

**Student Support in China: Addressing the Perceived Needs of
Undergraduate English Department Students**

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Abstract

As yet little research into the perspectives of Chinese students studying in mainland China's Higher Education Institutions has been undertaken. This paper explores the issue of students' support needs and presents the findings of a study carried out in 2005-2007 at a public university in North East China. The Action Research method used observation, interviews and a short questionnaire (n: 45) to ascertain the perceived needs of undergraduate English Department students in order to provide a practical plan to better support them through college and help equip them for a future career into the ever-changing knowledge-based global marketplace China is fast turning into. The findings from this study paint an overall picture of conditions that prevent students from developing into all-round autonomous people during their time at college.

Data shows that

- 50% of students do not think that university fosters emotional and social development
- 58% of students rate university courses as 'not useful'
- The class monitor system adversely affects students' academic development

The study shows that students lack important transferable skills such as teamwork, note taking and IT skills. Furthermore, students recognize that

- Freshers need both study and time management skills as well as guidance on how to adapt to college life.
- Second year students need to develop confidence and learn goal setting and career planning.

This paper concludes by suggesting the implementation of a Student Support course that uses multiple teaching methods and teaches study skills as well as transferable skills to classes of

about 20 students from different departments. The course aims to benefit students' personal, academic and career development and is designed as a Professional Development tool for teachers and students alike.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. General Background of the Study

In 1978 Deng Xiao Ping initiated the Open Door policy and since then innumerable changes in social structure have occurred in the People's Republic of China. China joined the WTO in 2001 and the ensuing 'market socialism', the move from a planned economy to a market economy, has greatly changed all major institutions in the New China. Globalisation and cooperation with foreign owned institutions has put its mark on education. First, in order to prepare its citizens to play a role on the world stage and to produce creative employees who can adapt to rapidly changing circumstances, the traditional focus on rote learning is being abandoned and curriculum reforms have been instigated. Second, it has become clear that lifelong learning skills are essential in today's society. Says the World Bank Report (Dahlman & Aubert, 2001, p.77), it is important 'to develop 'soft skills' such as management, HR development, foreign language fluency and the ability to work in teams. The new knowledge based production system requires people to shift their attention from individual competition to teamwork. Third, because of a huge increase in university enrolment and the fact that there are now many private companies in China, universities no longer help graduates find a job; nowadays students have to do their own job hunting. It has been reported that three out of five university leavers will fail to find a job because competition among the approximately 3.5 million graduates is fierce (HR Magazine Dec 2005; Hartmann, 2006). Moreover, recently graduated students have little to offer companies since they lack practical skills. The problem is that, because of a lack of resources, students need to follow the pathway of courses given by their faculty. Only in recent years have a handful of optional courses been offered. This lack of diversity of subject matter prevents students from broadening their horizon. The practice that students remain members of one and the same class and take all their compulsory courses with that particular group of students during their 4 years at university further restricts

students to interaction with peers who have similar ideas, interests and skills. The government realizes the need for citizens who have lifelong learning skills for 'China's competitive edge will be determined by its people's ability to create, acquire, share and use knowledge effectively' (Dahlman & Aubert, 2001, p.69). Obviously there is still ample room for improvement in the educational field.

Tradition, lack of financial and human resources and the government's focus on quantity instead of quality for any but the key universities are root causes for customer and stakeholder needs not being met. As for financial resources, China's public expenditure on education has been stagnant: in 2006 it was only 2.8% of Gross National Product as compared to Third world developing countries 3.5% (Yen, 2006). There are obviously major educational problems in a country with millions of graduates of whom only a limited number have the necessary skills; HR Magazine (Dec 2005) lists the lack of practical experience in projects or teamwork because of the education system's bias toward theory as one of the major problems. As yet, little attention is paid to providing quality education. The World Bank Report (Dahlman and Aubert, 2001, p.xx) sums up the root problems:

Centuries of Confucian tradition, decades of planned economy regime and emphasis on rote learning rather than creative thinking has shaped Chinese [...] methods of teaching. Most government support has gone to basic training. The curriculum is focused on basics, not on creativity and lifelong learning.

1.2. Problem Statement

China has made great strides in providing basic education for its large population; however, there are still a lot of educational problems that need addressing. In this paper special attention will be paid to perceived needs in student support services at a provincial public university in North East China. During the 2 ½ years that I taught at this university I noticed

a growing need for student support – growing, since Chinese society is changing at such a rapid pace that it is hard to keep up. Several areas where students seem to struggle were duly noted and this paper will further analyze the situation. This study aims to ascertain the perceived needs of undergraduate English students in order to provide a practical plan to better support them through college and help equip them for their future career.

1.3. Professional Significance of the Problem

Watts et al. (1996) point out that formal guidance services are linked to industrialization, democratization, social mobility and cultural individualism, and that countries with planned economies and totalitarian political systems tend to have no space for guidance: this is the current situation in China. The reason for the lack of guidance is the fact that these countries are inclined to assign jobs - as was the case in China until recently. It is likely that guidance will be moved from informal to formal provision in the future since this typically occurs when society becomes more diversified and complex, but at present little attention is paid to students' learning experiences or their needs. Because of the rapidly changing society students face many challenges and the people they have traditionally relied on for guidance and advice – their parents and teachers – often lack accurate knowledge to support them properly. I have embarked on this study because I want to be the best teacher I can be, to help my students realize and achieve their potential and to enable them to develop useful skills. In order to become the kind of knowledgeable, creative, trustworthy, inspiring teacher I aspire to be, I regard background information on my students' perceptions of their needs and their goals as essential. I expect this study to provide me with the kind of information to make me a more effective teacher who can help her students develop into confident, successful adults. Furthermore, I hope that this proposed action research will make a contribution to the Professional Development of local English Department teachers in China, with a view to

improving their level and ways of supporting their students' social, academic and career development. Though the scope of this study is limited, this study sets out to extend existing knowledge and provide valuable information in the hitherto quite unmapped area of Chinese students' needs and student support. As it is assumed that teachers who are aware of their students' needs and weak points will endeavour to address these problems, this study aspires to benefit teachers and students alike, and in doing so improve the quality of education provided. (Appendix 5, which is based on Deming's 14 quality improvement ideas as listed in Scherkenbach (1982), provides information on the quality of education at the university under review here).

1.4. Limitations of the Study

Since little research on student support in China has been undertaken, this study raises many questions in order to get an overall idea of the kind of guidance offered and needed at Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Though answers are obtained, some responses suggest new questions that – as yet – must remain unanswered because of a limited timeframe and the limited number of participants of this study. Since the area under discussion is rather unexplored, there are simply too many questions to answer in one study.

Observations from fieldwork, a short questionnaire and literature review are the three sources of information for this study. Some background information was extracted from documents and news releases from China Education and Research Network (CERNET) and the Ministry of Education website; however, a lot of information accessible on the latter site dated back to 2002 and had not been recently updated. Another source of documents was ERIC, from which information on recent studies concerned with Chinese students' learning was obtained in the form of Portable Document Formats (PDF). Finding appropriate literature was made difficult since the number of resources in this field is limited, and books available in libraries often

date from before 2000. However, as immense changes have taken place in the recent past in many fields – including education – in China, this study only draws on research conducted after 2000 since earlier findings are likely to be outdated. This further restricted the acquisition of data retrieved from secondary sources.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

CEE: College Entrance Examination is an academic examination held annually in mainland China. This exam is usually taken in the students' last year in high school and is almost always required for college admission. The score of the CEE has consequences for the rest of the student's life, since it determines whether he can enter college or not, and if so, whether he will be accepted by a key university or will have to be content with enrolling at a third tier college.

EL: Emotional Literacy is the ability to understand ourselves and others and to be aware of, understand and to use information about the emotional states of others with competence. It includes the ability to understand, express and manage our own emotions, and respond to the emotions of others, in ways that are helpful to ourselves and others. (Weare, 2004)

MoE : Ministry of Education of China

Monitor: A class monitor at university is a student who manages the administrative affairs in his class, helps his classmates solve their daily problems, and is the contact person between teacher and students. Each class, from primary schools to universities, has a class monitor (*banzhang*).

PBL: ‘Problem-based learning is focused, experiential learning (minds-on, hands-on) organized around the investigation and resolution of real-world problems.’ (Torp and Sage, 2002, pp.15)

TEM 4 and TEM 8: TEM stands for Test for English Majors. These are academic tests aimed at testing a student's general college-level English proficiency in listening, reading, writing and comprehension. Recently an oral component was added. Passing TEM-4 is a prerequisite for a BA degree for English Majors.

1.6. Organization of the Thesis

Chapter 2 gives an overview of what theoretical and empirical evidence say concerning the needs of Chinese students. This section is divided into background information, followed by a discussion of findings in the field of Chinese students’ personal development, academic development and career development. The last part summarizes findings from previous studies and clarifies how those findings relate to this study.

Chapter 3 provides information as to the methods of research that were used, as well as the context of the study, participants, location and procedures followed.

Chapter 4 combines the findings from the questionnaire with field notes. This section’s organization is similar to the literature section: it first provides background information on the educational system in which English department students find themselves, and then presents data in the field of their personal development, academic development and career development. The third part reports suggestions from students on how to make life at university more fulfilling and effective. Finally, a short summary of findings is given.

Chapter 5 interprets the Results, discusses their implications and proposes a practical solution for addressing the students’ needs. Suggestions for further research are also provided. The paper finishes with some concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Educators usually outline three types of student development: students' personal and social development, academic development and career development. This chapter will, first, provide background information as to the studies this paper draws upon and, second, it will discuss the empirical findings as to support provided at Chinese universities and difficulties encountered in the three specified fields of student development. Tables of UK and China-based Studies this Review draws upon are provided in Appendix 2 and 3.

2.1. Background Information

In recent years several universities in the UK have undertaken research in order to ascertain how to best attract, keep and support international (especially Chinese) students. Several studies carried out in the past few years focus on how to help Chinese students deal with expectations placed upon them by an education system based on Confucian principles – with the teacher as a model of knowledge and the belief that hard work can compensate for lack of ability - to a system with a Problem Based Learning style which involves independent studying and critical thinking. The western education system holds many foreign concepts for Chinese students. As yet, little research into the perspectives of Chinese students studying in mainland China has been undertaken (Xu, 2004, p.1; Corbin Dwyer and McNaughton, 2004, p. 374; Turner, 2006, p. 30). This study intends to inquire into Chinese students' perspectives concerning student support and aims to determine and address the perceived needs of English department students so that they can develop into all-round citizens, a goal also voiced by the National Congress of CPC of 2002. Though this paper cannot draw upon many prominent studies in the field of student support and guidance in Chinese State-owned HEI, international Chinese students who have just arrived in the UK are products of the Chinese education system and, therefore, some of the findings in UK based research may be relevant to this

study. In this chapter those findings will be reported and its implications for education in China considered. Furthermore, findings from a number of recent China-based studies on issues related to student support have been studied.

2.2. Review of Theoretical and Empirical Literature

A. Personal Development

Some insights into the extent of Chinese students' needs for personal development can be gained by studying their living and study conditions. Qiang and Wolff (2003, p.14) make mention of the 'sheltered lives led by university English majors' in China, and different aspects of this isolated life are related in several studies. First, Mohrman (2003, p.23) mentions that students 'follow their programme in lockstep fashion', indicating that students are not at liberty to make up their own mind and choose their own courses. Second, Wang (2003, p.180) points out that students do not meet many people with a different lifestyle and different point of view because they have 'little contact with society outside campus'. For four years a group of twenty odd students will be classmates and take the same courses. Only recently has it been possible to choose an elective course, but even these are offered exclusively to English majors for there is a clear division between study fields (Mohrman, 2003). Furthermore, students live and sleep with the same group of 7 peers, for MoE has issued the instruction that students must reside on campus in the dormitories provided (China Daily, 2007, July 17). Third, students have 28 classes a week (Qiang and Wolff, 2003, p.13) - far more than most fulltime students in western universities. This leaves little room for anything but studying and attending class. Fourth, most students cannot afford to travel and therefore lack opportunities to broaden their horizon. Internet access could provide access to the world, but university libraries own a limited number of computers and several universities have actually launched a rule to prevent freshers from buying their own computer (Zhang,

2007). Finally, the single child policy gives young people less opportunity to experience family support and develop social skills (Wang, Song and Kang, 2006). Because of all these restrictions, which prevent students from fully developing themselves, it is hardly surprising that Chinese students have 'problems in behaviour, psychology, choice of occupation, interpersonal relationships and values' (Corbin Dwyer and McNaughton, 2004, p. 375).

