hence this proportion made a total of Asian students' population of 105,305 in 2009/10 out of 280,760 and 116,600 out of 298,110 non-EU students (39.11%) in 2010/11.

With these figures in perspective, the identification of learning patterns among Asian students and their PL history is significant in relation to their learning experiences in the UK. Although most recently, research studies mainly focused on Chinese and East Asian students of Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) (Wu, 2008; Tian, 2008; (McMahon, 2011)), it is increasingly becoming vital to bridge the gap in CHC and non-CHC Asian students' patterns of learning in the UK.

Indeed, various factors (Fleming, 2007; Tian, 2008) and issues (Caruana & Spurling, 2007; Spronk, 2004) influence the way overseas students learn in HE, however the question about Asian students as one identity is yet unclear in literature.

In the past decade, institutions in the UK have consistently struggled to recruit students with adequate language and learning skills. This was because many of the arriving students were initially facing language and learning issues. In response to these difficulties, United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) moved to tighten the immigration rules for overseas students (Home Office, 2011), even establishing rules to refuse entry to students with inadequate language skills at airports (Lotbiniere, 2012). These efforts coincided with a period of major funding cuts for universities by the UK Government. However, in order to attract overseas students, universities had to loosen the English language requirements and even set English language scores below the recommended standards (Mathews, 2012). Clearly there is/was tension between the need for universities to compensate for funding cuts and the need of students who value British HE to cope with the demand for academic rigour (Brooks & Walters, 2009). Instead of raising the entry standard to enable students to cope better with learning, the reverse has actually happened and the problem is likely to grow rather than decline. The current study adds to assess this issue by providing a better understanding of the students' learning patterns in the UK higher Education.

The Context

The platitude, that quality education is essentially designed to generate learners who can promote their learning experiences, begs the question about the quality of that education and the support those being educated receive to enable them to gain maximum benefit from education. Universities in the UK benefit in many ways, not least financially, from the presence of students from many countries, with a majority from Asian countries (HESA, 2011). However, studies largely report the learning experiences of Asian students without seeking students' perceptions to build a consensus on how they benefit from the learning experiences in the UK. To enable students to benefit more from quality

education also begs the question whether the nature and extent of the learning process is felt different among CHC students than Pakistani and Indian (non-CHC) students and what issues are of utmost importance which can support their process of learning in the UK.

Identifying learning issues among overall Asian students who have been generalised as surface and rote learners in HE (Li, 2004: p.12; Huang, 2008) requires a research setting, involving both CHC and Non-CHC student where students' perceptions are heard in informal settings. The way to involve the practicing (learners) and the practiced (learning patterns) would add more value to the current research questions.

A similar idea has narrowly been looked at in numerous studies. The majority of such studies have sampled Chinese and other east-Asian students (Wu, 2008; Tian, 2008; McMahon, 2011) ignoring perceptions of South Asian (non-CHC) students. Sovic's (2008) suggestion, that learners must be looked at from educational backgrounds in order to minimise the risk of arising misunderstanding, fits in context of the current study. This study adopts a generic approach to identify students' perceptions as "what they say" about the learning issues they find in context of studying in British HE and what lesson/s can be learnt from CHC and Non-CHC students history of PL in order to facilitate the learning process for those students at need. Taking the above studies in context, a better understanding of students' perceptions would help to explore their learning patterns in a diverse learning environment in the UK and reflect on a framework that will help in the development of a learning process.

Aims

The aims of the study were two-fold in nature. First to explore how CHC and Non-CHC students consider learning in the UK and prior HE learning, and the issues of major concern in relation to aspects of academic and cultural settings; and secondly to identify a common ground for students issues of major concern to facilitate the learning process in which they are currently involved.

Literature Review

The existence of learning issues stands in contrast to some studies that indicate the majority of Asian students are deep learners (Bilgin & Crowe, 2008) who prefer a student-centred approach to learning. In relation to a style of learning Kolb and Kolb (2005) illustrate that students can easily adopt their independent style within the initial two to three month period of their studying in an alien learning environment. While the common perception, that Asian students are more rote and passive learners, is also controversial (Exley, 2005; Hall, 2008; Siddiqui, 2006; Valiente, 2008), and has been disputed by many researchers including Biggs (1999 & 2003) and Tian (2008) etc. Cooper (2004) generalises the issue of a process of learning development to overall students in universities. Given these views, the increasing demand of testimony of students might convey a variety of messages about themselves; it might even suggest that the real problems have not yet been correctly explored or else have been

particularised to a specific group of students from CHC (Biggs, 1999); or else Asian students have been branded “surface learners” on the basis of their identities or else do not consider learning a process at all because learning is fed to them rather than taking the spoon to feed themselves (Smith, 2008).

Whilst previous studies have looked narrowly at ‘learning issues’ in relation to overall Asian (Pakistani, Chinese and Indian) students studying in the West (Adeeb, 1986; Carroll & Ryan, 2005). Some studies have only listed particular problems of overseas students in the UK (Merrick & Robinson, 2006; UKCOSA, 2006); others have only investigated similar challenges of East Asian students in another English-speaking country (Wu, 2008; Tian, 2008). Similarly Heijne-Penninga et al. (2008) and Valiente (2008) have narrowly looked at coping issues among overseas students in western countries.

