

University Instructors and International Students:

When Expectations Meet Reality

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March 8, 2020

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ABSTRACT

As the number of international students continues to rise at Canadian universities, both university instructors and international students have to learn to adapt and change if they are both to be successful. The changes are greatest in terms of expectations and day-to-day reality. Instructors expect certain things from their students such as students will understand the language of instruction, students will have the necessary prior knowledge to benefit from instruction, and that students will be motivated to learn. Students have expectations as well, they expect that their lack of language skills will not be a barrier to learning, and they expect that they can continue to do the same things they did in their home countries regarding assignments. The mismatch between what instructors expect and what students expect is often overwhelming in classrooms leading to frustration on the part of both participants.

INTRODUCTION

International students, in record numbers, are making Canada their destination of choice for higher education. The latest numbers from Statistics Canada (2018) show that “International students totalled 245,895 in 2016/2017, representing 12% of overall enrolments” (para.2). According to the report, the largest number of international students are from China but a close second are students from India up 34.4% from 2015 to 2017. These students come to Canada and the United States to study for a number of reasons including the prestige of studying abroad, and their desire for a better standard of living for themselves and their families (Montgomery, 2017). In addition, the students are looking to fulfill the necessary qualifications to be able to immigrate to Canada. These combined reasons put a lot of pressure on the students to succeed once they arrive and their fear of failure is high. International students struggle when they come to study in Canada because they have to adapt to not only the lifestyle in Canada but also the method of learning. Many of the students are not used to the way that instructors teach in Canada, they are not used to the level of participation expected in classrooms, and they do not understand the language of instruction. This combination of difficulties can lead to problems not only for the students but also for the instructors.

I have been teaching international students for seven years and have seen some of the difficulties they face when coming to study in Canada. My experiences deal specifically with teaching students how to write an academic essay and how to learn at university. In the past three years, the population of students from India, specifically the Punjab region, have stretched the resources of not only the instructors but also the university. The majority of these students try very hard to adapt to their new environment but find it challenging due to their lack of preparation before becoming university students. The instructors also find it challenging and

frustrating to have these students in their classrooms. They find themselves unprepared for the time that it takes to educate the students and they underestimate the number of hours they will have to spend outside of class to help the students so they have a better chance of success. The rate of failure for international students is high in most classes and instructors are increasingly feeling overwhelmed in an effort to support their international students (Jin & Schneider, 2019). The problem with admitting so many international students to Canadian universities is that both the students and the instructors are not prepared for the time they will need to spend on the course if the students are to achieve success.

The recruiters, hired by universities and colleges, try to get as many students as possible to make the decision to come to Canada to study. Their livelihood and the livelihood of the institutions they represent depends on their success. They make promises to the students and their parents about Canada as a destination for not only the standard of living they can expect to find but also the standard of education, which is better than the one they have in their home countries. Rawlings and Sue (2013) identified the reasons why Chinese students desire to study abroad. They cite the fact that the students will gain a global perspective, which is necessary in the globalized market; some of the students' view education in China as outdated and rigid, and they know pursuing a degree outside of China will provide the needed road to immigration and the promise of a new and improved lifestyle. The recruiters promise students easier access to jobs and a shorter period of eligibility before they can apply for their permanent residence card. They explain that the cost of living is lower in Canada than other countries like Britain, Australia, and the United States, which makes it affordable for more students. The problem with making these promises is that the recruiters never discuss the reality of studying in Canada so there is some disconnect between what the students expect and what they find when they arrive.

Students know things will be different but just having the knowledge is not the same as developing an understanding of how that will translate into how successful they can expect to be in their studies.

It is one thing for universities and colleges to continue to recruit international students in record numbers to make up for the shortfall in government funding but it is another for instructors to deal with the students on a daily basis (Jin & Schneider, 2019). My cursory discussions with colleagues show how divisive these students are in the classroom. The talk around international students typically centres on the lack of English language skills, both oral and written that students have, the widespread practice of plagiarism, and the number of absences that pile up over a term. These issues make it difficult for instructors to do their job. We are not all specialists in teaching English as an additional language. We do not have time to cover the basics of grammar and punctuation that is sorely lacking in many students. We cannot help them catch up when they miss classes, often due to work schedules, because in many cases they never come to office hours. My colleagues reveal that they are finding it increasingly difficult to teach their courses. They get discouraged when they find that half their class does not understand what they are saying, which leads to the students not being able to complete the assignments. It appears that no one in administration has thought about how the influx of international students into classrooms would translate into the reality of teaching and learning.