Literature seems to agree that a lack of personal development adversely affects people's academic achievement and career prospects. Anderson and Mitchell (2006) and Weare (2004), for example, assert that success in work and life is more dependent on students' emotional and social abilities than on their IQ, and Turner (2006) stresses the importance of cultural learning to the development of academic confidence and performance. Some studies undertaken in China (Dwyer and McNaughton, 2004; Romanowski, 2006) mention the additional need to teach morals and values in order to develop a healthy personality; this does not seem a fad in a country where students habitually cheat on tests, engage in plagiarism and manufacture fake diplomas and credentials (Qiang and Wolff, 2003, pp.1-11).

Weare (2004) asserts that Emotional Literacy in education gives students a positive self-concept and tools for self-protection, making relationships, resisting pressure, decision-making, stress management, communication and negotiation skills. Studies show that a holistic approach and long term commitment are more successful in changing behaviour than short-term, one-off programmes (Weare, 2004; Turner, 2006; Wang, Song and Kang, 2006). Currently, students are dependent on opportunities in personal development provided by their teacher and through the moral and academic environment they create (Qiang et al., 2003). However, since English department teachers need to prepare their students for national exams such as TEM 4 and TEM 8, little attention is paid to personal development opportunities. Teachers are 'more concerned with exam scores than with aspects such as morality, character,

emotion and thinking' (Romanowski, 2006, p.78). (Appendix 4 provides additional information on Emotional Literacy in Chinese HEI)

In the UK peer tutoring has been effective in helping improve people's self-concept, behaviour, attitudes to learning and building social relations, but in China this is as yet a rather unexplored method. Ding and Lehrer's (2006) study in Chinese secondary schools found that peers with positive attitudes can improve student achievement; on the other hand, it cannot be denied that the Chinese education system is built on Confucius' principles which are teacher oriented. In this respect, Huang's research (2005) that noted the students' desire for accurate and concise information and 'teacher-centred teaching', and Gallagher's (2005, p.78) observation that 'peer learning is not valued' may be worth mentioning. It would seem worthwhile to further explore the effectiveness and feasibility of peer tutoring in Chinese education.

Because of different customs and culture, there are some discrepancies between what western and eastern educators consider important and feasible. Weare (2004) and Durkin (2004), for example, point out that societies have different notions of what constitutes Emotional Literacy, depending on their culture. Five main differences can be mentioned. First, western countries tend to focus on the needs of individuals, whereas the collectivist eastern countries concentrate on the needs of the group. Second, the west regards everyone as equal, whereas in the east the elderly receive higher esteem. Third, in the west it is appropriate to express emotions, whereas in the east emotional restraint is highly valued. Fourth, the west places great emphasis on an individual's autonomy and independence, whereas the east encourages individuals to follow rules, authority and tradition. Fifth, the west tolerates differences, whereas the east promotes conformity. The problem for Chinese young people seems to be that there is no longer a clear distinction between the one world and the other, for traditional Chinese cultural notions may no longer work given the new social environment. For example,

in the past Chinese people were taught communist principles, but nowadays one calls the motherland a ‘socialist’ state - as in ‘market economy based on socialist principles’; obviously society and culture are evolving and citizens need to find their way in the New China. This does not always happen effortlessly, as Feng (2006) makes clear in the case of headmasters who experience cultural dilemmas with the ongoing curriculum reforms. It seems imperative that proposals on student support will fit in the Chinese cultural tradition, so that they may be easily accepted.

As for the practical application of personal development in education, in the west portfolios and learning journals are frequently used. Moon (2006, pp.48-9) suggests using learning journals to enhance creativity and help self-development, and Wyatt and Looper (2004) propose using developmental portfolios to document personal growth. Another useful method to help integrate personal development opportunities into the curriculum is role-play (Weare, 2004; Meggison and Chitterbuck, 1994), which has the advantage that it can be used in the English language class, where it not only helps students to improve their oral English, but also shows them more about themselves, their ideas and feelings when encountering a certain situation. Furthermore, it is a useful method to help students prepare for job interviews and team meetings. According to Waddell (1982) ‘Simulation is a close representation of reality, but may be superior to reality for teaching learning purposes.’ (Watts et al., 1996, p.240) Western education has proven that these teaching tools show students more about themselves in a safe environment, and provide opportunities to develop problem solving skills.

B. Academic development

Watts et al. (1996, p. 212) define the academic intention as ‘to identify, expand and communicate a culture’s narratives, beliefs, dispositions, technology and values’ and point out that passing exams is too narrow a reason for learning, whereas Bereiter (2002) states that education must produce people who are able to create and exploit the potentialities of new

knowledge. New knowledge is what makes today's global society go round, and those who want to fit in need lifelong learning skills, which can best be developed in an environment that satisfies diverse learning needs and focuses on self-directed learning (Wang, Song, Kang, 2006). Unfortunately, it seems that education in China does not come up to scratch for it still focuses on examinations, lacks the teaching of values, and has teacher focused learning. It is not surprising that Qiang and Wolff (2003, p. 1) compare Chinese HEI to a 'modern factory assembly line' that mass-produces university graduates.

In western universities students' academic development is addressed through the teaching and integration of study skills such as group work and critical thinking, but in China most of the time is spent in directed activities, resulting in the students' lack of study skills and an inability to think critically and 'go deep' into a text (Xu, 2004; Dong and Stevens, 1992, p.109). Burns and Sinfield (2003, p. 11) describe the difference between surface and deep approaches; surface is the study of facts such as names and dates, whereas deep knowledge is where one understands the significance of the event that occurred. The latter kind of knowledge is acquired through an active learning approach where one continually asks questions and uses the information. In order to make the most of opportunities offered in the Knowledge Age, Chinese students need to learn a deep approach and one might wonder why the deep approach and the teaching of study skills have not yet been satisfactorily introduced in mainland Chinese universities. Several reasons are given. Gallagher (2005), for example, points out that Chinese students do not need critical thinking and a deep approach to pass exams, since studying the prescribed course material is enough to succeed in education courses in China. Education in China can be summed up as being 'teacher-centred, stressing recall of facts and uses of rote learning. It uses strict exams to develop academic knowledge. It is a typical style in which concepts come first, then skills'(Huang, 2005, p.39). Texts are rarely challenged and memorization is highly valued. Moreover, examinations tend to be a

repetition of class notes provided by the teacher (Huang; Mohrman, 2003) Many students therefore fit the picture that Bereiter (2002, p.380) paints of ‘over-managed and coddled students’ who do not think why they are doing something nor evaluate new ideas. Students follow a given programme of courses and are given few chances to choose electives. This, together with the fact that students have little access to basic texts (Mohrman, 2003) and that many texts are inadequate (Qiang et al., 2003, p.8) explains why students have little incentive to take their own studies in hand. Beard and Wilson (2002, p.199) sum up the consequences of this system: ‘Where people operate within the responsibility of others there is danger that they will abdicate responsibility for thinking and just follow instructions.’

Judging by western educational theories the situation in Chinese tertiary education is far from ideal. However, it is interesting to note that students do consider this method to have some strengths. For example, according to Huang (2005, p.39), Chinese students studying abroad point out several advantages of the Chinese style of learning, notably its structured content (65.9%), the fact that information delivered by lecturers is concise and accurate (76.5%) and the teachers’ practice of always providing notes (88.2%). Though some students call it a boring approach because one needs to memorise many new facts, one major advantage is seen as ‘you know exactly what you should learn’. However hard Chinese students work, though, the approach of the ‘one right answer’ does little to prepare them for entry into the ever-changing knowledge based global marketplace.

What actions can be undertaken to help students develop academically? Literature seems in consensus that transferable skills should be embedded in university programmes so that students develop IT, transferable and generic skills in the context of their own discipline (Anderson & Mitchell, 2006; Gallagher, 2005; Turner, 2006; Zhang, 2006). An important conclusion Gallagher (2005, p.83) draws from her pilot study is that transferable skills ‘need to be explicitly taught’, and she remarks that practice alone does not appear to lead to the

acquisition of the skills. In addition, she points out that English language class lends itself especially well to the explicit teaching and developing of skills, since personal reflection can be done through the target language. As for teamwork, which is a ‘culturally challenging concept for Chinese students’ (Edwards & Ran, 2006, p.20), studies find that it would be useful to persuade students of the rationale behind it (Durkin, 2004, p. 16) and ask them to reflect on its value (Edwards and Ran, 2006, p.16; Gallagher, 2005); in a similar vein, Huang (2005, p.42) advises to involve students in the process of deciding what they want to learn and how to learn it in order to get adjusted to the Problem Based Learning experience. Dong and Stevens (1992) add to this that the way to motivate Chinese students is to deepen their understanding of the necessity and importance of their studies and help them create a positive attitude towards their studies. In order to get students to embrace a new learning approach the consensus among educators seems that they need to be taken step by step, and encouraged all the way.

On a side note, it is interesting to make mention of Davey and Higgins’ finding (2005, p.89) that Chinese students consider their group work skills to require the least improvement; this conclusion is in sharp contrast with observations by Edwards and Ran (2006), Gallagher (2005), Huang (2005), Xu (2004) and Durkin (2004) that Chinese students lack this particular skill. According to Belbin (2003) teamwork is collaboration by a group of people who – ideally – have complementary skills and will take on different roles to achieve a common purpose. It would seem that Chinese students’ perception of the meaning of ‘teamwork’ differs from that of (foreign) educators and researchers. Davey and Higgins’ finding raises the question to what extent research in China that (only) makes use of surveys, questionnaires and interviews can be trusted. In any case, it would seem that there is a need to clearly define all terminology used, and to investigate the reasons for the diverging perceptions.

C. Career Development

Employability skills such as teamwork, communication, presentation and management skills may be part and parcel of education in the west, but in China this is not the case; in fact, university education is quite separated from the economic and social development of the country (Wang, 2003, p.180). HEI still follow the mode of 'planned economy', whereas graduates have to find their way in a free market economy for which they need to be innovative and creative, and with critical thinking skills (Ka Ho Mok, 2006). Furthermore, The World Bank (Dahlman and Aubert, 2001) specifically notes the need for practical 'soft' skills such as management, HR development, foreign language fluency and the ability to work in teams. Unfortunately, graduates' skills fall far short of this aim, as reported by HR Magazine (2006): research among 83 executives found that they considered fewer than 10 percent of graduates in China to have the skills to work for a foreign company because of their lack of practical and teamwork skills. Studies (Huang, 2005; Qiang et al., 2003) provide an explanation for this lack of skills by pointing out that student achievement is assessed mainly through written examinations, which fail to test teamwork and problem solving abilities. The universities' theoretical, fact-based, learn-from-the-master approach tend to be blamed, but in fact the central government stipulates the required curriculum - even the content of the basic courses and class timetables - which in effect prevents universities from fulfilling the needs of employers and students (OECD 2000; Mohrman, 2003). There seems to be an urgent need for change in this respect, for research has shown that 'most English department students are intent on pursuing a career in business, not in academia' (Qiang et al., 2003, p.12). Employability skills are therefore crucial to students.

Until recently China's centrally managed economy ruled out the need for university graduates to do their own career planning; however, now that China has embraced the market economy on socialist principles and entered WTO, it has become part of the global marketplace and

certain changes in the job market have had to be made. Foreign companies have been established in the developed metropolises in East China and jobs and lifestyles are fast becoming comparable to those elsewhere in the developed world. It is therefore not surprising to find a mention of 'job-placement' as one of the 5 areas of HE reform on the Ministry of Education website. It is significant, however, that no clarifications are provided as to the role of HEI in helping students find a job-placement, nor as to its proposed aims - unless it would be to help students pay their ever-increasing fees. No studies on job placements have been found. It seems that there is still a long way to go in China in the area of career guidance and support.

So, how do students make a career choice? In this respect it is interesting to note findings by Zhou and Santos (2007) based on research in the field of Career Decision Making (CDM) among 195 international students of which 85 were Chinese. They found (p.232) that Chinese students in western universities are not very motivated when it comes to CDM and attribute this to 'Chinese students' inclination to take into account significant others' expectations' – even if there is a discrepancy with their own goals. Watts et al. (1996, p.372) draw similar conclusions: the Chinese individual is 'expected to conform to family values'. These findings leave us with the question: is it necessary – and useful – to help Chinese students develop in this field? Would it not just be a waste of time and money since many students do not feel that they have the freedom to choose their own profession? In this paper it will be argued that students can be helped by teaching them employability skills that are useful in a wide range of jobs for, as pointed out earlier, career development tools such as teamwork and communication skills are necessary to find a workplace in the 21st century.