The extent to which studies might exist with reference to learning patterns, one might argue that they have not previously been studied in relation to the current sample in UK-based institutions. Some genuine attempts have been made by Tian (2008), Wu (2008), McMahon (2011), Siddiqui (2006), Pritchard (2008), Prosser and Trigwell (1999), and Felder and Brent (2005) and many others. However the literature is still scattered in respect of identifying the core issues which undermine the very process of learning development among overall Asian students.

Although teaching and learning (both) have considerable influence on the way in which students start and develop learning in HE (Kember et al., 2008; Reid et al., 2005 cited by Pritchard, 2008), there is a general agreement that different students adopt different ways of learning in different learning environments (Musa & Wood, 2003; Zeegers, 2004) and use different learning styles (Houghton, 2004) or else have different interpretations of the learning in different learning environments. However the perception that Asian students are highly influenced by a prior history of education is rooted in the conception of learning paradigms they inherit from their previous education settings (Mukhtar et al., 2011). Hence, adaptations of a certain learning style might arise as a result of PL patterns which could be encompassed by many other aspects. For example, Kolb and Kolb (2005) note; that *“Many students enter higher education conditioned by their previous educational experiences to be passive recipients of what they are taught”* (p.209).

The understanding students’ having about a different learning environment, as claimed in numerous prior studies (Kember et al., 2008; Entwistle & Smith, 2013; World Bank, 2000), may also have different connections in context of those students who find similar prior educational challenges (Wakeling, 2008). Such significance may be rooted in Liu’s (2012) findings who claim that the aims of HE are not only to meet the assessment requirements but to learn and process information more effectively (Brownlee et al., 2009); and are bound to be studied from other social and educational aspects of other Asian students.

The context of academic issues, i.e. lingual incompetence, PL patterns, and dependence on teachers, can be surpassed by the ways in which students approach their learning. For example, Barron et al. (2007) found lingual incompetence as a major factor in international students' discontinuation with their studies. Forland (2008) explains to the point that *"that many studies outline that educational differences, cultural, lingual and social of international students must be looked at in order to enable them to gain maximum benefits from their achievement"* (p.205) but very few studies come up with what needs to be done to end the gap in students prior history of learning and current education to promote learning as a process in HE.

One way to start with the academic aspects may be to identify how students approach their learning in contrast to what style they adopt, and what they see as "issues" in HE. This debate, over learning approaches/styles, has been active for the last forty years where Kolb (1984), and Honey and Mumford (1992) tend to dominate. While some authors use them interchangeably, as Hinkel (2011) uses reading and literary with respect to the way students' learn, others are more specific as Franzoni & Assar (2009) specify learning styles to subject-specific courses like linguistics and physics. Similarly Nicholls (2002) point out certain skills and mentions that students' approaches to learning encompasses intellectual skills (knowing how rather than knowing what); verbal skills (communication); cognitive skills (thinking and memorising); attitudes (concerned with emotions, social and cultural approaches to learning); and motor skills (required for physical tasks of learning) (pp.22-23). The case of CHC (in this case Chinese) with regard to such skills, on the ground of common practice in UK universities, is too vague (Edwards & Ran, 2006: p.4). Similarly the scenario of other Asian students (non-CHC type) is not viewed differently. As a result, a common perception that *"Asian students as rote learners"* has widely prevailed. This perception has jeopardised the learning process undertaken by overall Asian students, despite the notion of a high ratio of successful completion of studies by Asian students (Wakeling, 2008).

Although the perception of 'surface learners' is in itself widely controversial. For example, Gordon & Debus (2002) suggest that change in the current teaching and assessment methods will result in students acquiring deeper understanding of learning. This would mean that even surface learners can soon become deep learners, by gaining adequate English and study skills, enhancing the learning experiences of students (UKCOSA, 2006), through some institutional changes. The lack of lingual and other issues concerning less-developed study skills (academic aspects) are likely a result of alienness towards the requisite of language skills and cultural understanding (Sovic, 2008; Tan, 2011). However, similar problems originate from historical education of PL (Yorke & Longden, 2008) where students, according to Valiente (2008), simply accept the teacher's authority and knowledge. Teacher's authority may also dominate the traditional conception of teacher as 'a hub of knowledge', often practiced in the form of spoon-feeding (Smith, 2008), and the result of such spoon-feeding 'teacher-

centeredness' is seen in the shape of variant issues hindering the learning process among Asian students.

Wakeling (2008) questioning the surface-learner label, during a study, found that overseas students were more critical than UK students in their first year of study, leaving a gap for further research to identify similarities, differences and educational background across intercultural group of students. It is vital that the overall number of students, in the first year, consider learning as a process of creating links with prior learning (Brownlee, et al., 2009) which, in the context of Asian students as 'teacher-centeredness' (Valiente, 2008; Huang, 2008), is still disputed in the literature. Similarly, Cooper (2004), exploring the learning perceptions of Chinese students and Australian students, mentioned that Chinese students come from different educational and social environment and hence they cannot be expected to show similar patterns of learning (p.295) as western students. Cooper found that there are clear differences among Chinese students on their educational backgrounds (p.296). These differences may be similar to those of other non-CHC backgrounds. To understand this phenomenon of CHC and non-CHC on the grounds of PL history, it is vital to seek students' voices about the learning process development through the lens of issues and history of learning when studying in the UK.