It is virtually impossible to attend any class, on university and college campuses in Canada, without seeing international students. Lots of them. Where there used to be, one or two students in each classroom who came to Canada for a better education and lifestyle these same classrooms are now made up of half international students and half domestic students. In my own case, the last three terms I have taught I have had on average ten international students to

every 15 domestic students in each class. What this does to the classroom dynamics, and the instruction in the classroom, has to be addressed because with more international students comes more failures. When there were only one or two students it was easier to help them integrate into the classroom because I had the time to meet with them individually. Now with the increasing numbers it is more difficult for them to become part of the class due to my not having the time to meet with each student. This is in part due to the expectations that instructors have regarding students in their classrooms. Instructors expect their students to have some degree of familiarity with writing protocols such as punctuation, capitalization, and sentence construction. When this expectation is not met, it is extremely difficult for instructors to do their job. It also has to do with the students' expectations concerning what to expect when they study in a different country and a different culture. International students expect that their instructors will teach them everything they need to know to be successful and when they discover that they have to learn how to do things themselves, they are lost.

International students also represent a significant number of non-traditional students. In a study by Forbus, Newbold, and Mehta (2011) of non-traditional and traditional students, some of the factors they identified as being problematic for non-traditional students include time-management behaviours, stress factors, and coping strategies. Even though the parameters of their study looked at students, who were over 24 years of age, working full time, and often having dependents to support, the factors they identified are some of the same issues, which can be applied to international students. As identified, "these students [non-traditional] bring with them desires and needs that are different from their traditional counterparts on campus (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2009). Since the population of international students is not going to be receding in the near future it is necessary for not only universities and colleges to learn how to

adapt and change their approach to educating non-traditional students but university instructors also have to learn to adapt their classrooms. Similarly, the international students have to understand that they must do their part in adapting to a new education system if they are to be successful in pursuing a degree in a Canadian university or college.

It is a mistake for instructors and administrators to assume that all international students are the same and all have similar issues. The students are all individuals with their own set of difficulties. It is definitely easier to attempt to lump them together and come up with a working plan, a one size fits all, but that is doing a disservice to the students. When I look out at the sea of faces staring back at me in the classroom, I do not see a generic group of students. I see students who are desperately trying to fit in, and students who have no idea how they ended up here but they are aware of the hope they carry for their families and the burden that comes with that expectation. In other words, each student comes with his or her own baggage.

The first thing instructors have to do is deviate from their belief that all international students require the same type of instruction. I am not advocating that instructors tailor their classrooms to each student that is in it. That is not tenable but what I am suggesting is that instructors look around the classroom, stare into the faces of their students, and decide what they need to do if they want their students to be successful. It could be something as easy as explaining to the international students a question that needs background information. It takes a minute or two but can work to make students feel like they are part of the class too. International students have expressed frustration with the language used, such as idioms, in the classrooms because they have no way of understanding what they mean and without that understanding, they often feel left out of the conversation (Andrade, 2010). As explained, the problem that arises is when universities attempt to group all international students together as one entity. This is not

realistic since students come from various backgrounds, have different language skills, knowledge, motivation, and goals.

This chapter will address the concerns of both the instructors and the international students who have to work together in Canadian university classrooms. Some of the issues that international students and instructors have to deal with include the language of instruction, and the prior knowledge the students bring with them from their home countries. The students also underestimate the motivation they will need to be successful and instructors underestimate the students' priorities when it comes to education versus making a living. Along with this is the students' inability to adapt to different ways of learning in a university setting which is nothing like they have ever encountered before in their own countries. In addition, the instructors are reluctant to adapt their courses to take into account international students' needs.