2.3 Summary of Previous Studies' Findings and How They Relate to this Study

Research on Chinese students' living and study conditions shows that students lead a fairly isolated life in which there is little room for personal and social development. Several studies

point out that a lack of personal development tends to adversely affect people's academic achievements and career prospects; however, as yet teachers in China seem more concerned with helping their students pass national examinations than with promoting their emotional or moral development. The consensus in literature is that a holistic approach and long-term commitment are the most productive way to address students' personal development; this conclusion is also drawn by Gallagher (2005) and Turner (2006) who have run courses that embed student support in UK or as part of British degree courses provided in China. This study has a slightly different focus in that it sets out to examine students' needs in the context of state-owned Chinese universities, which are run on different lines than western-style universities. However, the importance of previous research with Chinese students is acknowledged, and this study will therefore also explore which aspects of earlier research findings can be used in the context of this study.

This chapter has shown that Chinese HEI pay little attention to academic development: classes tend to be teacher-directed and students just follow instructions. It is therefore not surprising that students are found to lack study skills and critical thinking skills. Research involving Chinese students studying in western universities found that students perceive the teaching of 'concise and accurate knowledge' as an advantage of Chinese style education. Studies on teamwork skills that involved Chinese students seem to indicate that students' interpretation of their situation does not always conform to reality; several studies found that obtaining this skill tends to be 'culturally challenging' for Chinese students, but interestingly, a study by Davey and Higgins (2005) showed that Chinese students themselves are fairly confident about their teamwork skills. This proposed study focuses on English majors' academic needs and endeavours to ascertain and address the underlying reasons for students' lack of academic skills.

Though not much information is available on Career Development in China, two findings mentioned in this chapter seem especially noteworthy for this study. First, Qiang and Wolff (2003) found that most students intend to pursue a career in business, not in academia: this finding seems to provide valuable information as to students' aspirations and needs, and this study intends to explore whether English majors' have similar career goals. Second, literature illustrates the importance of cultural awareness when contemplating how to provide career support; for example, studies found that Chinese students are heavily influenced by the needs and wishes of their family. This study therefore aims to find out what kind of support would help develop students' employability and lifelong learning skills in a culturally acceptable way.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

‘I am a teacher. As such, my business is education and my job is to educate. So I facilitate the process whereby another person engages in the process of developing herself. My education [...] is concerned with developing my ability to facilitate the development of another person.’ (McNiff, 1993, p. 106)

McNiff expresses my exact feelings and perceptions of the job I love doing: I too wish to develop myself in order to help others reach their full potential; interestingly, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) action research can be an aid to achieve these goals. They state (p.85) several characteristics of action research, notably ‘reflection on practice’ and ‘collaborative empowering for participants’. Those characteristics also apply to this study, for as students answered questions in person and on a questionnaire, they were involved in reflecting and evaluating their situation, and as they suggested ways to meet their needs, they were engaged in problem solving. So, just by undertaking this action research some positive outcomes can already be noted: professional development for me as a teacher in that I have become more aware of students’ wishes and weaknesses that need addressing in class, and personal and academic development of the participants.

3.1. Description of General Methodology

Glatthorn and Joyner (2005, p. 104) point out that action research is usually carried out by people who are involved in identifying and solving an educational problem – possibly in their own organization. The educational problem under review here is the lack of support provided to tertiary students in China. The goal of this study is to find a way to better support students during their time at university and to help them achieve their potential; its focus is the needs of Chinese undergraduate English department students. When I first contemplated how to acquire data and structure the research, I leant towards making it a solely qualitative study that used data obtained from observing and interviewing students. However, while gathering

data in my role of teacher-researcher, I became aware of the relevance of Gilham's (2005, p.166) statement that 'the human eye is not a camera: it does not just record but selects and interprets.' Though I have worked in China for almost a decade, I am essentially a product of the western culture and education system studying conditions in another culture, so I need to guard against researcher bias. I therefore decided to also use a questionnaire in order to get factual data (closed questions) and more information on the students' attitudes and perceptions (open questions). In this way, by mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, I aim to collect enough information to be able to provide an objective, all-round picture of the situation.

Research questions

This study's aim is to find a way to better support Chinese undergraduate English department students. In order to reach this aim the paper sets out to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the students' perceived needs concerning support in college?
2. What is the effect of the current education system on the personal and academic development of the students?
3. What aspects of previous research findings on addressing the needs of Chinese students can be used in this context?
4. How can the students' needs be addressed within the confines of limited funding and MoE requirements?

3.2. Research Context and Site.

This research focuses on the situation at a provincial public university in the North East of China. The university is a second tier university, but lately some improvements have been made and in December 2006 it was approved by the State Department to be one of a hundred universities in '211 Project' which will receive major investments from the government in

order to raise the overall quality of teaching, scientific research, and the training of professional manpower. The university consists of 11 separate colleges, one of which is the college of Foreign Languages, which is comprised of the Russian, Japanese, Korean, and English Department. This study will focus on the educational situation English Department students face. The university aims to cater to the educational needs of students from the ethnic minority group living in that area; therefore, youth from the focus ethnic minority group who want to enter this particular university need lower scores in the College Entrance Examination than those from the Han or other minority groups. Another fact worth mentioning is that most students come from rural families and/or from the ethnic minority group prevalent in that area. This has bearing upon this study for, though urban families have to comply with the single child policy, rural families are permitted two children if the first was a girl or disabled. Ethnic minorities are also allowed more children. This means that most students have siblings and may therefore have acquired more social skills than their urban counterparts.

3.3. Participants

This study received valuable insights from two cohorts of students; during the fieldwork stage (2005-6) I observed and interviewed second, third and fourth year students, and mid 2007 the questionnaire was sent out to second and fourth year students. A total of 52 replies were received, of which 16 were from fourth year students and 29 from second year undergraduate students in the English department. Of the 16 fourth year respondents 13 were female and 3 male, and of the 29 second year participants 27 were female and 2 were male. 7 replies were received from students in other departments or other universities, but these were duly excluded from this study. As the questionnaire was sent during the summer break, the fourth year students had actually just graduated, and the second year students were about to become third year students. This paper will use 'she' and 'her' for students since the great majority of

English majors in China is female; classes tend to have 20 students of which 18 are girls and 2 are boys. However, 'he' will be used when referring to the monitor since the regulations at this particular university call for monitors to be male.

3.4. Instruments Used

The information for this action research was gathered by observing students in class and around campus, and through formal and informal interviews with students. The interviews were conducted informally, sometimes with one student and at other times with a small group of students. I recorded interviews twice, but soon realized that the tape recorder was a distracting factor and made students nervous and tongue-tied; therefore, I took notes from then on. However, when I began analyzing the data by clustering notes into topic groups, I found that there were still many areas in which I was not entirely sure about students' attitudes and ideas. So, in order to get a more inclusive idea on the students' views concerning support needs and to verify whether my and their observations were in agreement, I decided to develop a short questionnaire. A pilot study for which I sent out 6 questionnaires took place in June; the bulk of the questionnaires was administered and completed over a two month period during the summer break. Though the main aim for using the questionnaire was to receive practical input from the students, it was also hoped that students might be brought to contemplate their life and education more thoroughly and be inspired to assume more positive attitudes towards their study, for 'questionnaires can be used to pave the way for new ideas' (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996, p.98)

3.5. Procedures Followed

As stated earlier, the procedures that were used to conduct this study were collecting data from fieldwork (observations, interviews, questionnaire) and a review of theoretical and empirical evidence in the field of Chinese students' support. The following procedures were used to document and evaluate the action: first, observations from fieldwork were grouped

according to topic. Next, areas which needed to be investigated further were ascertained and a pilot questionnaire was made. At the same time former students were emailed and asked whether they would be willing to fill out a questionnaire concerning student needs. Then the pilot questionnaire was sent out to the first 6 respondents, and based on answers received questions were adjusted or added. After that, the final version of the questionnaire was sent to a larger body of students, but only after a positive answer indicating willingness to participate in the study had been received. On receipt of the completed questionnaire an email message thanking the student for her help was sent; when a student's answer was ambiguous a follow-up question was sent so as to ask for clarification. Most students responded positively to this request for additional information. Subsequently, the open answers from the questionnaire were documented according to topic in Word documents, whereas the closed questions were recorded and analyzed using spreadsheets. When most questionnaires had been received, all data was carefully looked into, significant quotes from the field notes and questionnaire were added to the relevant categories, preliminary conclusions were drawn and a first draft of the thesis was written. Over the months, because of new insights deducted from literature review and further email exchanges with interested students, the draft expanded until it finally took this shape.

My former students were asked to fill out a short questionnaire sent to them by email, which included both closed and open questions. As the questionnaire was in English and the students are unfamiliar with the concept of educational research, I kept the questionnaire short and the questions simple in order to prevent the problem of non-response. The open questions asked for students' attitudes and opinions, whereas the closed questions provided a simple choice between 'agree' and 'disagree' in an attempt to avoid confusing the respondents. In an accompanying email message it was mentioned that any further observations they might have

on the topic of 'student support' and 'student needs' would be welcomed, and the last question again invited students to share their ideas.

Since conclusions deduced from too small a number of questionnaires are not valid, I decided to draw together the answers given by second and fourth year students. Only in special cases will attention be paid to the separate groups. It needs to be observed that some tables will be based on a response rate of less than 45 students since, first, a few students failed to answer one or two questions, second, six pilot questionnaires had been sent out and based on the responses received some questions were later added to the questionnaire. Answers from questionnaires that had not been fully filled out were analyzed and used for this study since the questions stand on their own and not answering a question was therefore deemed not to affect the validity of the other answers.

Chapter 4: Results

As stated in chapter 1, the study reported here examines data collected from the questionnaire and observations from fieldwork. The structure of this chapter is similar to that of chapter 2 in that it starts with a short section providing background information on education in China, and then describes findings related to the three areas of student development: personal, academic and career development. This is followed by a section containing suggestions from students on how to make life at university more fulfilling and effective. The last part summarizes the results.

4.1 Background Information

One student describes what she perceives as the goal of college life:

Some teachers tell us we should study hard, but I think that to make full use of university life does not only mean studying hard but also means learning what's right, how to live and what kind of person you want to be.

However, findings show that students do not consider university to be a place where they can fully develop themselves into all-round professionals; the focus is on studying, and there is little time and space for extracurricular activities.

So how do students value their education? An interesting problem arises when analyzing students' opinion whether or not 'university helps me prepare for the future' and 'courses at university are useful', since their answers seem contradictory.

The usefulness of university	Agree	Agree %	Disagree	Disagree%	Total
University helps prepare for future	40	93	3	7	43
Courses at university are useful	19	42	26	58	45

Figure 4.1 Perceived usefulness of university

If courses are not considered useful by the majority of students (58%), why do 93% of students consider university a good preparation for the future? The answer may lie in the fact that university is considered a place where degrees are obtained which will help secure a good job for the future; it is not necessarily a place of academic learning. Turner (2006, p.31) states, ‘The popular view remains that education correlates strongly with future career success and will bring security to both the student and their family.’ Times are changing, however, and it would seem that in the near future a degree will not be enough to secure a job – skills will also be needed in the global marketplace that China is fast turning into. It is therefore time to start thinking about how to help students achieve their potential at university.

4.2. Review of Findings

A. Personal Development

Students were asked several closed questions to ascertain the level of personal development they acquire at university. The following findings were found:

Time at university has helped students to:	Agree	Agree %	Disagree	Disagree %	Total
Develop emotion/socially	22	50	22	50	44
Know your strong & weak points	39	87	6	13	45
Develop self-confidence	29	66	15	34	44
Take responsibility for their study/life	24	73	9	27	33

Figure 4.2 Personal and Social Development at university

It is interesting to note that only 33 students answered the question on taking responsibility for their study and life: quite a few students left a blank space. The question of taking responsibility and the fact that 27% of students answer it negatively may give an indication as to the autonomy of students; this issue will be drawn attention to later on in this Chapter. As for the first question, it would seem that - if 50% of total respondents observe that they have

not developed emotionally and socially while at university- there is a clear problem since MoE and other stakeholders wish for all-round mature graduates.