Theoretical Framework

A grounded theory approach was used in this study, and a constructivist framework (Charmaz, 2006) informs our findings as data was coded, analysed and themised (refer to Glaser & Strauss, 1967). A number of studies have drawn insights about the way Chinese students learn in HE (e.g. Tian, 2008; Wu, 2008 etc.), however there is no existence of grounding the data to locate a sample of diverse Asian, CHC and non-CHC, students studying in British HE institutions. This as a matter of conceptual categorisation did allow us to apply coded data to sensitise the emerging concepts underlying Asian (students) specific understandings of learning habits and coping mechanism of the learning issues. Given this, Charmaz (2006) points out that *"Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data and define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means"* (p.46).

In this way the emerging theory, in this study, is grounded in the data when theoretical sampling reached a point of saturation resulting from reflection and revisiting the theory and thus refining it. The transcription of data was coded through NVIVO software which gave rise to further categories (see A.2) and concepts (again revisited in further phases), leading to a formation of theory. A brief graphical representation of process is shown below.

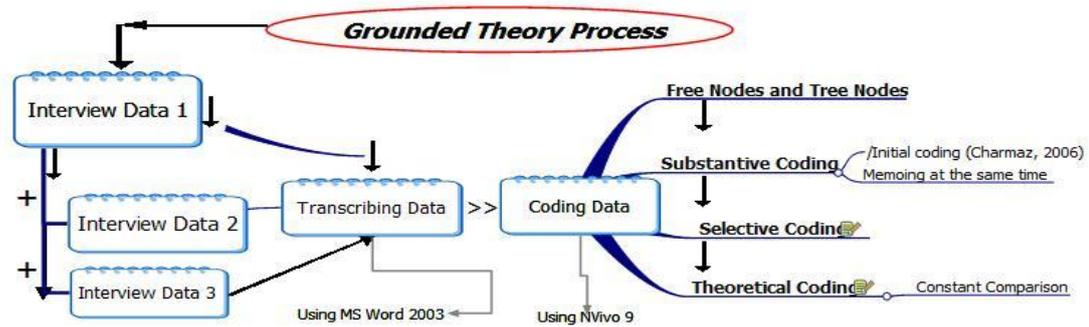


Diagram 1.1: Process of Grounded Theory used in the current study

Given our Grounded Theory approach, this study constructs the reality from within the data obtained from learners' own understandings of learning and relevant academic issues.

Sample

Chinese, Indian and Pakistani students were recruited, based on convenience sampling, in three British universities studying different programmes at undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) levels.

The overall number of students, who were interviewed in the first phase, studying at University of Worcester, University of Edinburgh, and University College Birmingham, is shown in the following table 1.1.

Table 1.1: List of interviewees with level of study in the UK

Origin	Male (UG)	Female (UG)	Male (PG)	Female (PG)	Male (Research)	Female (Research)	Total
India	1	0	0	1	1	0	3
China	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
Pakistan	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Total	3	1	2	2	2	0	10

In phase-two, a total of 8 students were probed from the above sample and were selected based on their availability. While in the last phase-three, only 6 participants from the above table were interviewed for the purpose of clarification of issues identified in first and second phases.

Method

In accordance with the sample, this study draws on qualitative data obtained from students' perceptions of learning in the UK which combines semi-structured in-depth interviews with a three phase formula (Kvale, 2007), and personal narratives (Elliott, 2006) using a grounded approach, originally used by Glaser and Strauss whilst locating its sphere within its constructivist version

(Charmaz, 2006). This multi-method was designed to help the researcher combine personal experiences with those obtained from students' opinions. To obtain a portion of preliminary understanding of students' views about learning issues some generic questions were designed as an effective and useful way of data collection (Twiggy, 2006: p.45). From this point the interviews sessions revolved around broader academic and learning aspects of studying in the UK. All interviewees consented voluntarily for all three phases of interviews.

Phase-one was aimed to establish a consensus of how Asian students view learning in HE and the issues they encounter during a transitional period. This was then followed by two more phases of interviews designed to explore the emerging theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) to gain a fuller picture of the issues in order to explore the nature of learning, seen as a process, and issues in CHC and Non-CHC students, if they existed.

The original principle of this study was based on evaluating the data obtained from semi-structured in-depth interviews through the help of personal narratives, to develop, refine and present a basis of learning development (theory) and the major concerns the sample students encounter during this process development.

In this context-based setting, qualitative methods of interviews and personal narratives seem realistically closer in a naturalist paradigm. Grounded theory research was thus used which allowed construction of knowledge rather than relying on pre-existing ideas (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: pp.12-15). The use of personal narratives allowed reflecting on the issues faced by sample students.

The Process

Previous studies have merely looked at the academic dimensions directly affecting the learning behaviours of Chinese students (i.e. Tian, 2008) and adjustment and language issues of East Asian students studying in a single university in the UK (i.e. Wu, 2008; Tian, 2008 etc.). Hence, the current study looked at a bigger picture of issues undermining an overall population of Asian students' learning and the key issues by linking their' PL experiences to those in the UK and focusing not only on academic issues but also those aspects hindering students' approaches to learning and the very process of learning.