INSTRUCTOR EXPECTATIONS

Instructors, at university, expect the same things from all of their students whether domestic or international. They expect their students to attend every class. They expect that their students will read the material before class and be prepared to discuss what they have read. They expect their students to take notes. They expect that students will participate in class. They expect students to ask questions in class. They expect that the students will hand in work that is the best they can accomplish. They expect that students will hand in their assignments on time. They expect that students will behave like mature adults and will treat them as such. They expect that students will be active learners not passive learners, and they expect that the students will come to their office hours if they are experiencing difficulty in the course. International students often do not understand these expectations due to their own set of expectations based on their prior knowledge of an educational institution.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

The majority of international students do not have many expectations when it comes to learning as they begin university, mainly because they have no idea what to expect in terms of what they need to do to pass their courses. Their expectations often do not pertain to academics but instead they are more concerned with the institution in general. For example, one of the things that students have told me they expect is a more advanced level of education than they have received in their home institutions. This is a very broad statement and they cannot define what that means. They expect that their instructors will be highly trained but cannot articulate what that means. They expect that they can attend class when they want to and that attendance is not that important as long as they get their assignments completed. They expect that all of the information for exams will come from their textbooks. They expect to be able to go to their instructors to get a higher grade simply because they need one. Some students, especially Asian students, expect that the education system will be similar to what they grew up with in their country. One of my Asian students told me, in frustration after failing a critical reading assignment, that in his country students acquire knowledge from their teachers but they do not learn to think. It was therefore difficult for him to come to Canada where he was expected to give his opinion on a topic and to join in the discussions because he said he had never really given much thought to what he was learning.

LANGUAGE ISSUES

By far the biggest hurdle that international students face when beginning to study in Canada is a lack of English language skills (Andrade, 2010; Cao, Li, Jiang, & Bai, 2014; Haan, Gallagher & Varandani, 2017; Jin & Schneider, 2019; Rawlings & Sue, 2013; Redden, 2014). The majority of international students, in Canada, are from Asia, specifically China, where the

English they learn is more conversational English. They do not learn academic English, which is required in Canada, especially for written essays. Their language deficiency leaves them struggling to understand class lectures and discussions when they come to Canada to study. Students who do not understand the language of instruction are at a disadvantage. Without the basic language skills, they cannot understand the subject specific vocabulary they will need in every course they take. Andrade (2010) explained that students may have good English language skills for their home countries and may have scored high on the English language tests but that does not mean they have the capability to be successful in academic settings. She further stated that international students self-reported that they struggled with understanding the lectures due to the delivery of the instructors and the unknown vocabulary used in the classroom. Similarly, Akanwa (2015, as cited in Macgregor & Folinazzo, 2018) found that “taking and passing TOEFL does not always translate into proficiency in the English language” (p. 302). In addition, Nguyen (2013) pointed out that the TOEFL may “not serve as an accurate indicator of international students’ verbal communication skills” (p. 102). She further theorized, “international students who meet the minimum TOEFL score for admission into a U.S. university or college might not have enough proficiency to achieve success” (p. 102). The language proficiency of students is an important factor in whether they pass or fail as it affects their ability to understand lectures and read the textbooks.

Students from countries such as India are also at a disadvantage, not because they cannot speak English, because many of them can but because they do not understand the words used in their classes. These words are subject specific and are not part of their everyday vocabulary. Similarly, students from Nigeria and other English speaking colonies are proficient in the English language and can carry on a conversation with their instructors but they too, often, suffer

the same fate. Their school systems do not prepare them for the subject specific vocabulary that they need to be successful in their classes (Andrade, 2010). MacGregor and Folinazzo (2018) identified the same language issues as Andrade (2010) by stating, “if students do not have knowledge of the technical terms used in a program, they are unable to follow the course readings” (p. 301). The ability to learn subject specific vocabulary is something that instructors expect and when students cannot pick up the meaning of the words it makes it difficult for instructors to get their message across when teaching a lesson.

The language of instruction is one of the most difficult to overcome for both instructors and students. Even if students first language is English the difficulties arise for them due to the terminology used in university writing classes such as thesis, syllabus, indent, in text citations, and plagiarism to name a few. In addition, for those students whose first language is not English, they face almost insurmountable odds when learning in a new language. The language proficiency tests they take in their home countries exacerbates the situation due to the students thinking that they know enough English to pass since they were successful in the language test. These tests do not give a true measure of the types of words that they will need to be able to understand to benefit from instruction.

It would make sense for universities and colleges to improve international students’ English proficiency skills before they can register in introductory courses since many of the academic difficulties faced by the students are due to their weak language skills (Andrade, 2010; Haan et al., 2017). The 93 university instructors that Andrade (2010) surveyed agreed that students were able to perform passive tasks such as reading and listening but were not able to understand and follow instructions in class, were not able to hand in an acceptable written paper, and could not participate in class. The instructors further stated that, in their opinion, the greatest

challenge faced by international students was writing successful papers due to grammatical errors, which detracted from the content in their essays. The instructors also indicated that they were not prepared to take the time to teach grammar, as they did not see that as their responsibility. Ramburuth (2001) studied the English language competence of first-year international students enrolled in a Commerce and Economics department in Australia. She found that approximately 76% of the students required intensive language support in order to be successful in their courses. These findings corroborated instructors concerns about the language competence of their students and the need for extensive language support.