Emotional/social development	Agree	Agree %	Disagree	Disagree %	Total
second year students	17	61	11	39	28
fourth year students	5	31	11	69	16

Figure 4.3 Second and fourth year students' emotional/social development

A somewhat different picture on students' emotional and social development emerges when separating the answers provided by second and fourth year students: though the majority of graduates (69%) answer the question whether university has helped them develop emotionally and socially with 'disagree', the majority of second year students (61%) find that they have developed in this field. This may be an indication that the changes MoE is trying to implement to improve the quality of universities by allowing them to offer some elective courses is beginning to take effect. On the other hand, it may be a reflection of the fact that I spent considerable time with the second year students and tried to provide some support in the form of a student support website, creative extracurricular activities, office hours and the like. The information here is rather inconclusive and calls for further research.

Since no formal support services are available, students were asked who they turn to for emotional support. 50% of students replied 'friends and classmates', 33% would call their parents, 15% would try to solve the problem themselves, and a mere 2% answered 'teacher' (see Appendix 6, figure 6.1) The fact that students mainly rely on their classmates and friends for emotional support is illuminating, as is the fact that the teachers, who usually feature so prominently in Confucian style education, play virtually no role here.

Class with other majors

The Literature Review showed that English department students tend to lead very sheltered lives. One of the examples given was the fact that students are likely to spend 4 years in the same restricted group of about 20 classmates. It was also pointed out that the government encourages inter-school interaction but that this rarely happens. In the questionnaire the students were asked the question whether they would like to have classes with students from other majors, and if so, why. Figure 4.4 shows that the great majority of students would welcome taking classes with students from other departments, but 6 students (13%) do not. Further questioning revealed the reason for their negative response. Their reasons for rejecting mixed classes was:

1. Other majors are incompatible with English
2. It makes class ineffective
3. It make the class size too big (2)
4. I have no time for extra classes
5. Students from other majors cannot keep up with the teacher so she has to slow her speed of talking

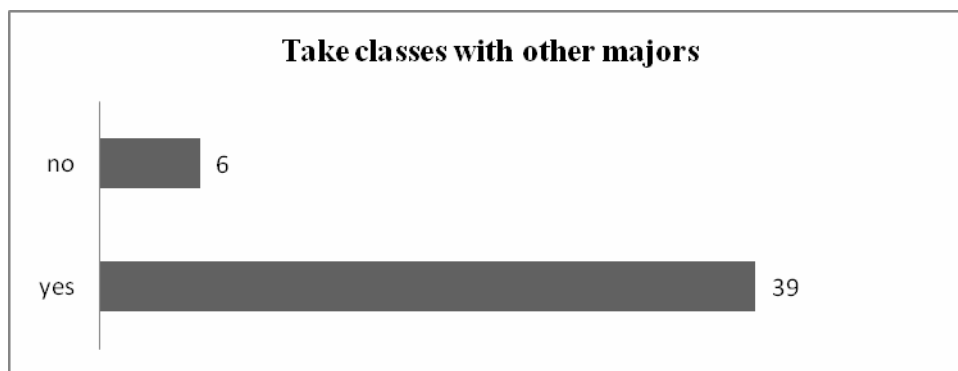


Figure 4.4 Number of students wanting to take classes with other majors

Point 1-3 and 5 seem to refer to the ‘short optional courses’ which students can take during the one month summer semester; 3 students (7%) also rate those courses as ‘less useful courses’ (see Appendix 6, Figure 6.2). However, when asked specifically whether students would welcome

courses with students from other departments if classes had a maximum of 20 students whose level of English would be adequate for the requirements of the programme, reactions were quite positive. One student remarked,

If it is still a small class, but a mix of students, I think it will be a great idea. Actually, English is not only language, but all kinds of knowledge. That is just what our English majors' lack. In this way we can accept different ways of thinking and learn many things from each other. So in this way, I absolutely agree.

Why do students want to have classes with other majors? As shown in figure 4.5, students' answers indicate that they wish to broaden their horizon and to look at life from different perspectives. This kind of mixed-class experience would help students find out who they are, what they stand for, and they would learn valuable knowledge at the same time. One student observed: 'We meet new students; we make new friends; we learn new things; we benefit.'

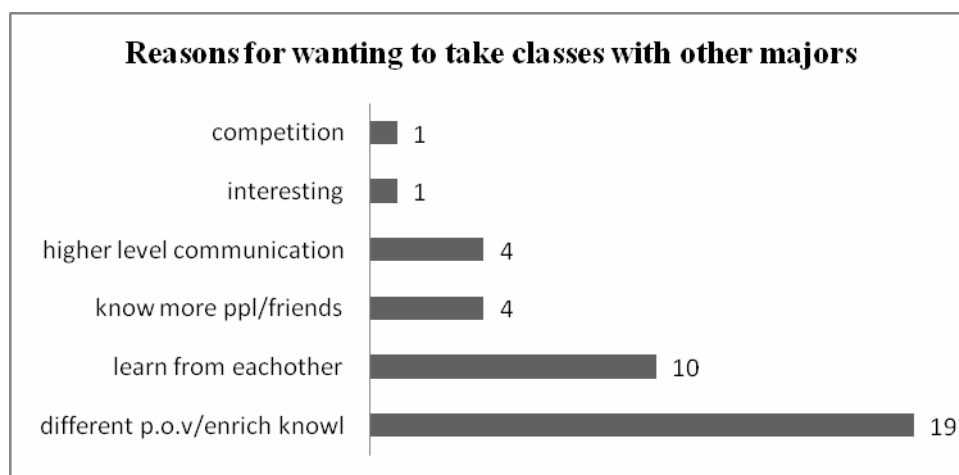


Figure 4.5 Reasons for wanting to take courses with students from other majors

It is worth mentioning that though one student stated 'competition' as the reason for wanting to take a course with other majors, another student noted that 'More students bring more competition; more competition brings more stress. And stress may be negative'. However, learning how to deal with stress is an important life skill, and it would seem that if this skill

can be addressed while at university, it would be a step towards further social and personal development.

B. Academic development

While teaching undergraduate English majors, it sometimes seems as if little progress is being made. One expatriate teacher confided to me that he had noticed that quite a few students' had a better command of English when they arrived at university, then when they left. Though students spend a lot of time in class and doing homework, it seems that they also do a lot of rote learning and that some just sit back and go with the flow. It is a fact that students have to study very hard in order to get a good score on the CEE, but once they have entered university students have few worries since most teachers just let them pass or even allow them to cheat during tests (Appendix 4 and 5 provide more information on values and quality at university). So what kind of academic skills do students learn at university? The following findings were collected:

Time at university has helped students to:	Agree	Agree %	Disagree	Disagree%	Total
Develop academically	35	78	10	22	45
Develop teamwork skills	34	77	10	23	44
Develop organizational skills	27	61	17	39	44
Find information online	31	91	3	9	44
Think independently	33	75	11	25	44
Take notes	30	68	14	32	44
Write letters using English	32	73	12	27	44

Figure 4.6 Academic development at university

Teamwork

Figure 4.6 shows that 77% of students expect the majority of students to acquire teamwork

skills, but this differs from my observations. Even though one might expect people from a collectivist background to work together well, the truth is that most students lack teamwork skills in which every member takes a different role in order to achieve a set goal; in fact, the best students get to do most of the work. This was pointed out to me by a couple of top students, who felt overwhelmed by all the work loaded on them. On inquiry, I was given a number of reasons for this practice, which ranged from 'the best students are confident to do the work, and they are eager to get the teacher's praise' to 'the other students don't like to do the work and they think it should be the best students' responsibility. Some students just don't like to challenge themselves.' Though this practice helps weaker students during college, it prevents everyone involved from experiencing 'true' teamwork, which skill is indispensable when students enter society.

Note-taking

Though note taking would seem a basic skill for college students, 32% of respondents do not think it will be acquired by all students. This finding seems to be the result of the Chinese teaching style, for several students informed me that their teacher solely asks questions based on information in the textbook. Some teachers prime their students before examinations, so that the students know exactly what pages are important and what might be asked. Small wonder, therefore, that when students attend lectures with information that comprises diverse aspects of a topic, they seem at a loss what to write down. When I taught British culture and literature courses I advised students to take notes, but few did. Certain topics were mentioned several times but the students still did not realize their significance. Furthermore, I put the PowerPoint Presentations that I used in class on my 'student support website' in order to help the students, but at the end of the semester they still came to me anxious to know what to study and what was important. On inquiry I found that in high school pupils do take notes, but usually solely on the teacher's instigation – when she spells it out. Obviously there is a need

to train students in the art of note taking, since distilling and interpreting new information is a vital skill in the Age of Information.

IT skills

Another vital skill in the Knowledge Age is the use of computers: 31 students (91%) indicate that most students acquire the skill of finding information online at college. However, some students are less capable in the field of IT, a fact brought home to me when I asked third year students to make a PowerPoint Presentation for the British Culture course; I noted that several of them were at a loss what to do. The questionnaire fills in some of the gaps on why the students lack practical computer skills. It needs to be mentioned that this question on the strong and weak points of the computer course was only sent to second year students and did not appear in the pilot, so the number of respondents was relatively low.

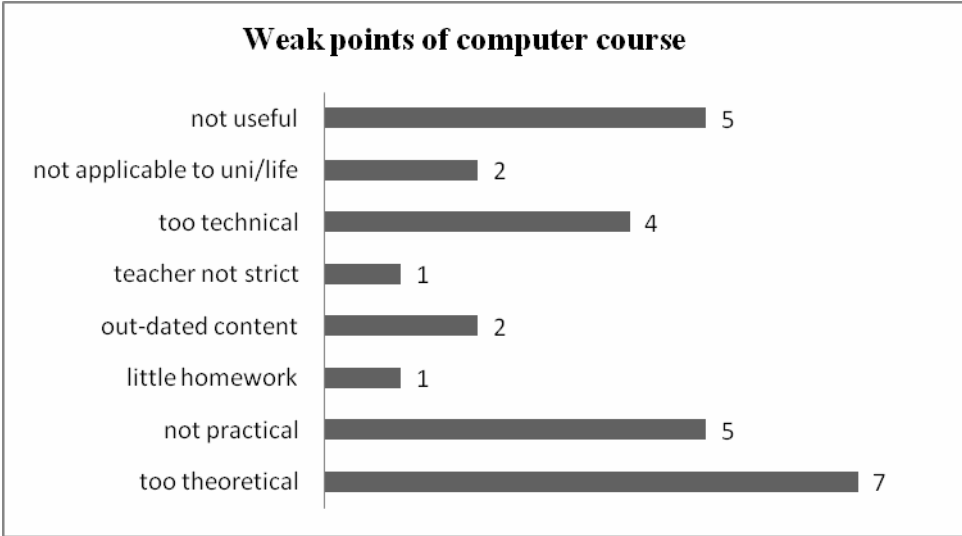


Figure 4.7 Weak points of the computer course

Students were unable to name many strong points of the computer course: it seemed that they picked up the bare basics of using a computer, but little more (Appendix 6, Figure 6.3). There was also consensus on the weak points of the course, in that it gave students no tools for life at university or the world of work. Four students (15%) mention that the course is too technical, with one student observing: ‘Most of us use computers, not fix them.’ Furthermore,

7 students (26%) commented that they considered the course to be too theoretical, while one student provided food for thought by remarking: ‘We are forced to remember a lot of data or information which we can’t understand to pass the exam.’ The computer course seems a prime example of the traditional Chinese teaching style: it requires rote learning in order to pass an exam, and lacks any thought as to the course’s value for the student’s life.

Source of support

Figure 4.8 shows clearly who students turn to for academic support. As few parents will have had a college education, it is understandable that students do not turn to them for academic support. It is surprising, though, that more students turn to their classmates (48%) than to their teachers (34%) for academic support. It will be noted that 4 students (8%) mention the monitor as their source of help. As monitors exert an indelible influence on their classmates, it may be beneficial to consider the position and (dis)advantages of having a monitor more deeply.