In this study, for the purpose of identifying similarities and differences, all codes were constantly compared with each other. As a result, themes started to emerge from the combination of data, codes, categories and sub-categories. Initially, there were 120 refined codes, which decreased to 44 codes when integrated into common categories (see A.1 & A.2). This paved the way for the later development of 12 axial codes (see A.1). Each emerging concept was coded and each code was constantly compared with overlapping codes to identify similarities and differences. The emergent themes from the coding process facilitated making logical connections with the research aims. The emerging themes were gradually moved from a low level to more sophisticated categories

which were based on selective coding, providing support for the evidence of the literature review, the stage when theoretical composition, saturation (Charmaz, 2006), was complete.

Analysis and Discussion

A constructivist tradition of Grounded Theory approach was used to develop codes, categories and learning patterns across sample students' transitional and later period of learning experiences. This study used some pre-planned questions during interviews to probe the issues in generic way and then develop and probe the questions further on the basis of initial data. After coding the data (open coding), that lead to the thematic codes, axial coding was conducted to combine some overlapping codes. As a result the core categories emerged through analytical process. The core categories were further regrouped, compared and refined on the basis of central point "IL development". Throughout this process, writing memos, and conducting a constant comparison of data, codes and categories was key to constructing the reality from within the data (Charmaz, 2006).

During three consecutive sessions of interviews with the current sample students, I developed a sense of cultural sensitivity which helped in sensitising concepts during the data analysis process. My experience with Asian students helped me to establish a trustworthiness of data obtained. First, I ensured to get access to those Asian students who were keen to discuss their learning experiences and issues. This gave me more confidence to draw upon a convenient pattern of discussion than structured interview. Second, as a result, confidence building measures were developed to revisit the same students for further clarification that would establish authenticity (Cousin, 2009). Last, the timing of each interview was set not to exceed an hour.

In phase-one the study attempted to explore academic issues in detail from both CHC and non-CHC students. In phase one, the analysis of the data identified the existence of some issues in common with those identified in the literature review (see Tian, 2008, Wu, 2008; Edwards & Ran, 2006; Ahmed, 2011). As a result of the analysis of the data at phase-one, students found it difficult to cope within the learning culture in the UK at early stages of learning. The reasons for this difficulty were language barriers, lack of IL skills, difficulty in social adjustment, and dependency in learning as a result of prior educational history. The expression of students' concerns about the lack of IL skills – which was identified as an issue of prior educational learning (students were found to be too dependent on their teachers) – is an early indicator of learning dependency. Therefore the assumption that IL patterns are significant among students in HE was noted for further elaboration because it also matched the researcher's initial experience in studying in the UK. The theme of dependent approach to learning was identified among overall students for further exploration and clarification, though its nature was differently experienced by the researcher itself.

In addition to the issue of learning dependency, students' views about learning experiences in the UK revealed certain interconnected issues, including language issue as a source of difficulty in adaptation to a different learning environment. Linking the issues in learning in both prior and UK-based learning, two major codes, 'likes and dislikes', (as used in NVIVO 9) were identified. In relation to likes and dislikes, students expressed their liking for IL and the availability of learning resources, particularly libraries, IT facilities, and internet speed and availability in the UK. They also expressed their dislike for less support from teachers; whilst in the case of their home country; students liked the extra support from teachers but disliked dependency and the lack of resources. The study also noted the significance of dislike for dependency in the home country as a shift in educational approach among selected students. A clear dichotomy was apparent in both prior and UK learning experiences and in that of the researcher's one. Differences in views about preference for learning patterns, i.e. from dependent (prior) to IL (current), were noticed as a clear change in approaches to learning from dependent (traditional) to independent (non-traditional) and may lead to the development of successful independent learners. A question as to whether support is vitally important in HE in the UK and whether support is required for certain subjects was sought for further clarification. In comparison to the previous comments in phase-one and comments made by students in phase-two, there was a clear inclination, among students, towards the possibility of impact of language over IL.

Given that language issue exists in multiple shapes, the analysis shows that academic writing (AW) and communication skills, at level of competence to convey and receive ideas effectively, are two major lingual problems. Both academic writing and oral communication – the level of oral skills required for learning, were probed to examine the extent of lingual issues among students in HE. Although the researcher experienced a different form of lingual incompetence than the sample students but as theirs' perceptions were central to this study, it emerged from data that these students consider English language skills crucial to becoming independent learners.

Students also viewed support as a key requirement, vital for kick-starting the process of learning in HE at the initial stages of their studies, confirming previous findings (see McMahon, 2011; Wu, 2008) and it matches the researcher's own experience of starting the learning process. Questions arise whether the importance of language skills to students is limited to competence in interactive speaking and academic writing abilities, and whether the same language skills are required for all students or whether language expertise is required for certain subject areas (subject-specific).

Given that language issue have other dimensions, the issues examined related to IL and the effects of dependency on IL, and the features students liked and disliked in both their prior and current learning were explored further. When themes of 'likes' and 'dislikes' were compared in both prior and UK learning, it

became apparent that students liked IL patterns because there were enough resources in the UK in contrast to the ones in their PL and they were in a sense forced to adapt to IL patterns, a sense of behavioural approach (refer to Pavlov & Skinner) to teaching learning interaction was found. The level of studying support was appreciated in PL in contrast to concern for lack of available support in the UK. In other words, we can assume that behavioural approach to learning existed in the UK, and not in PL. Therefore, liking for support in PL while liking for availability of resources and use of IL skills in the UK were noted as the main themes. Dislike of a lack of resources dependency on prior learning, and the level of support provided in the UK were categorised as themes.