Similarly, Haan, Gallagher, and Varandani (2017) reported that students are being admitted to campuses without the basic language skills necessary to be successful and that there is not enough support being offered to instructors from the institutions. Increasingly, instructors are feeling the pressure to help international students gain the basic language skills they require which means they often have to use their office hours to teach students these skills (Hann, Gallagher & Varandani, 2017). Likewise, Macgregor and Folinazzo (2018) stated that second language learners often overwhelm faculty because they lack the necessary training to deal with second language learners. Redden (2014) in her study found that “the topic of English language proficiency came up repeatedly [when speaking to instructors] with some faculty describing frustrations regarding enrollment of students whose English proficiency level was simply too low for them to participate – or in some cases, pass the class” (p. 2). This mismatch between what the students require in terms of language skills and what the instructors are able to offer creates classrooms where students are set up to fail.

I frequently have students, usually Asian students, who do not understand me at all when I am teaching. These students come to class, sit there, do not take notes, and do not do well on

the assignments or the exams. I ask them to come to my office and attempt to speak to them. They look at me, and nod, but I can see they have no idea what I am saying. When I ask them what I just said, they shrug their shoulders, and say they do not understand. I, as well as my colleagues, ask ourselves how these students managed to pass their English language exams. It is not possible and yet they end up in our classrooms. I am not an EAL teacher, but even if I was, I do not have the time to teach them the basics of what they need to know to be successful in my course. There is no time to teach them punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, paragraph construction, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and content knowledge. Without these basic skills, these students will fail. There is no other possible outcome for them and it is not for lack of trying on both my part and the students' part. How is this fair to either of us when our institutions continue to admit students who cannot possibly be successful without a great deal of support? As it is now, the burden rests on the shoulders of the instructors, which is not reasonable.

UNDERSTANDING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM – PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

One of the problems for instructors is that they have no idea what experiences their international students have had, what their backgrounds and cultural values are so they tend to group students based on nationality (Freeman & Li, 2019). These stereotypes are not conducive to assisting international students in achieving a sense of belonging in the classroom. University instructors, especially ones who have been teaching for a number of years, have certain expectations regarding their students. They expect to walk into their classrooms and face a large group of students ready to learn. These students have enrolled in the courses, so instructors expect that they must want to be there. Instructors are there to teach their students the subject matter of the course. The students are there to learn from the instructor. It has been this way for

centuries. However, what happens now is that when instructors walk into their classrooms they face an increasingly diverse set of students. There are still some students, who are fresh out of secondary schools, but there are more and more mature students (those over 24 years of age) who are enrolling in classes. In addition, now add another layer to that student body, international students who have never studied in a Canadian school setting. Even the mature domestic students would have come through the educational system of Canada and have certain expectations but international students have no such expectations or the expectations will be so different from what they have previously encountered. This can cause a conflict between what the instructors expect and what the students expect.

Rawlings and Sue (2013) characterized Chinese students as having come from an education system that valued the collective not the individual. This makes it difficult for students to adapt to the fact that the learning environment is not centred on the teachers, that all of the information they require will not come from just the textbooks, and that instructors will not expect their students to remain silent during the lecture. In contrast, classrooms in North America respect the individual, are less formal in their teaching approach, and value classroom interaction. Rawlings and Sue (2013) discovered that the Chinese students, they interviewed, reported that they remained silent in class because of their limited English language skills. Likewise, the students that Valdez (2015) interviewed expressed the same thoughts on the education system in North America as Rawlings and Sue (2013) reported. Valdez's (2015) students reported that in China the instructors tell them exactly what to do including when to take notes, and they spend a great deal of time memorizing information. They contrasted that with the education system in the United States where they are expected to participate in class and have to take part in group discussions in the classroom. They also discussed how uncomfortable they

were with the expectation that they would ask questions in class, as that was something that they were not used to doing in their classes in China. Lin, Su, and McElwain (2019) reiterated the point that international students are afraid of talking in class and giving their opinion due to their perception that they should avoid confronting their instructors. They see it as rude to interrupt their instructors.