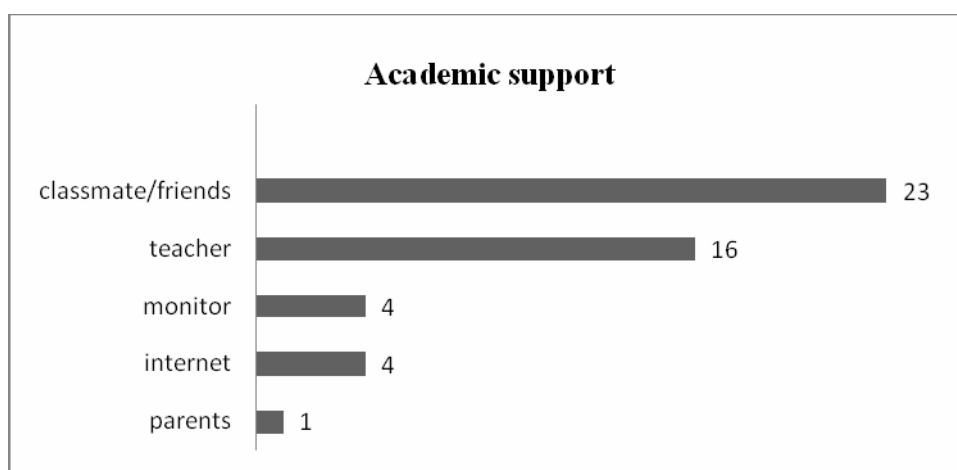


Figure 4.8 Sources of academic support

Monitors

Throughout their educational career, from primary school up to university level, Chinese students are used to having a class monitor who helps the teacher, unifies the class and acts as the leader and spokesperson. The concept of having a monitor is entirely unknown in the

western world and it goes against its belief in the autonomy of the individual. However, China's culture is collectivist, and this has its implications.

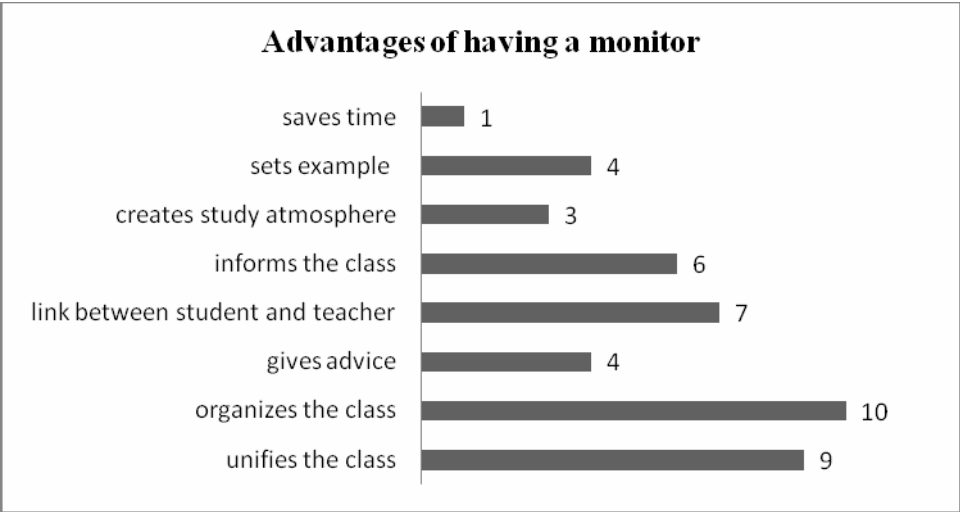
What does a monitor do? Three sources of information provide an answer to this question: my observations, interviews with a few monitors, and the questionnaire. First, in class I have noted several times how students depend on the monitor to help them remember homework, organize activities, and liaise with teachers. This in effect prevents students from becoming autonomous learners. Few students own an agenda or organiser, and the prominent role the monitor plays in the academic life of students was brought home to me when one of my students who had not done his homework blamed the monitor for not reminding him that the assignment was due that week. This occurrence clearly illustrates how having monitors prevents students from taking responsibility for their study. Second, one of the monitors summed up when students approach him for help:

When they do not know how to be self-controlled, how to make and fulfil a study plan or a plan for their life, how to be efficient, how to study well, how to organize things, how to finish their homework.

It would seem that the monitor acts as the motivator, organizer, academic adviser and spokesperson of the class. Furthermore, a monitor 'monitors': 'He can help teachers monitor students, informing them what is happening to students and what problems they have, which may provide teachers with exact information about current situations, or help to solve some emergent problems.'

Third, Figure 4.9 which is based on the findings from the questionnaire, shows that students also consider 'setting an example; and 'unifying the class' as one of the tasks and responsibilities of a monitor. These findings demonstrate that the monitor bears a great responsibility in that he sets an example, gives advice and creates a study atmosphere. It would almost seem as if bad study results would be due to the monitor not doing his work

well; this actually seems to be the conclusion drawn by some teachers and students, for according to one of the monitors he had been blamed by a teacher for the bad study results of



some of his classmates.

Figure 4.9 Perceived advantages of having a monitor

Students were also asked to comment on the disadvantage of using monitors. Figure 4.10 shows that four students (11%) fear that ‘terrible results’ may happen if a bad monitor is chosen; this comment makes sense when linked to the idea that the monitor is responsible for creating the right study atmosphere, and that as such he effectively influences the study results of his classmates.

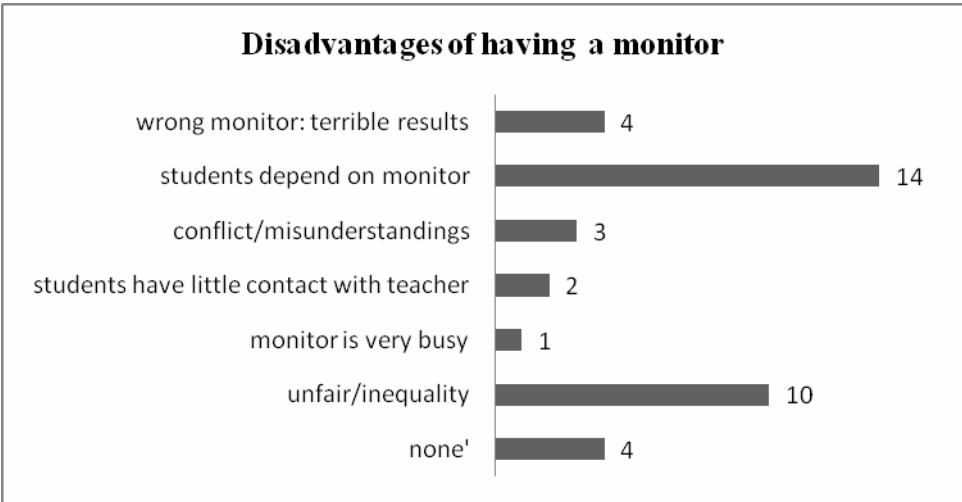


Figure 4.10 Perceived disadvantages of having a monitor

The observation of 10 students (26%) about the inequality and unfairness of having a monitor seems worthy of exploring. Several explanations for this response were given, ranging from students dissatisfied with their score when a teacher asked the monitor to check his classmates' homework to 'other students also want to become Party members but they do not have much of a chance'. One student remarked: 'Every student has the ability to be a monitor, I think. It's not good that one continues being a monitor for four years.' Though four students could find no fault with the class monitor system, one of the monitors himself did not agree. He realised that if a short-sighted or careless monitor were chosen, this could have adverse effects on the whole class. He answered the question, 'What are disadvantages of having monitors?' as follows:

1. Spoil. Most students will rely on monitors, which may lead to laziness. They may put everything on a monitor's shoulders. They may even want the monitor to handle everything for them.
2. Mislead. Monitors cannot be good decision-makers all the time. However, most students follow each instruction given by the monitor without thinking, no matter whether it is right or wrong.
3. Suffocate new ideas. If the monitor is not open-minded, he will not listen to other students, which may suffocate some new ideas. Moreover, if the atmosphere in class is negative and inactive, no one wants to share things, including good ideas.

C. Career Development

Students were asked several closed questions concerning career development. The following data was found:

Time at university helped students to:	Agree	Agree %	Disagree	Disagree%	Total
Know what it takes to find a job	26	58	19	42	45
Have a clear idea what to become	31	69	14	31	45
Understand society and how they fit in	16	36	29	64	45

Figure 4.11 Career development opportunities at university

The literature section summed up many reasons why English department students' lives are rather sheltered, and this confirms those findings: 29 students (64%) do not 'understand society and how they fit in'. Students feel removed from society in their 'ivory tower'. In fact, students often talk about the daunting 'gap' between university and society. This situation is clearly not conducive to an easy move from the world of letters to the world of work.

It is also interesting to note that only a small majority of students (58%) think that they know what it takes to find a job after graduation. This is not surprising since students do not receive proper career advice, and very few students actually get work experience from a (part-time) job during college. It is true that the majority of English majors tutor primary or secondary school pupils for a few hours a week, but this job is usually found with the help of friends or teachers and neither official job application nor job interview takes place. Moreover, helping one or two children do their homework does little to develop students' employability skills. Some students' ideas on what it takes to get a job differ from those usually provided in textbooks, as I found out one day in class. During oral English class second year students were asked to role-play job interviews; one student was to act as the interviewer, the other was being interviewed for a job as translator at a company. The interviewer began by asking a few practical questions and then inquired whether the interviewee was any good at singing and dancing. After having replied in the affirmative, she was then asked to demonstrate this. At this point I reminded them that this was not a job interview for an entertainer, but for a translator. Interestingly enough after class a small group of well-performing female students stayed behind and told me that they considered this kind of 'showing another side of myself' to be necessary in order to obtain a job.

Fourth year students were asked what kind of support they would suggest for English majors who have reached their final year in college. Findings reveal that the main perceived needs of fourth year students concern career development (Appendix 6, figure 6.4). Students mentioned that they had actually attended a 'career course' that ran for one semester; however, they agreed that the information given was impractical and inadequate. One student remarked, that the teacher just teaches the theory and talks about the salary, but no practical advice is given nor role-play as to how to go about finding a job. Also, there is no focus on helping students find out what they like and what would be best for them.

Several students mentioned a need to get job experience, and suggested that the Employment Center on campus should help more students, not only soon-to-graduate students, but also first, second and third year students. In interviews several students called for the school to provide more opportunities to get work experience through student placements.

Though the suggestions on how to improve support for soon-to-graduate students are helpful, this is not the only way to help prepare students to enter society. Another way would be for English Departments to provide more practical elective courses, as seems indicated by Figure 4.12 which shows what course students would like to take if they had complete freedom to choose. Besides art and psychology, the courses mentioned are all practical and would be advantageous to graduates entering the field of business, to employees in the tourism sector and to translators in law or business firms. The findings from Qiang and Wolff (2003) that most students intend to go into business, not academia (mentioned in Chapter 3) also seem to apply to English majors and may explain why practical courses are reported as 'useful' and desirable, whereas more philosophical, academic, theoretical courses such as linguistics, literature, and politics are listed as being 'less useful' (see Appendix 6, Figure 6.2 and 6.2A). The figures seem to provide an answer to the seemingly contradictory data noted in Figure

4.1: in order to improve the ‘usefulness’ and effectiveness of the academic experience, more practical business and society-focused courses seem called for.

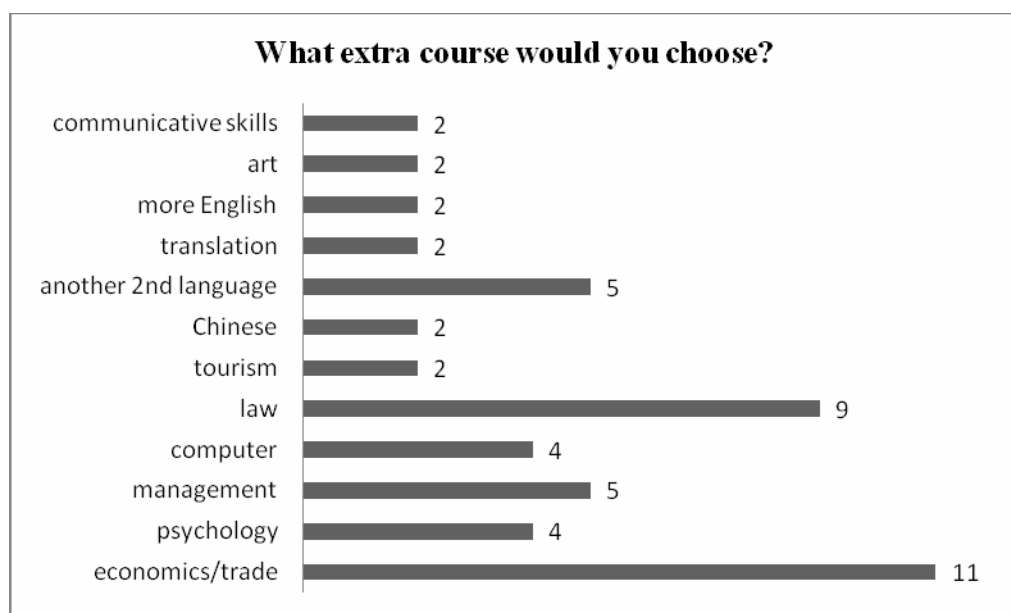


Figure 4.12 Students’ wishes concerning elective courses

4.3 Students’ Suggestions on How to Make College More Effective

Students were asked for ideas on how to help freshers make the most of their time at university. Some respondents pointed out that there is actually a kind of induction for freshers, but this student union meeting for freshers was called ‘a one off, pro forma meeting’, and students considered it better to get advice from ‘someone in authority, not from older students. What they told us was not the way to learn but how to deal with exams and that doesn’t work for English study.’ As figure 4.13 indicates, many students see a need to teach freshers study skills (28%) and time management skills (29%). It is interesting to note that 11 students (20%) pointed out the need to help freshers adapt to college life. As one student clarified: ‘Freshers should be given information on how to adapt here, because they all feel disappointed about college life.’