The overall population of students consider support vitally important for IL skills and the same practice was felt by the researcher during a doctorate degree. It appears, from students perceptions in phase-two, support is mainly felt only in certain fields of study and the amount of support tends to vary according to a field of study, for example the one which was noted in students of petroleum engineering. Students also considered IL difficult to acquire at the beginning but possible through support, and difficulties only vanished gradually. A different view, in comparison to the one in phase-one, emerged 'as a result of the importance of support for learning in HE and students' differentiations in between the teachers in the UK and those in their home countries in terms of the support they provide. An example of such support might be that teachers provide more intensive support in theirs' home countries than in the UK. Hence, there is a clear gap of understanding among students when they judge teachers, both in the home countries and UK, on the basis of the nature of support teachers provide. At first it appeared that all students desired greater support but differences emerged as a result of in-depth probing. Chinese students indicated more openness towards discussion about the importance of support while Indian and Pakistani students refrained from doing so despite their tendency towards learning support.

As explored in detail, the emerging theory was built upon the core indicators derived from categories and included both academic (language - writing and expert communication; learning support - impact of support on IL; likes and dislikes, and IL - from exam-oriented learning to IL) and adjustment issue. It is noted that language skills as a whole influence IL in contrast to previous understanding which shows that IL influence language skills (see Tian, 2008; Tan, 2011). Alongside, learning support influences both language and IL skills. This present a cyclical process of learning competency and the key for gradual change lies with the nature of learning support that steers the learning process as a whole.

In the course of investigating the impact of language skills on IL, it was found that students' initial enthusiasm towards their studies in the UK mislead them at the point of assessment, when they found themselves trapped in a learning

culture beyond their comprehension at the early phases, as they realised at later phases of their studies. Another indication given by students is about the need for support towards learning patterns that arise from a lack of knowledge about the practicing learning patterns in the UK. Students find out about learning patterns in the UK only upon their arrival in the UK. Students indicated that additional generic learning support has a positive impact on their learning in the UK.

The student perceptions also indicated that liking in prior and UK-based learning for support and liking for IL and availability of resources in the UK lead to successful adjustment in the academic environment in the UK, which is considered by students as a guarantee for successful learning development. This is often called 'widening participation' which the researchers realised at later stage of studies.

Students' perceptions also revealed that upon abandoning the mono-ethnic concept of communication (see Brown, 2008) and students' restricted access to a wider community, in which English is spoken in daily life, the process of adjustment could be achieved. In other words the wider use of English and the emancipation from the mode of translation - a mode in which students try to translate ideas from their 1st language (L1) to English - to a more natural use of spoken English would facilitate the adjustment process, which also leads to successful learning in the UK - developing IL patterns. Important to note that the impact of the issues is equally found among both CHC and non-CHC students.

Conclusions

Reiterating that students' perceptions were central to this study, the Grounded Theory process explored students' voices, additive to the researcher's personal narrative, which are likely to replace some of the existing perceptions about CHC and non-CHC students in relation to their learning patterns, the adaptation issues they find in the UK, and the variance in issues among theirs' learning experiences. The process involved in developing ideas from already prevailed perceptions to more fundamental ideas forms the basis of issues of urgent need and the differences between these students, relevant to learning encounters.

Though, the literature highlights that cultural and social differences are most evident among Asian and Western students (Twigg, 2006) because different students have different cultural and social needs (Wu, 2008). This current study negates previously held perceptions about Asian students on the basis of socio-cultural understanding and learning experiences. Students with educational ambitions are less prone to socio-cultural habits and aspirations; and their socio-cultural values are only liable to represent their history of prior social backgrounds; which might be the only way to see diversity in HE (Ahmed, 2011; Spronk, 2004), this has nothing to do with their academic journey in the UK but it does provide us more freedom to explore their learning adaptations and learning abilities.

One example might be worth mentioning that Asian students expressed that they are the ones respecting their teachers and not their western counterparts. This does not mean that western students do not respect their teachers but it is simply a matter of how one culturally perceives the kind of respect. The way Asian students perceive respect may be differently perceived by western students (Bakar, 2013). These socio-cultural perceptions are similarly found among CHC (Tian, 2008) and non-CHC students (Ahmed, 2011) which means that Asian students as whole, from both CHC and non-CHC backgrounds, share a range of socio-cultural similarities.

Crucially important is the students' socio-cultural aspects that integrate them into one single Asian identity which informs us to formulate similar teaching and learning strategies for them. Hence the label of CHC and non-CHC students is not relevant anymore, and we find no difference in Asians' socio-cultural understandings; a strength that may be used to explore the needs of Asian students under one 'cultural' umbrella. Thus a dichotomy in CHC and non-CHC students apparently does not exist.