The students, in Valdez's (2015) study did mention that another one of the reasons they do not participate in class was because of the pace of the class. They said it was difficult to speak in class because they take more time to formulate their responses in English than domestic students do so the discussion moves on without their input. They were careful to point out that just because they do not respond in class does not mean that they do not have opinions they just cannot express that opinion fast enough. It would be beneficial if instructors gave their international students more time to answer questions or give their opinion. The sound of silence in a classroom does not have to be oppressive and does not have to be something that is avoided. It can lead to some excellent discussions but only if instructors are not afraid of dead air and instead give more time for students to formulate their responses.

FAILURE

It can be a stressful time for instructors when they realize that many of their international students are going to fail their course. We do not expect our students to fail. We expect that with our guidance they will be able to pass the course. Not everyone can achieve an A grade but that does not mean students who do not get A's fail. Some get B's, some C's, and some the occasional D. The only way a student will fail, typically, is if they did not attend class or they did not hand in assignments. Now, instructors have students who attend every class, but due to their own set of difficulties usually with language, will not be able to pass no matter what they or

their instructors do. This creates stress in the instructor as they struggle with trying to understand what else they can do for their students. They search for answers from tutors but this is like putting a Band-Aid on a broken leg. The Band-Aid might look good and might make one feel better that they at least did something but it is not going to heal the leg. It is not going to allow them to walk on the leg without assistance. The lack of support for both the students and the instructors is yet another failure of the institution that puts the onus squarely on the instructors to try to find a solution to their students' difficulties. The instructors struggle with trying to figure out where they can turn to for assistance so they can help their students. This institutional problem needs assistance from people who are in a better position than instructors are to provide guidance to the students who need extra help. As mentioned before, students need to have a bridge course at the university in English language skills before they register in first-year courses. If they do not have that bridge course, they are being set up for failure and to make matters worse they are paying for the privilege of failing. We expect that every student in our classes will be able to handle the course material and the course assessments. Increasingly with international students this is not so.

FEELINGS OF ISOLATION

Another issue for international students is the feeling of being completely alone (Yan & Sendall, 2016). This is not something that students expected when they moved to Canada. Many of the students are used to having their parents do everything for them including paying bills, finding a place to live, providing food, doing laundry, and other household tasks such as cleaning and cooking. Now, they are on their own having to figure out how to do these things in a strange country that does not operate in the same way that their countries do. Their support system is now far away and they only get to speak to their parents long distance. Their parents,

also, cannot help them with any problems they encounter because they are not familiar with Canadian culture. In addition, students find it difficult to make friends especially with Canadian students. As a result, many international students choose to combat loneliness by other methods. Morris, Brooks, and May (2003) stated that students rely on what they called ‘passive coping methods’ that manifested as missing classes, not keeping up with their coursework, and drinking alcohol more as a way to cope. These are not good ways to cope with their situation as it can, and will, affect their school standing.

International students are also commuting students because they have to commute from their home countries. Newbold, Mehta, and Forbus (2010a) found that “the commuting student tackles challenges that the non-commuting student typically doesn’t face, especially feelings of isolation, multiple life roles and different support systems” (p. 116). Freeman and Li (2019) in their study found that students felt like “ghosts in the classroom” (p. 30). They described, “feeling isolated in class, being scared and afraid to communicate with NES [Native English Speakers] students, and feeling insecure about their intercultural competence” (p. 30). The fear of speaking in class is not typically something that instructors think about when they facilitate classroom discussions.

The international students, in my classrooms, often speak about being lonely and not being able to make friends. Some students tell me that they expected it would be easy to make friends just as it was in their own countries. They, also, did not expect to feel so isolated in the classrooms and in their day-to-day life. They report going to school and then going home where they spend time alone playing games, watching movies or shows on their devices, or going on social media. The students who appear to fair the best are those with roommates or those who stay with Canadian families. In those instances, they are not alone. I travel a great deal so I can

often speak to the students about things that are familiar to them if I have visited their home countries. They like to hear what I thought of their country and what I liked best in the country. When this happens, I can see that they come alive. They are so happy to be able to speak to someone who has knowledge of their home countries. The institutions, and instructors, often underestimate the complete feeling of isolation that international students must endure everyday especially those who cannot speak English well enough to form friendships. It is therefore up to universities and colleges to provide opportunities where international students can mingle and speak to other students.