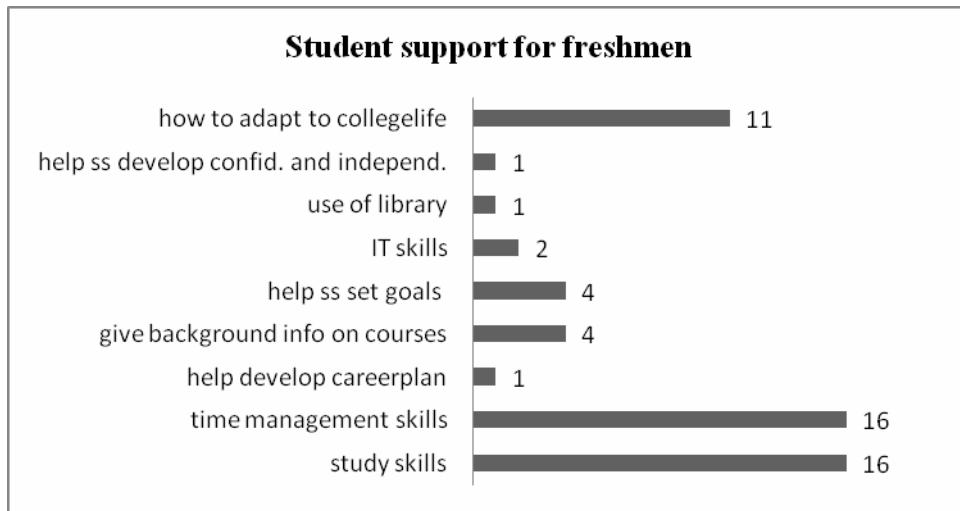


Figure 4.13 Suggested support for first year students

The kind of support suggested for second year students (Figure 4.14) shows a different kind of focus, in that they are beginning to think about life after graduation. However, when I taught two lessons which focused on finding out what kind of job would suit the students' talents and interests, most (first semester second year) students lacked interest. Several mentioned that it was too early to think about life after graduation. Interestingly, findings from the questionnaire show that at the end of the second year students have begun to look toward their future. Ten students (38%) mention career support needs: 'Learning how to make a career plan and setting goals' (6) and 'receiving information on career/further study opportunities' (4). However, the kinds of problems second year English majors experience are still very much related to life at college.

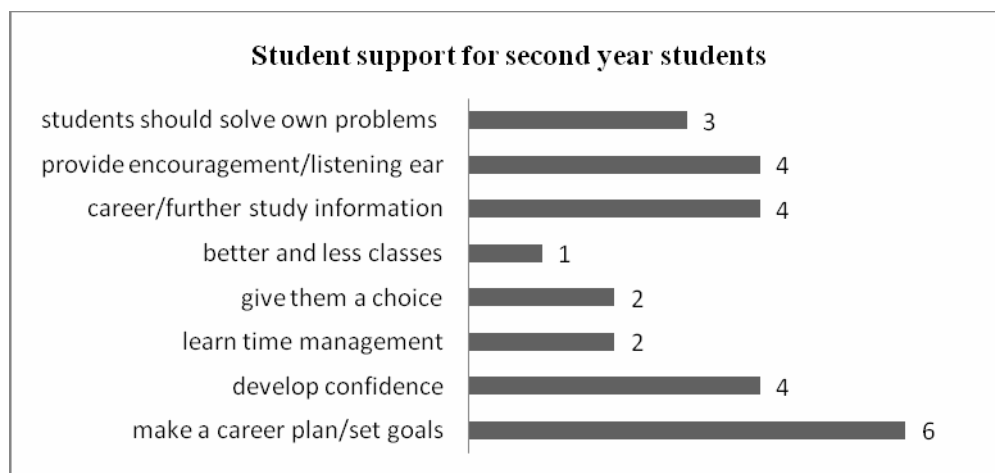


Figure 4.14 Suggested support for second year students

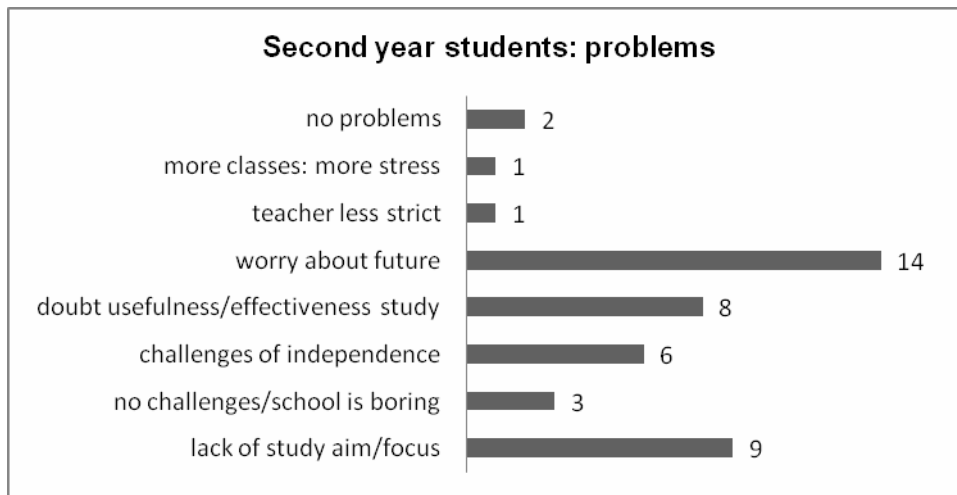


Figure 4.15: Problems second year students face

One student summed up several of the problems experienced by second year students: ‘Many classmates do not know the purpose of study. They just follow what others do or what their teacher asks them to do, but never think whether it is necessary for them.’ This explains why a student would be worried about teachers being less strict – it means less ‘guidance’. The fact that 9 students (20%) mention a ‘lack of focus and study aim’, that 3 students (7%) find school boring, and that 8 students (18%) doubt the usefulness of their study seems to show that they are just going with the flow, and do not feel in control of their studies and their life. This finding seems to tie in with suggestions in Figure 4.13 to help freshers set goals (4) and give background information on courses (4), so that students know the value of those courses, which will motivate them to study diligently.

Besides the perceived need for academic support, students also mention a need for ‘encouragement and a listening ear’ (6). It was found that some students struggle with ‘challenges of independence’(6) and a lack of selfesteem (4); it may be remembered that 15 respondents (34%) indicated a need for students to develop self-confidence in college (Figure 4.2). There may be more to this than meets the eye as one student remarked that ‘college students’ psychological problems are very serious and urgent’. She proposes that HEI should

establish a system to help students, including organizing events to teach psychological knowledge, and having a consultative services office with a trained counselor.

4.4 Summary of the Results

This study paints an overall picture of the study conditions of undergraduate English department students in a Chinese public university. Several findings are worth mentioning. First, students' personal development: 50% of students did not think university induced emotional and social development; a positive note was, however, that findings showed a higher percentage of second years than fourth year students answering this question positively. As for emotional support, students seem to almost exclusively turn to their classmates. Furthermore, findings showed that students would welcome having classes with students from other departments, provided that classes are kept small and classmates' level of English good. Second, students' academic development was shown to be impeded, indicating a need to develop teamwork, note taking and IT skills. Findings concerning the computer course illustrate why some students doubt the usefulness of university: they argue that there is little to learn but much to study, for students have to memorise a lot of facts that are too technical and theoretical to make sense to them. Other findings seem to indicate that students prefer practical to theoretical courses. Furthermore, data shows the adverse influence of the class monitor on students' academic development since they rely on him to solve problems.

In answer to the first research question, this chapter has found that the perceived needs of students concerning support in college are twofold: needs that students themselves point out, and needs that have been observed by the teacher. First, students observe a need for freshers to learn study skills and time management skills and to get advice and guidance on how to adapt to college life. Students perceive a need for second years to learn about goal setting and career planning. Several students also pointed out a need for students to develop confidence

and receive encouragement. Second, observations from the researcher-teacher demonstrate the need to help students develop teamwork, note taking and IT skills. In all, students need to be given opportunities to develop autonomy.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This final chapter of the dissertation interprets the Results, discusses their implications and proposes a practical solution for addressing students' needs. It also suggests areas for further research. Answers to the research questions will be incorporated in the appropriate sections in this chapter.

5.1 Interpretation of the Findings

As explained in Chapter 2, the study reported here was an action research that aimed to provide a practical plan for better student support for undergraduate English department students at a university in North East China. Its focus was therefore on the perceived needs of the students. This study used both qualitative and quantitative data in an attempt to extend knowledge in the field of students' experiences and needs. Data was acquired through fieldwork (observations and interviews) in 2005-2006, and a short questionnaire which was sent out to and answered by 45 students in the middle of 2007. As no formal Guidance and Student Support Services exist in China, there was little previous research this study could draw upon. However, this study does make use of findings from a number of UK and China-based studies with similar topics.

Findings from this study paint an overall picture of conditions that prevent students from developing into all-round autonomous people during their time at college. In short, the current educational system is found to have the following effect on Chinese students' development:

- Personal development: the education system shelters students, which stifles their social development, creativity and seeing things from different perspectives. Moreover, it provides little chance for students to realize their strong and weak points and develop self-confidence.

- Academic development: students lack study skills because the educational system promotes memorization and regurgitating facts. As most activities in class are teacher-directed and textbook-based, students are effectively discouraged from taking initiative and fail to develop transferable skills such as teamwork, note taking and IT skills.
- Career development: students are not given any help with career planning, nor are they taught employability skills. Only a select few find a proper part-time job and obtain work experience during their time at university; there are no arrangements for student placements in companies.

5.2 Relationship of the Current Study to Previous Research

This study has corroborated several findings from previous research with Chinese students. Though participants of those studies were not English majors, findings are fairly similar to this study's results, indicating that students' needs and wishes countrywide do not differ much due to the tightly controlled educational system. In this section the most important findings on student support will be reported - first, findings that this study has in agreement with previous studies will be given and, second, findings that vary from or add to earlier research are listed. The last part will consider in more detail what aspects of previous research findings can be used in the context of this study.

First, because the topic of previous studies differed from this research, the findings concerning students' needs that this study shares with other studies are limited. The overall picture of life at a Chinese public university is the same, though.

- Findings illustrate the isolated position of English department students;
- Data highlights an urgent need for students to get study skills and teamwork skills.

Second, findings from this study that agree with and extend existing knowledge on Chinese students' learning experiences and needs can be listed as follows:

- Several studies have found that teamwork proves a challenge for Chinese students. This study draws attention to the fact that students' collectivist orientation may be at the root of this problem: students tend to focus on the group's interest and, consequently, they fail to learn about role differentiation. In fact, it was shown that well performing students often end up doing more than their fair share in order to reduce pressure on the weaker ones.
- Previous studies have noted that Chinese students have little autonomy and tend to follow the teachers' instructions. This study underscores the influence of the monitor, who is the appointed leader, spokesperson, motivator, adviser, and organizer of the class, on students' failure to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Earlier studies make mention of the quality of classes: they are teacher-directed, textbook-based and require little critical thinking. This paper supports these findings and shows that instead of increasing students' knowledge, some classes actually stifle students' all-round development. Students taking the IT course, for example, seem to lose motivation because they are required to memorise highly technical or even outdated information. Few classes meet students' needs.

Third, several practical ideas on how to address Chinese students' needs were learned from earlier studies:

- Transferable skills should be incorporated into the curriculum. (Anderson and Mitchell, 2006; Gallagher, 2005; Turner, 2006; Zhang, 2006). This is a practical way to aid students' acquisition of English language skills as well as academic and generic skills.