On a similar note, steering academic aspects are the ones to sustain the basis of students' academic journeys. For example, student revelations, about IL as a solid learning approach, will encourage and ease formulating 'teaching strategies' but what really constitutes and sustains this approach is also important. For one to continue IL, it appears vital to have adequate language skills, in particular academic writing and expert level of oral skills through which students enable themselves to transmit ideas more effectively (Bakar, 2013). The level of incompetent language skill (particularly written) originates as a result of different interpretation students' conceive and convey. Indeed students with inadequate language skills are less likely to demonstrate coherent argumentations during demonstrations and presentations etc. Similarly, the ability of coherent analytical approach to argumentation in particular might be important in 'academic writing skills' for all students in some subject studies while oral communication skills are already acknowledged as different among Asian students on the basis of different subject studies (see Entwistle, 2005). The reason for difference in communication skills requirement in different subject studies might be that some subject areas do not require competency in speaking. Hence, the level of required competency in spoken language varies from discipline to discipline because some subject areas may require intensive spoken skills for the purpose of demonstration while others don't, and this trend may not be limited to Asian students. Hence, language skills in respect of academic disciplines force students to seek alternatives to meet the demand of academic language skills. Currently students' perceptions have revealed the implications of support from within the learning environment, i.e. from teachers and this was seen a facilitating factor to overcoming language issues in general. However it is vital to note that students' both multi-ethnic approach to learning and language enable them to experience a successful transition. This is seen to turn the trend towards IL skills.

Theory into Practice

As previously noted, it was suggested that raising the required level of English language competence (i.e. IELTS scores) would be necessary to meet the growing demands of internationalisation (Quality Assurance Agency, 2012), in which language was picked as a major constraint (Hinkel, 2011). It was also suggested that in this way, universities would be able to recruit competent students (BIS, 2010) even if English language ability remains one of the major problems among students in higher education (Dees et al., 2007; UKCOSA, 2006).

At large, to continue recruiting Asian students, they would need to be made aware of the need for early stage-preparation as well as intermingling in multi-cultural learning environment. This practice is vital as students are often mis-sold a dream of British qualification whilst they have not aware of the implications of 'IL' in the real sense. If universities are really serious about educating these students, then they need to act in collaboration to ensure a range of learning support is available for them so that they can make successful transition to UK's institutions.

Similarly, the levels of English measured through IELTSs etc. cannot be considered the only criteria because it gives a very crude picture of the student's capability of learning adaptation. Preparation for IL in the UK is currently underdeveloped and very worrying (see Cartwright, 2007; Nieto, Dimitriadou & Davy, 2008), causing anxiety (Coutu, 2002) and sometimes failure and discontinuation (see Biggs, 2003). Unless different structured approaches to preparation for IL (perhaps in the home country as well) are not considered, it would be unenlightened to expect a successful process of learning in the UK, leave alone a successful IL experience.

Limitations

As a common practice of research not every issue can be probed in a single study, nor all aspects of an issue, but those which affect participants more can realistically be explored (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Hence in the current study, it was thought necessary to identify perceptions of both CHC and non-CHC student in relation to issues they face. It is possible that multiple issues may exist among sample students, as Tian (2008) and Wu (2008) found among Chinese students but this study only focused on how different Asian students consider learning as a process in HE and the related issues they encounter during this time. Thus the current study forms the basis for HE learning in the UK, extending the nature of inquiry from Chinese towards Indian and Pakistani students. The sample was not cohesive in number but was sufficient for the three-phase interviews, supported by the researcher personal narratives. The study did not consider concerns other than academic nor sought identify in broad national (identity) interpretation. Similarly students' perceptions regarding different subject-studies in relation to learning issues were not explored in detail as it would not have been feasible in a single study, leaving a

gap for further investigation using different analytical and data collection methods.

References:

- Ahmed, A. (2011). The Experience of Indian Students before Studying in the UK in: Foster, M. (ed.) *Working with Cultural Diversity in Higher Education*, May 2015, SEDA Special 28, UK, pp.46-47.
- Adeeb, A.M. (1986). *A study of the problems and issues of higher education in developing countries, with special reference to South Asia*, PhD thesis, University of Bradford, Postgraduate School of Studies in Social Analysis – Education Unit, UK.
- Bakar, A. (2013). *A Study of Asian Students' Perceptions of Learning Strategies and Related Issues in UK Based Higher Education Institutions*. PhD thesis, University of Worcester.
- Barron, P., Baum, T., & Conway, F. (2007). Learning, Living and Working: Experiences of International Postgraduate Students at a Scottish University, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 2 August 2007, 14(2): 85-101.
- Biggs, J.B. (1999). *What the student does: Teaching for quality learning at university*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Biggs, J.B. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Buckingham: Open University Press/Society for Research into Higher Education. (Second edition), Buckingham, UK.
- Bilgin, A., & Crowe, S. (2008). Approaches to Learning in Statistics. *Asian Social Science Research* march 2008, 4(3): 36-42.
- BIS (2010). *One Step Beyond: Making the most of postgraduate education*, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Accessed 8th Sep 2015 at: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/BISCore/corporate/docs/P/10-704-one-step-beyond-postgraduate-education.pdf>.
- Brooks, R. & J. Waters (2009). 'International higher education and the mobility of UK students' *Journal of Research in International Education* 8(2): 191-209.
- Brown, L. (2008). Language and Anxiety: An Ethnographic Study of International Postgraduate Students, *Evaluation & Research in Education* 2008, 21(2), 75-95.
- Brownlee, J., Walker, S., Lennox, S., Exley, B., & Pearce, S. (2009). The first year university experience: using personal epistemology to understand effective learning and teaching in higher education. *Higher Education*, 58(5): 599-618, Springer 2009.
- Carroll, J. & Ryan, J. (2005) (Eds). *Teaching International Students: Improving Learning for All*. SEDA series, 1st Edition October 2005, London: Routledge.
- Cartwright, S. (2007). *Understanding Learning and Learners: University of Bath MA Unit: How can I help my students understand and develop the skills of independent learning?* MA Thesis.
- Caruana, V. & Spurling, N. (2007). *The Internationalization of UK Higher Education: a review of selected material*. Project report, June 2007. Accessed 9th March 2015 at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/tla/internationalisation/lit_review_internationalisation_of_uk_he_v2.pdf
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*, London: Sage.
- Cooper, B.J. (2004). The enigma of the Chinese learner. *Accounting Education*, 13(3): 289-310, Routledge.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded Theory Research: *Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria*, *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1): 3-21.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* [3rd Ed], Sage Publication.