STRESS

International students face enormous stress from their families to succeed. Many families have spent their entire life savings to send their children to study in Canada. Students understand this but many cannot cope with the academic demands made on them and fall further and further behind. The students' academic stress is compounded by the need to earn money to survive in Canada. These factors result in students making decisions that will affect their entire academic life. As Newbold, Mehta, and Forbes (2010) found students tend to begin avoiding school because they are not doing well and they do not know what to do. This plays out in classrooms everyday when students begin to miss classes and do not keep up with their assignments.

In addition, students face financial difficulties (Nguyen, 2013). As stated by Nguyen (2013) "the challenge is finances. A lot of them do not have enough money [for education], they just come, and they think the system will eventually support them somehow. They [want to] find a job but they cannot find a job" (p. 108). This combination of stresses often leads to homesickness, which directly affects their ability to concentrate on their studies. Adding to their stress about finances is their reluctance to speak about it to anyone. Lafleche (2019) found that

some international students, from India, live on a piece of fruit and a cup of tea for breakfast because they cannot afford to buy any other food. One of the students interviewed by Lafleche stated that despite the financial hardship they could not go back. He said, “there is no going back for us” (p. 1). It is sad to think that some students have no alternatives but to starve themselves just to remain in Canada. One of my international students confessed that the reason he had money problems was that he spent a lot of money on things he did not need because there was no one to monitor what he bought and he wanted to show off to his fellow international students. This may be true for him but it seems the majority of students have to work if they want to survive due to limited funding from their families. If institutions are going to accept international students it is up to that institution to ensure that the students have enough money to be able to survive and thrive. Too often, the burden of supporting the students emotionally falls to the instructors who are not equipped to deal with the financial problems many of these students have.

MOTIVATION

One of the predictors of success in university is student motivation to learn. This is a problem for international students. They are motivated to come to Canada but once they get here they are overwhelmed with all of the free time they have that they do not take the time necessary to do well in their school subjects. This lack of motivation to put in the work needed to succeed creeps up on them and they often do not monitor their grades so when they find out that they are failing it is too late for them to correct their course of action. In her study, Montgomery (2017) discovered that international students were motivated by external factors such as parental expectations, and a wish to get a better job. The decision to come to Canada was in part made because they wanted to experience a different culture but they did not think of what that would

mean for them. The students expected that they would get to know domestic students, gain practical experience in their chosen field, learn English, and become immersed in the university culture. The reality of their experiences conflicted with many of their expectations. The international students found it difficult to make friends with domestic students and therefore could not improve their English language skills. In addition, they expressed frustration that they did not gain the expected practical experience in their profession (Montgomery, 2017).

PLAGIARISM

Freeman and Li (2019) interviewed international students about some of the issues they encountered that they did not expect. A student from Japan said about plagiarism “here [in the United States] they really check [for plagiarism] strictly, but in Japan not so much” (p. 26). Similarly, a student from Vietnam said, “in Vietnam you know, most students literally copy and paste and it’s like really bad” (p. 26). In addition, a student from China explained that “In China. I don’t read anything. I just write what I want to explain. No any theory to support or evidence to support” (p. 27). These examples explain why international students have problems understanding the disciplinary regulations of the universities they attend thus leading to plagiarism issues. The students also observed, “teachers don’t explain anything about academic skills except to say we must reference and we’re expected to know how to answer assignments” (Freeman & Li, 2019, p. 28). Students expected some literacy instruction but that only happened in courses designed to be language and communication courses. Of course, not every student has to take these courses so it is no wonder they struggle with understanding academic integrity policies. Macgregor and Folinazzo (2018) reported that international students found writing to be difficult because of their poor citation and reference skills, which led to them misunderstanding plagiarism. Nguyen (2013) also addressed the issues that international students

have with understanding plagiarism. She summarized the problem by stating that some students, especially Asian students, do not understand the concept of plagiarism. The students are used to taking information that they find online because they see it as public information and therefore it is for their use. These students would have benefited from attending workshops provided by their institutions through either library services or tutoring sessions to gain a better understanding of what plagiarism means and how to avoid it when writing papers. Instructors often do not have the time to address plagiarism in their classrooms except to tell students not to do it, which is why international students would benefit from workshops designed to explain what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

