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International Students in US: Feel Hard When Writing?

Haynie (2014, p.18) indicates the international students in the U.S. has dramatically increased. Especially, students from India, Korea and China represent more than half of the international students in the U.S. Those students are all from Asia countries, which have huge differences from the American, in all settings. Thus, apparently, they will meet and even cause huge amount of problems when they study abroad in America, which is a big challenge for colleges to help them overcome those. Specifically, achieving both academic and extra-curricular successes are the ultimate goal. They are usually treated as same as native American students in the class for writing, which is a problem because most of them cannot meet the U.S. standard of writing (Riazantseva & Angelova, 1999, p.492).

The writing differences raise barriers of communication. Consequently, they have to spend large amount of time on practicing writing skills, and many of them fail to get high scores on the essays and to get great social networking with local American people. Riazantseva and Angelova (1999) state, international students feel painful with writing because they have limited help.

In fact, although the communication barriers can be overcame, the international students face communication barriers because they cannot meet the U.S. writing style when writing essays or emails. They have language barriers of non-proficient English, different culture background which is more conservative, and different writing style with more formal expressions.

**Language Barriers**

International student, as their name indicates, are from different countries speaking different languages. When they come to the U.S., an English-speaking country, the language barrier becomes the first and most apparent problem.

Good communication requires efficient expression and least misunderstanding. However, not all the English as a Second Language, as known as the ESL students, are able to master English, meaning that they need to develop their English skills while studying for their degree (O’Loughlin & Murray, 2007). Under some circumstances, such as in Saudi Arabian as Fischer (2011) researches on, due to the support of government more and more students are sent abroad to study and thus the difficulty of study abroad becomes lower and students feels impossible to overcome the language barrier in such a short time (p.13).

Even those who speaks fluent English feel hard when they firstly come to the U.S. The American style English is different from what they learned from the textbook (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2014, p.5). The word usage and local dialect makes the situation even worse. When students writing emails and texting, they sometime get confused by the American style abbreviations and phrases, and it costs more time to learn. On the other side, American students feel hard to read their emails because their language is ambiguous and hard for native speakers to interpret.

In the past, the universities ignore those problems because the international students are such a minor group that nobody noticed their difficult. However, when it comes to the modern U.S. universities, which has 886, 052 new international students during just 2013 -2014, the problem cannot be neglected, or the university will have a chain of problems due to the negative effects (Haynie, 2014, p.18).

**Culture Shock**

Except the language difference, international students also share various culture background. They will definitely face the “culture shock”, which is a kind of anxious emotion when a person is put into a different culture (Macionis & Gerber, 2010). That is the second major barrier faced by international students after the language. People act, think, and communicate in different way and they have to adjust themselves to get used to that.

One big thing is the Willing To Communicate, also known as WTC. International students, especially from conservative countries such as China, are generally less willing to communicate than the local American Students (Lu & Hsu, 2008, p.86). People in a conservative culture are educated not to talk directly what they think. However, in the U.S., people just feel free to talk anything they want, express their thoughts directly and never guess others’ “potential meaning”. In that scenario, international students sometimes feel to be offended though American people did not intend to do. Also, American people feel confused by the indirect conversation because they cannot catch the idea directly as they expected.

Moreover, a culture is often regard as a set of values, believes and similar experience. People from the same country have similar thoughts to a specific thing, which is another big issue for the international students. There is miscommunication in the intercultural communication because the meaning can be interpreted in different ways. (Lynn, 2005, p.6). Which way to be interpreted is determined by the culture. Thus, when it comes to the writing, international students usually cause misunderstanding and uneasiness when they attempt to express their idea (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2014). That prevents an effective and efficient communication, from which international students suffer.

**Writing Style and Format**

Even students overcome the language barrier and culture shock also face problems when writing. The writing style and different discipline also block their way of achieving success. Readers feel it clear when they read an article in format they get used to. A good author-reader communication is created depending heavily on the writing format.

The first major difference is the informality. American people are known for their informal behavior of acting and writing. People prefer to treat others like their friends, no matter for their customers or bosses. However, in some countries, like Japan and Europe, people prefer to write in a formal way instead (Bjørge, 2007). Then the problems appear. An extremely formal email written by those international students will make American people feel nervous and uncomfortable when reading it. That makes it hard for them to make friends over the emails and social media.

Moreover, Readers have expectations of what they are going to read next, and that expectation is derived from the American’s writing format. This situation is obvious especially for the academic writing. A reader of an academic article, expects very certain things: research question, method, result, and the conclusion. If an article does not follow that way, it will be considered as a bad article.

Further, the attitude toward the authority diverse from the western and eastern. In eastern country, such as China, people believe what authority write is absolutely true and they should not paraphrase or rewrite that (Fischer, 2011, p.14). But that will be definitely regarded as plagiarism in the U.S. As the Fischer states, American people value the article with good critical thinking, which many of international student lack. If the international students are not given the right instruction of how to writing an academic essay as American people usually do, they will face a set of troubles.

**Does the Problem Can Be Solved?**

International students’ problem have been already seen by the universities and most colleges have moved. So many institutions have launched the Language and Support programs for the international students to help them with writing, and that helps. (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010). Special indications are given to the international students to help reduce the negative influence of the culture and language barriers.

Moreover, some universities launch the peer pair program and special international student orientation to help them (Fischer, 2011, p.14). International students now have instructions of how to deal with the daily and academic communication and writing, and get help anytime from a local peer mentor. As Fischer indicates, these programs help international students do better in the campus.

However, the problem cannot be fully solved. Although students are able to learn how to write academic essays from the help programs and ESL classes, they still have troubles integrating into local communities, especially making local friends (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011). International students still feel hard to live as a genuine American to communicate. The way to make friends in a specific culture cannot be instructed.

**Conclusion**

In short, international students in the U.S. have serious problems of writing in the U.S. way on both in-curricular and extra-curricular, though some programs try to help them. The low-level English abilities, conservative culture background, and formal and unique writing styles are the main barriers preventing them make perfect communication. More helping program should appear in the future. Although overcoming those three main barrier requires more research and practive, the universities are responsible for help international students do better in the writing communication.

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