- Cousin, G. (2009). *Researching Learning in Higher Education*, Routledge .Coughlan, S. (March 2011). *Record numbers of international students*, BBC News Education. Accessed 19th Aug 2015 at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12671198>.
- Coutu, D. (2002). The anxiety of learning. *Harvard Business Review*, March-April, 1-8.
- Dees, D.M., Ingram, A., Kovalik, C., Allen-Huffman, M., McClelland, A., & Justice, L. (2007). A Transactional Model of College Teaching. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 19(2): 130-139.
- Edwards, V., & Ran, A. (2006). *Meeting the needs of Chinese students in British Higher Education*, the University of Reading, UK. Accessed 18th June 2015 at: http://www.ncll.org.uk/50_research/researchprojects/meetingtheneedsof/meetingtheneeds.pdf
- Elliott, J. (2006). *Using Narratives in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage.
- Entwistle, N.J. (2005). Ways of thinking and ways of teaching across contrasting subject areas. Paper to be presented at the ISL2005 conference on "Improving Student Learning by Assessment" University of Edinburgh, UK. [Online] accessed 7th July 2015 at: <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/etlISL2005.pdf>
- Entwistle, N.J. & Smith, C. (2013). Exploring the nature of academic understanding. *The Psychology of Education Review* 2013, 37(1): 28-36.
- Exley, B. (2005). Learner Characteristics of 'Asian' EFL Students: Exceptions to the 'Norm'. In Young, Janelle, Eds. *Proceedings Pleasure Passion Provocation. Joint National Conference AATE & ALEA 2005*, pp. 1-16, Gold Coast, Australia.
- Felder, R.M. & Brent, R. (2005). Understanding Student Differences. *Journal of Engineering Education*, 94(1): 57-72 (2005).
- Forland, H. (2008). Bridging the gap in expectations between international students and academic staff - "At home the teachers feed me with knowledge, but in the UK they help me pick up the spoon and learn to feed myself". *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 12(2): 204-221, Sage.
- Fleming, D.N. (2007). *Learning Styles and the Personalization of Learning: A Discussion Paper for Dundee University 2007*.
- Franzoni, A.L., & Assar, S. (2009). Student Learning Styles Adaptation Based on Teaching Strategies and Electronic Media, *Educational Technology & Science* 2009, 12(4): 15-29.
- Glaser, B. (1992). *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence v Forcing*, Mill Valley: The Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Chicago: Aldine.
- Gordon, C., & Debus, R. (2002). Developing deep learning approaches and personal teaching efficacy within a pre-service teacher education context. *British Journal of Educational Psychology* (2002), 72(1): 483-511.
- Hall, B. (2008). Plagiarism among international students, *International Students and Plagiarism: A review of the literature*, University of Bournemouth, UK.
- Heijne-Penninga *et al.* (2008). Student Learning, influence of open- and closed-book tests on medical students' learning approaches, Open and Closed-book Tests. *Medical Education*, 2008, 42(10): 967-974.
- HESA (2010). *Students in higher education institutions 2008/09*. Press release 144. Accessed 2nd March 2015 at: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1668&Itemid=161

- HESA (2011). *Students in Higher Education Institutions 2009/10*. Press release 155, February 2011. Accessed 3rd March 2015 at: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1943&Itemid=161.
- Hinkel, E. (Ed) (2011). *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, Volume 2, Routledge.
- Home Office (2011). *Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary, National Statistics, QUARTER 1 2011 (JANUARY - MARCH)*, United Kingdom. Accessed 11th April 2015 at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/immigration-asylum-research/control-immigration-q1-2011-t/control-immigration-q1-2011?view=Binary>
- Honey, P. & Mumford, A. (1992). *The Manual of Learning Styles 3rd Ed*. Maidenhead: Peter Honey.
- Houghton W. (2004). *Engineering Subject Centre Guide: Learning and Teaching Theory for Engineering Academics*. Loughborough: HEA Engineering Subject Centre. Accessed 2nd December 2014 at: <http://www.engsc.ac.uk/er/theory/learning.asp>
- Huang, R. (2008). *The Enhancing Series Case Studies: International Learning Experience Critical Thinking: Discussion from Chinese Postgraduate International Students and Their Lecturers*, The Higher Education Academy: Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Network.
- Kember, D., Leung Doris, Y.P. & McNaught C. (2008). A workshop activity to demonstrate that approaches to learning are influenced by the teaching and learning environment. *Active Learning in Higher Education* March 2008, 9(1): 43-56.
- Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- Kolb, A., & Kolb, D.A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4(2): 193-212.
- Kvale, S. (2007). *Doing Interviews: The SAGE Qualitative Research Kit* Edited by Flick, U, 2007, Sage Publications
- Li, X. (2004). *An Analysis of Chinese EFL Learners' Beliefs about the Role of Rote Learning in Vocabulary Learning Strategies*, PhD Thesis, University of Sunderland, UK. Accessed 12th June 2015 at: http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/xiuping_11-05_thesis.pdf.
- Liu, L. (2012). An Overview of Development of Higher Education Access in China, *Higher Education Studies* June 2012, 2(2): 107-113.
- Lotbinière, M.D. (7 Aug 2012). UK immigration staff to test foreign students' English skills: Concerns that officers will not be trained to assess students' competence as part of a campaign to bar bogus applicants, *Guardian Weekly*. Accessed 7th July 2015 at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/aug/07/uk-student-interviews>.
- Mathews, D. (23 Aug 2012). English standards being set below recommended levels, *Times Higher Education UK*. Accessed 8th July 2015 at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=420938>.
- McMahon, P. (2011) Chinese voices: Chinese learners and their experiences of living and studying in the United Kingdom, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33(4): 401-414.
- Merrick, B. & Robinson, J. (2006). *New Horizons: the experiences of international students in UK further education colleges*, Report of the UKCOSA Survey, UKCOSA, The Council for International Education.
- Mukhtar, S., Tatlah, I.A., & Saeed, M. (2011). An Analytical Study of Higher Education System of Pakistan. *International Journal of Academic Research Part 1* March 2011, 3(2): 310-313.