ASKING FOR ASSISTANCE

University instructors hold office hours for students to be able to come and ask questions if they do not understand something about the course or the assignments. Most international students do not avail themselves of this opportunity. They do not come to talk to their instructors unless they want to complain about a grade after the fact. I recently had a student, from China, come and speak to me after failing his assignment. He said he did not understand what I wanted him to do. I asked him why he did not come to see me before the assignment was due rather than after I had graded it. He said because he thought he could find out what to do by first asking his friend for help but the friend did not know what to do, and then he asked other students in the classroom for assistance but they could not help him either. Again, I asked him why he did not come to see me since I was the one who could have answered his questions. He just shrugged his shoulders and asked for a rewrite. I told him I could not allow that as the assignment was not one that was eligible for a rewrite. Then he said, “but I am an international student”. I told him so were all the other students in his class. This example serves to illustrate what instructors deal

with on a daily basis. Students do not come to office hours unless they want to complain and then it is too late.

Freeman and Li (2019) discovered that the reason international students do not ask questions of their instructors is that they were worried that they would not understand the answers. However, Freeman and Li (2019) found that once they had the opportunity to get to know their instructors they said they asked questions before and after class, which they found helpful. The authors learned from the students that once the term progressed, their stress lessened when dealing with their instructors but it did not decrease in speaking to domestic students:

I'm just afraid. I'm afraid they [domestic students] cannot understand what I am talking about. I'm also afraid I cannot understand what they are talking about. And I'm afraid they don't like other people to ask them anything. It's like we have nothing in common. What is private, what would make them unhappy or uncomfortable? I'm not sure so I'm just afraid. (Freeman & Li, 2019, p. 30)

The inability to know how to speak to their fellow students caused considerable stress in the classrooms and they were not sure how to deal with it. When they did try to engage domestic students they felt that the students often were not interested in speaking to them or else just spoke briefly and then did not speak with them the next time they saw them. This caused stress because the students felt the domestic students did not accept them in the class and they wanted to be accepted. They wanted to feel like they were part of the class too. They, also, did not want the domestic students to feel uncomfortable in their presence. They expected that they would be able to improve their English language skills by making friends with the domestic students but that did not happen which left them to develop friendships with other international students who

had similar backgrounds. It therefore ultimately falls to instructors to foster opportunities in the classroom for all students to interact with each other through discussions and group work.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Students come from all over the world to study in Canada. The majority of them are from China and India. How these students cope with not only the changes to their way of learning but also the changes needed to function in a new culture can mean the difference between failure and success. It is therefore important to review the expectations these students arrive, in Canada with, and how those expectations align with the expectations of their instructors.

One of the things my students tell me they expect is that they will get a break because they are international students. They come to see me after they get an assignment back and plead their case. They were told, by the recruiters, to explain to their instructors that they are international students and therefore do not know the rules. They seem to think this entitles them to a proverbial free 'get out of jail card'. They take this to mean that if they fail an assignment, they will be able to keep rewriting it until they pass. This is not acceptable and instructors who fall for this pleading do not do their students any favours. Students have to be able to do the work in the host university. Without this academic integrity, their degrees will not be worth anything. I had a student, come to see me after he had failed his essay. He told me that it was not helpful for instructors to fail students because we should instead be encouraging our students and that a failing grade was not encouraging him to work. He wanted me to pass him. I explained to him that just because he was an international student that he still had to do the work and the work had to measure up to the standards set by me. I asked him if he would feel good about his essay, knowing how bad it was, if I just gave him a passing grade without telling him

how he could improve the next time. He left my office angry but I noticed that the next time he was in class he was taking notes. If instructors have no standards, and just pass international students, because they are swayed by their stories than what is the point. Without standards, in place, instructors and students are operating in the dark.

CONCLUSION

Is there a looming crisis in higher education institutions as the number of international students continues to grow? And what kind of crisis? The most obvious answer is yes, there is a crisis that has not yet reached its peak but is slowly getting there. The lack of knowledge of English is one of the main issues when it comes to international students. If an instructor looks out on their classroom on the first day and sees that three quarters of the students are international students how does that impact their teaching methods? Does it affect how they teach or what they teach? Most instructors will say that it makes no difference (Andrade, 2010). But how can it not? There is no indication that the number of international students will drop. Instead, they will continue to rise especially since universities are looking for ways to increase their revenue and international students provide much needed income. There is no doubt that both the instructors and the students need to make adjustments if they are each to be successful in a university classroom. It is unrealistic to expect either group to make all of the necessary modifications and not expect the other group to do their part as well. While it is incumbent on the instructor to make sure that each of their students has the necessary knowledge and tools to be able to function in their classrooms there is only so much that instructors can do. It is difficult to know how much to adapt and how much to expect. If international students come to study in Canada, they have to be aware that things are not going to be the same as their home countries' educational system. They have to adapt. This is especially true when they are studying with