- The way to motivate students is to explain the value, rationale and importance of a course (Durkin, 2004; Edwards and Ran, 2006; Gallagher, 2005; Dong and Stevens, 1992). Several participants in this study have actually suggested providing students with background information on courses; I am therefore determined to make explaining the importance of a course an integral part at the start of each new module.
- Involving students in decisions on what to learn and how to learn it motivates them (Huang, 2005). Second year students who are losing interest in their studies may be motivated by providing them with a ‘voice’.
- Role-play as a means to learning new skills. (Weare, 2004; Meggison and Chitterbuck, 1994; Watts et al., 1996) The use of role-play exercises in the oral English class is not a new concept, but this study’s findings provide a challenge to embed role-play in other courses in order to help students acquire transferable skills.
- Learning journals enhance students’ creativity and self-development. (Moon, 2006; Wyatt and Looper, 2004). By asking students to keep an electronic journal they improve IT skills as well as develop creativity; however, considering that few students own a computer and that it is not always easy to get access to one, the amount and kind of assignments that have to be done using a computer need to be within reasonable limits.

5.3 Recommendations for Educators: A Practical Proposal for Student Support

The World Bank Report (Dahlman and Aubert, 2001, p.74) states the need to adapt curricula to increase the flexibility, creativity and autonomy of China’s youth. Furthermore, it advocates the need for new methods of training, new learning materials and more well-trained teachers. The proposed Student Support Course aims to do just that. Based on conclusions drawn from findings in this study, I believe that it would be feasible and helpful if student

support advice and information were incorporated into the curriculum. The following is a proposal for conducting a Student Support Course that embeds ways to address students' perceived needs.

AIMS: Support students during their time at university and provide them with opportunities to develop themselves academically, socially and emotionally so that they will develop into all-round, useful and creative people.

CONTENT: offer a course that teaches the following skills: teamwork (students learn about role differentiation and find out their preferred (Belbin) team role), Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (students learn more about their strong and weaker points), basic counselling skills, study skills such as time management skills and note taking, presentation skills, job interview techniques, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the reflective diary tool, and goal setting. If possible, the course will be taught to combined classes of about 20 English Department and Business Department students.

TEACHING METHODS: short lectures, group work, teamwork, discussions, working in pairs, presentations, role-play, filling in questionnaires (on paper and online) and contemplating the results. Listening to guest speakers and asking relevant questions.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES: Students take personal responsibility for learning, acquire independent thinking skills and are actively involved in learning. They have opportunities for interaction with people from other majors who may hold different ideas and opinions. The course will therefore help students develop academically, socially and emotionally, and provide them with employability skills.

ASSESSMENT: continuous assessment and an electronic portfolio in which students describe their learning experiences and their answers to the handouts. This type of assessment will allow students to focus on topics that are of special interest to them, and they will be able to follow their own pace of learning. Moreover, it will challenge them to be creative while using the computer.

AREAS for DEVELOPMENT: Key weaknesses of the educational system have been pointed out in this study: the monitor bears responsibility for his classmates' study progress, classes are teacher-directed and textbook based, and some teachers allow cheating. It is hoped that students will come to realize their own potential and will take charge of their own study progress; at the same time, teachers who have taken this course are expected to see the need for integrity and fair evaluation.

A Standard Process

It is easy to get carried away when desiring to make changes, but Atkinson (1997, p.70) rightly admonishes to set realistic measures. I believe that the Student Support Course proposed here is workable in Chinese Universities. The following are the proposed steps to take to implement this course effectively:

First, teach the course to the teachers and ask for their input. If they believe other kinds of student support information should be added, discuss in teams, and implement. Flexibility is needed to keep pace with China's changing society. The aim is to get the teachers enthusiastic, so that they will see it as their project. It is thought that the best way to start is to train the new teachers, who are more open to adopting new ways of teaching.

Second, teach the monitors and evaluate with them what topics are useful and what else is needed.

Third, teach Business and English majors who are highly motivated in taking this optional course. Classes should be limited to 20 students in order to keep room for student centered activities. After finishing the course, those interested could use their newly acquired listening skills/study skills to help others.

After running a pilot programme, the programme needs to be evaluated by students and teachers. It can then be decided whether it would be beneficial to split up the content into a special 'Induction Student Support Course' for freshers' (teaching study skills, IT skills and Gardner's MI) and 'Life in the Global Marketplace Student Support Course' for second, third and fourth year students (teaching Belbin, goal setting, career advice, job interview role play and other knowledge that seems relevant to that particular group of students).

Anticipated Results

The likely outcomes for teachers are: more job satisfaction and more confidence in teaching because of the range of new teaching methods and the insights into student development that they can now apply.

The likely outcomes for students are: they develop more fully, understand their strong and weak points, and they acquire useful social and academic skills. The atmosphere in class is likely to improve when students begin taking responsibility for their own life and study, and it is no longer just the monitor bearing the brunt of students' study progress. Moreover, with their newly acquired knowledge students and teachers can develop a better induction for freshers. All in all, it is anticipated that students will be able to help each other better, resulting in a better care and support network. This will improve the quality of education and life at university.

Action Planning

According to Scholtes (2003, p.5-65), key ingredients for successful improvement efforts are: maintain communications, link to organizational priorities, bite off what you can chew, fix obvious problems, look upstream, document progress and problems, monitor changes and publicize/celebrate successes. While writing this paper have e-mailed the contents of this proposed Student Support Course to the Dean of the English Department, who mentioned that a 'Learning Strategies' course has been scheduled to start in 2009. This could be the answer to the third research question on how to make the course stay within MoE guidelines: the course offered would be an officially assigned course, but as the content is left to the teacher's discretion it could be set up like the Student Support course proposed here. Another issue, the finances, are not likely to be a problem if free online tests are used. Nowadays, there are multiple excellent sites sponsored by governments, universities and businesses that offer useful information, online tests, questionnaires and the like for free; at the beginning of the course the teacher could provide a handout with useful addresses or post it on the Student Support website (<http://www.allsortsofeverything.co.uk/xinhua/index.htm>).

5.4 Suggestions for Additional Research

As stated in chapter 1, this study offers answers to certain questions, but also rakes up new questions. As Chinese society is changing rapidly, student support is likely to become an important issue in the not too distant future. This study has found some areas which need addressing if China's HEI want to turn out highly skilled autonomous graduates who can find their way in the global marketplace. Three topics for research are considered crucial in order to improve the quality of tertiary education provided.

- Advantages and disadvantages of the monitor-led class

Chinese educators and students are so used to having a monitor that they do not seem to pause to consider a possible downside of this system. From the students' answers, however, it may be deduced that having a monitor seriously impedes the autonomy and personal development opportunities of students. This system seems to effectively provide the monitor with a plethora of opportunities to develop his organizational, presentation and leadership skills, but to thwart the chances of classmates from doing likewise. Based on findings in this study it might seem beneficial to abolish the practice of using a monitor, in order to give all students a chance to make their own decisions. As China is a collectivist culture in which social cohesion is important this may not happen overnight, though, for outcomes from the questionnaires show that most students see more advantages than disadvantages in having a monitor. Nevertheless, in order to help students improve their skills and develop autonomy, it might be beneficial to have different monitors for different classes, or to choose a new monitor every semester. This study has only scratched the surface concerning the (dis)advantages of having monitors, and therefore no conclusive evidence-based solutions can be provided. Further research on advantages and disadvantages and implications of the 'monitor-led' class is suggested.

- Feasibility of Peer Support networks

Findings from this study have demonstrated that students depend most on their peers for academic and emotional support. It might be concluded, therefore, that it would benefit students to acquire listening (counselling/coaching) skills and study skills, in order to help themselves and other students more effectively. However, in this respect Gallagher's (2005, p.78) observation that 'peer learning is not valued' should be remembered. It would seem worthwhile to further explore the effectiveness and feasibility of peer tutoring in Chinese education.

- Teamwork versus group work

It would seem that Chinese students' perception of the meaning of 'teamwork' is different from that of (foreign) educators and researchers. In fact, it is possible that students confuse teamwork with group work, whereas actually 'teams focus on role differentiation' while 'groups look for unifying notions' (Belbin, 2000, p.13). Essentially, group work is based on collectivist ideas of helping each other along, whereas Belbin's perfect team asks for individuals who use their particular talents to achieve a certain goal. As China has a long collectivist cultural background, group work would come natural to students. Teamwork, on the other hand, seems firmly based in the individualist tradition and proper training is needed to help students acquire it. Further research to ascertain whether this misunderstanding is at the root of Chinese students' difficulty in acquiring proper teamwork skills might produce groundbreaking information on how to teach Chinese students more effectively.

5.5 Final Remarks

I am well aware that this paper only scratches the surface of problems and solutions in the field of student support in China's HEI. Still, the proposition for the Student Support course is consistent with several of Deming's ideas on improving the quality of education (as mentioned in Appendix 5), notably the need to continually update the programme to mirror changes in Chinese society, the teacher as leader who helps develop the students' whole person, the aim to create joy of learning and collaboration with colleagues and students from other departments. Clearly, the Student Support course is only a small step on the road towards a quality student support network, but it seems a practical first step to fix a couple of indisputable weaknesses. It is hoped that the proposed course will help the students know more about themselves, and provide them with some practical tools to find their way into society.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear student,

I would like to ask for your cooperation in answering the following questions to the best of your ability. Choose either ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ or fill in your opinion on the dots. Any (extra) thoughts or comments you have on the topic discussed can be added at the bottom of the page and will be greatly appreciated!

Best wishes,

Margriet

- | | | |
|---|-------|----------|
| 1. I have a clear idea what I want to become in the future | agree | disagree |
| 2. I have learned more about my strong and weak points at university | agree | disagree |
| 3. I have developed self-confidence since I came to this university | agree | disagree |
| 4. I know what it takes to find a job | agree | disagree |
| 5. I understand how society works and how I fit in | agree | disagree |
| 6. The courses I am taking help me develop academically | agree | disagree |
| 7. The courses I am taking help me develop emotionally | agree | disagree |
| 8. University helps me prepare for the future | agree | disagree |
| 9. If I have problems in my studies I will ask help from (please specify) | | |
| 10. If I have personal problems I will ask help from (please specify) | | |
| 11. The person who has given me most help during my time here is | | |
| (name the person and his/her relation to you) | | |
| 12. To me, Lifelong Learning means | | |

13. Most students have learned the following skills in university:

- | | | |
|---|-------|----------|
| a. Note taking in class | agree | disagree |
| b. Working in teams | agree | disagree |
| c. Organizing events | agree | disagree |
| d. Finding information they need on the internet | agree | disagree |
| e. Thinking independently | agree | disagree |
| f. Taking responsibility for their study and life | agree | disagree |
| g. Writing letters in English | agree | disagree |

14. I expect to have to work in teams in the future agree disagree

15. I always take notes in class agree disagree

16. I have some work experience agree disagree

17. I spend most of my time with English major students agree disagree

18. I have friends in other Departments agree disagree

19. I regularly meet with people who are not students at this university agree disagree

20. Most courses I am taking are useful for my future agree disagree

21. In my opinion course is very useful for my future (please write the name of a course)

22. In my opinion course is not very useful for my future (please write the name of a course, if any)

23a. If I had the liberty to choose some extra courses in another department, I would like to take a course on(please write down the subject area)

b. Why?

24a. I would like to take classes with students from other majors agree disagree

b. Explain why (not)

25a. In your opinion, what kind of support/information should be given to newly arrived freshmen?.....
.....

b. Is this kind of support/information currently given to freshmen? Yes No

c. By whom?

26.a. Are there any problems sophomore students often encounter? Yes No

b. If yes, what are those problems?

c. In your opinion, what would be an effective way to help students facing these problems?
.....
.....

27. The monitor's main task is:

a. Most students ask the monitor's help when
..... (state the students' needs/problems/questions:).

b. In your opinion, would it be helpful if the monitors received some kind of training so that they could help others better? Yes No

c. Please clarify your answer (If yes, what kind of training would be useful?)
.....

d. Advantages of having monitors are

e. Disadvantages of having monitors are

28.a. Did you take a computer course?

Yes No

b. If yes, please describe what aspects of the course you found particularly useful.

.....

c. In your opinion, what aspects of the course were not so useful?

.....

d. How might the course be improved?

.....

If you have **any further comments** on students' needs (and how you think they can be addressed), please write them here:

.....

.....

.....

.

Thank you for your help!!