- Musa, A. & Wood, J.R.G. (2003). *Online Learning and Learning Styles, Education in a Changing Environment 17th-18th September 2003 Conference Proceedings*, University of Salford, UK.
- Nicholls, G. (2002). *Developing teaching and learning in higher education*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Nieto, N., Dimitriadou, A. & Davy, N. (2008). Developing Skills for Independent Learning for Access to Higher Education Students. *FACE Conference, 2nd and 4th July 2008*, St John University, York UK. PP. 1-14.
- Pritchard, A. (2008). *Studying and Learning at University, Vital Skills for Success in Your Degree*. Sage Publication, London.
- Prosser, M. & Trigwell, K. (1999). *Understanding Learning and Teaching. The experience in Higher Education*. Open University Press, 1999.
- Quality Assurance Agency (2012). *International students studying in the UK -Guidance for UK higher education providers*, The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2012. Accessed 6th April 2015 at: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/International-students.pdf>
- Siddiqui, S.Z. (2006). *Study Approaches of Students in Pakistan: The Revised two-factor Study Process Questionnaire Experience*, Occasional Report 1 December, 2006, HEC Pakistan.
- Smith, H. (2008). Spoon-feeding: or how I learned to stop worrying and love the mess. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(6): 715-718.
- Sovic, S. (2008). *Lost in Transition? The International Students' Experience Project, Creative Learning in Practice*, Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, University of the Arts London.
- Spronk, B. (2004). Addressing cultural diversity through learner support, In Brindley, J., Walti, C., and Zawacki-Richter, O. (Eds.), *Learner Support in Open, Distance and Online Learning Environments*, Oldenburg, Germany: Bibliotheks-und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg, 2004, pp.169-178.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. (2nd Edn), Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Tan, P.L. (2011). Towards a Culturally Sensitive and Deeper Understanding of "Rote Learning" and Memorisation of Adult Learners. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15(2): 124-145.
- Tian, M. (2008). *"The Chinese learner" or "learners from China"? A multiple case study of Chinese masters' students in the University of Bath*. A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, University of Bath.
- Twigg, C. J. (2006). *A grounded theory study of overseas students in an English university*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Huddersfield.
- UKCOSA (2006). *New Horizons: The experiences of international students in UK further education colleges*. Report of the UKCOSA Survey, UKCOSA, UK.
- Valiente, C. (2008). Are students using the 'wrong' style of learning? *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9(1): 73-91.
- Wakeling, P. (2008). Are Ethnic Minorities Underrepresented in UK Postgraduate Study? *Higher Education Quarterly* 2009, 63(1): 86-111.
- World Bank (2000). *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*. The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, February 2000. Accessed 1st December 2014 at: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRREGTOPTEIA/Resources/Peril_and_Promise.pdf

Wu, W. (2008). *Challenges of university academic adjustment: a case study of East Asian international postgraduate students at one British University*. PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, Institute of Education. Available at: <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/2851>.

Yorke, M. & Longden, B. (2008). *The first-year experience of higher education in the UK, Final Report*. Higher Education Academy, UK.

Zeegers, P. (2004). Student learning in higher education: A path analysis of academic achievement in science. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 23(1): 35-56.

A. 1: Codes at later phase

Type	Name	References
Node 1	Social Connections	37
Node 2	Learning with socialising	19
Node 3	Independent Learning	11
Node 4	Learning Experiences	19
Node 5	Communication	57
Node 6	Preferences of learning	56
Node 7	Unattractive aspects	52
Node 8	Learning Support	47
Node 9	Learning from teachers	29
Node 10	Resources	35
Node 11	Lingual Influence	43
Node 12	Cultural Similarities	32

A. 2: Categories

Type	Name	
Cat 1	Teacher Centeredness	
Cat 2	Likes	
Cat 3	Dislikes	
Cat 4	Independent Learning	
Cat 5	Translation Period	
Cat 6	Interactive Learning	
Cat 7	Multi-ethnic Approach	
Cat 8	Learning Support	
Cat 9	Learning Guidance	