domestic students who are more aware of the expectations based on their familiarity with the educational system in Canada. This does not mean that instructors should 'dumb down' the curriculum for international students or mark them differently. The international students come to Canada to earn a Canadian degree. Instructors who make too many adjustments for their international students are doing them a disservice.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When international students cannot learn often through no fault of their own it is time for the instructors and the institutions that employ them to make changes. These changes have to address the concerns of both the instructors and the students they instruct. One of the recommendations is to provide a bridge course between their home institution and the one they are attending in Canada with respect to upgrading their English language skills. Without an English tutorial that will ensure that all international students understand what they are learning there is going to continue to be a high rate of failure. Students need to learn subject specific vocabulary that will help them in the classroom. They need to learn how to converse, how to answer questions, how to ask questions, and how to speak to their instructors and the domestic students they will encounter in their classes. It is therefore, mandatory that instructors explain and define unfamiliar terms so that all students can benefit from instruction. With international students, instructors have to be aware that the more ways they present the vocabulary the easier it will be for students to understand. This means, not only mentioning the terms in class, but also having them written down on PowerPoint slides, document readers, and perhaps having a handout that is provided in class with the basic terms that all students need to know before they can be successful in class.

If it takes a village to raise a child, then we can use the same analogy for an international university student. The institutions that recruit international students have to have the supports available for them when they come to study. This means having programs in place that can help them overcome some of the issues that many students face such as English Language programs geared to students whose first language is not English. Without the needed supports international students will continue to fail their courses through no fault of their own and through no fault of the instructors tasked with teaching them.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Bridge Course: The term bridge course refers to a non-credit course that all international students should take before beginning university classes. The course would teach basic grammar skills like sentence construction, punctuation, capital letters, paragraph construction etc. It would also teach students verbal English language skills so that the students would benefit from instruction once they enter university. This course is necessary if international students are to be successful when they take introductory courses. If their English language skills were not sufficient for them to understand what their instructor was saying in class then they would need to repeat the course until their spoken English skills allowed them to be able to converse in class.

Commuting Students: A commuting student is one who lives outside the city where the university or college is located and who has to take care of all their own basic needs. These students have to find their own housing, pay bills, cook, clean, shop, and many apply for part-time jobs. A commuting student does not have the family support that students who reside in the city have in their day-to-day life. This is why international students fit the definition of a commuting student. They are far from their support systems and have to figure out things for themselves.

Domestic Students: A domestic student is one who was born in Canada or who has received the majority of their schooling in Canada. These students are fluent English language speakers and writers. They do not require student visas to study in Canada and their parents may or may not be supporting them financially.

Institution: An institution is the post-secondary university or college, which the students are attending. Institution refers to not only the bricks and mortar building but also the people who make the decisions regarding who they accept to attend their school, the student advisors, and the other support staff who assist students once they become part of the student body.

Instructors: Instructors refer to professors, full-time instructors, and contract faculty. In other words, anyone who teaches at a post-secondary institution is an instructor.

International Students: An international student is one who was not born in Canada and who has come from another country to study in Canada. They are attending school with a temporary student visa that they had to apply for before they could come to Canada to study and which they have to renew every year. In most cases, parents support the international students financially.

Language Skills: Language skills refers to the international students' ability to converse and write in the English language. This includes being able to benefit from instruction, in the classroom, in terms of understanding what is being taught and being able to follow instructions. It, also, includes the students' skill in being able to write a paper in English following the accepted protocols of the course.

Non-Traditional Students: A non-traditional student is one who did not come to university or college directly from a secondary institution. These include students who have taken a year off before attending, students who did not complete their high school courses but are now over the age of 21, students who attended right after high school but stopped attending for a number of years, and international students. Even if international students were attending right after their secondary schooling, they are non-traditional students due to the different experiences they had

in their home school system and their inability to speak or write in English well enough to be successful.

Plagiarism: Refers to copying and pasting information from a source without citing the source of the material. It, also, includes taking an author's exact words and not using quotation marks to indicate to the reader that the words are not the words of the writer of the paper.