APPENDIX 2: TABLE OF UK-BASED STUDIES THIS PAPER DRAWS UPON

Researcher	Location	Participants	Subject of Research
Turner (2006)	UK Business School	Chinese students	Reflective Teaching: issues
Zhou & Santos (2007)	UK University	British and Chinese students	Career Decision Making
Gallagher (2005)	International foundation course (Dublin)	Chinese and other international students	Transferable skills
Davey & Higgins (2005)	British degree course provided in China	Chinese undergraduate engineering majors	Study skills for English language learning
Durkin (2004)	UK university	Chinese students	Problems in educating Chinese students in UK
Edwards & Ran (2006)	UK university	Chinese students	The needs of Chinese students in UK
Huang (2005)	UK university	Chinese Tourism majors	Problem Based Learning

APPENDIX 3: TABLE OF CHINA-BASED STUDIES THIS PAPER DRAWS UPON

Researcher	Location	Participants	Subject of the research
Xu (2004)	Chinese university	Chinese economics majors	Students' experiences of teaching and learning
Mohrman (2003)	Chinese HE	Teachers and administrators of Chinese HE	Survey of HE reforms
Qiang & Wolff <i>et.al</i> (2003)	Chinese HE	HE students	Quality of third tier colleges
Wang,Chen & Zhou (2002)	Chinese HE	Chinese freshers	Coping strategies and social support
Corbin Dwyer &McNaughton (2004)	Chinese primary education	Chinese education administrators	Counselling services (7 day workshop)
Romanowski (2006)	Chinese primary and secondary education	Primary and secondary school teachers	Problem areas in the Chinese education system

APPENDIX 4: QUALITY IN EDUCATION: EMOTIONAL LITERACY

K.Weare on developing Personal Support structures and Emotional Literate schools	Emotional Literacy and Personal Support at a Chinese Provincial University
1. Holistic approach	x
.. in organization	Students can only obtain help from their own teachers
..in climate	Most students just focus on passing tests.
.. in ethos	unknown
..in personnel	Teachers are to be respected and their advice/instructions (implicitly) followed. Most teachers are only available during the times when they teach (about 10 hours a week).
.. in relations with the community and society	Once a year 1-day trip to a suburban school to teach children for a few hours
.. teach emotional and social competences explicitly	Sports day for all students. Drama and dance competitions are organized. Students' focus is only on their own department. Many students do not know students studying in other departments
..teach values.	Teachers do not hinder (some: give opportunity for) cheating
.. in an emotional literate environment	sterile environment with possibly some posters made by students in the entrance hall of the departmental buildings

2. Learning for Life	Learning to pass exams
Autonomy of students is encouraged	Students have little input. They tend to follow the teachers' instructions. Each class has a <i>study monitor</i> who is responsible for his students' study progress and grades.
Access to information to help students make informed decisions	There is a job centre and library, but students are not clearly shown the way to access information (and the resources are usually rather limited). Staff is often unavailable.
Opportunities for citizenship in school, neighbourhood and society	Students may take 1 day to go out in the community if the activity is organized by teachers. Few and far between.
Students develop knowledge, skills and attitudes to be able to seek information and help support life choices	Most students have little eye for the future and do not know what they want. Focus is on here and now: to pass exams.

3.Review of Individual Progress	3.Little Review of Progress
Schools provide regular review of progress in learning and Personal Development	Once students have entered public universities they relax. Chinese teachers are not strict and most students just pass exams. Review of a student's progress is therefore not considered important. The study monitor is often made responsible for his classmates' academic achievements. He is supposed to advise and encourage his fellow students.
Schools help with transitions between different stages of education	There is little help for first year students and even less help for senior students entering society.
Schools help to plan for the future	One semester course on society and jobs. Mostly theoretical, little practical advice on job interviews, employees' rights and responsibilities.

4. Access to Support	4. Access to Support
Schools provide access to staff by pupils who want support	Support is very limited. In case of an emergency the student can try to track down a teacher, or ask the class monitor (a fellow student) for advice.
Schools co-ordinate support between agencies and schools, wherever learning takes place	Not available.
Staff respect confidentiality	No clear guidelines on keeping confidentiality. Depends on the teacher.
Schools ensure time and space to seek help	There are no specific 'office hour' times. Students have to find teachers around the times they teach classes. There is one office, but teachers hardly use it. If students want to talk to a teacher privately there is no designated quiet place they can go to.

APPENDIX 5: DEMING'S QUALITY EDUCATION AND CHINESE UNIVERSITY
CONDITIONS

DEMING'S IDEAS ON QUALITY MANAGEMENT - ADAPTED FOR SCHOOLS	PRACTICES AT A CHINESE PROVINCIAL UNIVERSITY
Pursue continuous improvement of the curriculum & learning diligently and constantly	Senior managers have little to say as to the content of the curriculum. Most courses are required by the Chinese Ministry of Education
Adopt the system of profound knowledge in your classroom and school as the prime management tool	Quite a few (young) teachers have little life experience and teaching experience. They stick to the textbooks, which are not always a source of updated and relevant information.
Build quality into teaching and learning and reduce the inspection of quality into work after the event	Teachers grew up with a system of rote learning and it is difficult to change their ways. Students' grades are all-important; the focus is on providing evidence for the annual inspection that students know the basic required knowledge.
Build a partnership relationship with colleagues students, colleges and employers	There is as yet no partnership relationship with employers, so students have no opportunity to get firsthand knowledge during a term of approbation.
Constantly improve the system within which teaching/learning takes place	Improvement depends mainly on new regulations issued by the Ministry of Education. Fortunately, in recent years, some senior teachers/managers have had an opportunity to go abroad for further education. This should help improve the quality of management/teaching. Few workshops are held in which newly acquired knowledge is taught to the junior staff.

<p>Take every opportunity to train in new skills and to learn from your pupils</p>	<p>Basic in-service training is provided for new teachers, but Professional Development workshops for more experienced teachers are lacking. The majority of pupils know little of the world and have few skills besides memorizing.</p>
<p>Lead, do not drive or manipulate</p>	<p>Classmates all take the same courses. Only in recent years is the opportunity given to choose 1 or 2 optional courses. Senior managers implement the study pathway. Students tend to just follow instructions.</p>
<p>Drive out fear of punishment, create joy of learning</p>	<p>As many teachers literally recite from the textbooks when teaching, there is little joy in learning. Few students know how to critically analyze a text. Grades are all-important, so failing a course is not an option. The great majority of teachers do not let students fail – and students are aware of this practice.</p>
<p>Collaborate with colleagues from other departments and functions</p>	<p>In the past every department was its own regulator. In the last few years, colleges and departments have begun to cooperate – though only in a limited way. Language departments are now working together. However, students/teachers do not collaborate with other departments.</p>
<p>Communicate honestly not through jargon or slogans</p>	<p>Slogans are part of the Chinese heritage. They bind groups together. To give up working with slogans is therefore difficult. Communicating honestly is also difficult since in China ‘saving face’ is all-important. You do not wish to embarrass others, nor do you wish to be embarrassed yourself. Unlike in the west, people do not get straight to the point – they usually circle around the issue.</p>
<p>So far as possible create a world without grades and rank order</p>	<p>This is impossible to do unless the government decides to make some major changes at tertiary education level. It is promising that in 2006 a new curriculum for primary and secondary schools was launched, in which portfolios play a part. The goal is to develop Chinese pupils into all-round citizens. However, the national examinations which determine one’s academic future are still in place.</p>

<p>Encourage and celebrate to develop your students' pride in work</p>	<p>Some extracurricular activities are organized in which students can excel. However, as for regular courses, grades are given based on exam results, so in this respect little 'pride in work' can be obtained.</p>
<p>Promote the development of the whole person in students and colleagues</p>	<p>Most university students study all day and do some tutoring in the evening/weekends. There is little room for 'broadening one's horizon' or learning a range of new skills.</p>
<p>Wed your students to learning by negotiation with them of a quality experience</p>	<p>No negotiation due to limited resources.</p>

APPENDIX 6: ADDITIONAL DATA

Figure 6.1: Students' sources of emotional support

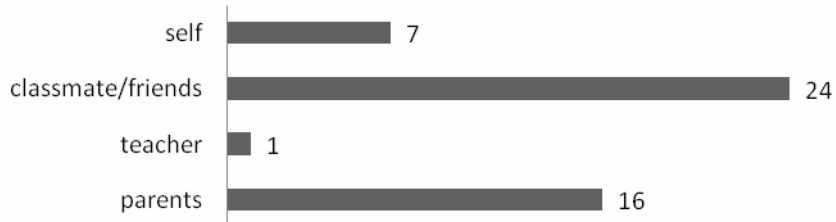


Figure 6.2: Students' perception of less useful courses

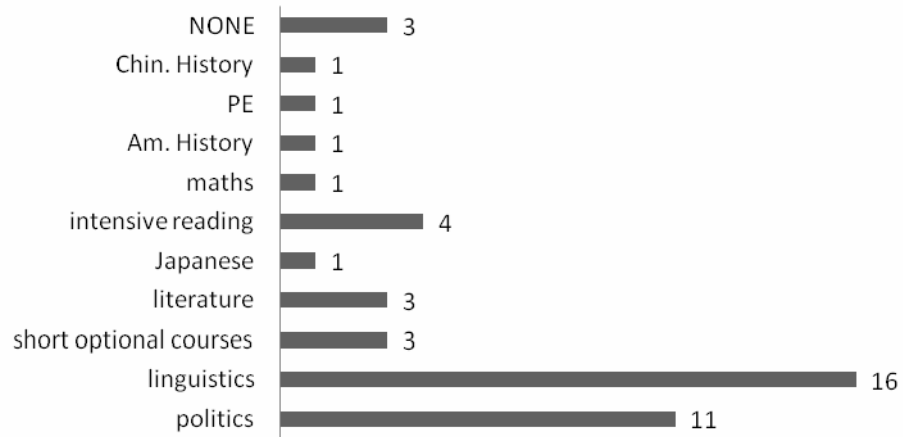


Figure 6.2A: Students' perception of useful courses

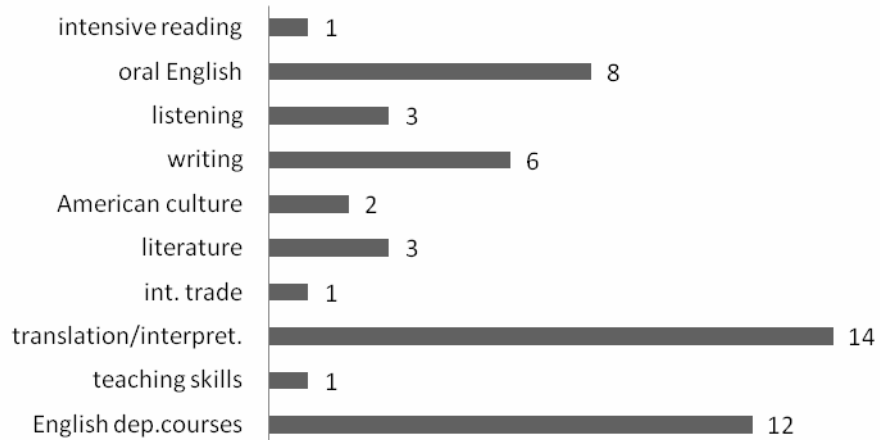


Figure 6.3: Perceived strong points of computer course

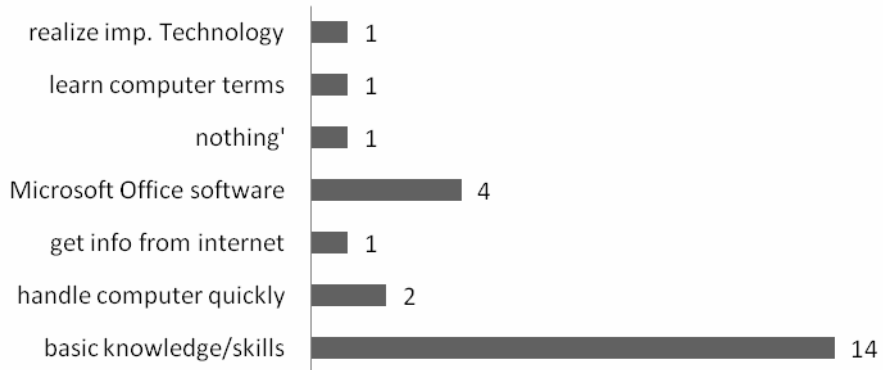


Figure 6.4: Suggested support for fourth year students

