

# Language Preparation and the First Year Experience: What Administrators and Policy Makers Should Know

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*Florida Journal of Educational  
Administration & Policy*

Fall 2007  
Volume 1, Issue 1

*Studying in a second language is probably one of the greatest challenges for international students. In this study, the relationship between language preparation and the first year graduate study among East Asian international graduate students in the United States was investigated in order to provide implications and suggestions for university administrators and policymakers. Language preparation before arriving in the United States and their first year experiences were explored in order to understand the challenges that East Asian international students face. The findings from 12 interviews reveal the first year academic experience of East Asian international graduate students and the needs of this population regarding university language support. In addition, the findings allow policymakers and higher education administrators to better understand the difficulties this population faces as well as the importance of support services and mentoring programs in ensuring their academic success in the United States.*

**Keywords: Language Proficiency; International Graduate Student; Academic Performance; Adjustment Process**

As a crucial center of information and advanced technology, the United States attracts students and scholars worldwide (Sandhu, 1995). According to the Open Doors (2006) report, 564,766 international students studied in American higher education institutions in the 2005-2006 academic year (approximately 3.9% of the total postsecondary enrollment) including 259,717 students in graduate programs (approximately 46% of the total number of international students). Approximately 58% of the total international graduate enrollment were students who were born in Asia (Open Doors, 2006). Hence, this study's focus is Asian international graduate students. Specifically, our participants were all of East Asian descent. They were from the numbers two, three, and four countries – China, Korea, and Japan (India being number one) for pursuing graduate studies at U.S. higher education institutions (Open Doors, 2006).

Although international students have already become a component of student population in U.S. postsecondary education, based on a report released by the Association of International Educators (NAFSA, 2006), “the era of robust growth in international student enrollments in the U.S. was already over” (p.2). Now, fewer international students are enrolled in U. S. higher education institutions than there were before the events of September 11, 2001. Other countries are working to attract the world's scientific, technological, and intellectual elites from around the globe. As the report states, “what is most alarming is that,

for the first time, the United States seems to be losing its status as the destination of choice for international students” (NAFSA, 2006, p.2). Given this situation, a comprehensive strategy was presented, including effective policy coordination for admission, monitoring, and services for international students; more flexible and coordinated visa policy; and removing excessive governmentally imposed barriers. However, most of these strategies are at the national and state levels. For higher education institutions, one of the most important efforts geared at attracting international students and providing quality education is understanding and meeting their educational needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to use qualitative methods to explore the most prominent educational needs of international students and provide corresponding implications for educational administration and policy.

A lack of proficiency in English is the number one issue for international students who are from non-English speaking countries and the primary obstacle faced by international students in the U.S. (Mori, 2000; Selvadurai, 1998). Therefore, we chose language difficulty as the primary educational issue for international students. In our research, we define “language” as “English,” which is the linguistic medium for instruction at American universities. The participants for this project are from non-English speaking countries, making them non-native speakers of English. It was assumed in this research that for most international students, their English proficiency depends on their English learning experiences and English test preparation before they came to the U. S., so we explored international students’ English language preparation and its impact on their first year of graduate educational experience, academic performance and adaptation to the new environment. Our research questions are:

1. How did international students learn English and prepare for English tests before they came to the U. S.?
2. To what extent do international students’ English skills affect their first year graduate study?
3. How can educational administrators and policy makers help international graduate students to overcome language barriers and achieve academic success?

What emerged from our data collected through qualitative methods were insights into the language preparation of East Asian international graduate students before they arrived in the U.S., as well as their first-year experiences in graduate schools at American universities. The findings of this research not only answered our research questions, but increased awareness of the challenges faced by this population and provided implications for administrators who may be unaware of the needs of this population.

### **Literature Review**

Researchers have found that the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) are reliable measures for predicting international student performance in American graduate schools. For example, Wainer and Lukhele (1997) assert that the reliability of the TOEFL is well established. Ayres and Peters (1977) determined that the TOEFL has predictive power in determining graduate grade point average (GGPA). Light, Xu, and Mossop (1987) found that the overall TOEFL score has a statistically significant correlation with international graduate students’ GPA ( $r = .14, p < .05$ ); moreover, the higher the international student’s TOEFL scores, the more graduate

credit hours the student is able to earn in the first semester ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ). However, several researchers were not able to find clear evidence regarding the relationship between international students' TOEFL scores and their academic success as measured by GGPA in their studies (Neal, 1998; Person, 2002; Simner, 1999; Yule & Hoffman, 1990).

Several other studies indicate that the GRE score is a significant indicator of international graduate students' success. In their study, Angelis, Swinton, and Cowell (1979) note that while the quantitative aptitude score is not greatly affected by English language proficiency, the verbal aptitude score as measured by the GRE is highly affected by English proficiency. Ayres and Peters (1977) find that a combination of TOEFL scores and the verbal portion of the GRE (GRE-V) is a reasonable predictor of success as defined by program completion, since the correlation between the verbal portion of the GRE and the TOEFL score in their study is .76. Nelson, Nelson, and Malone (2004) also assert that the GRE score is a generally valid predictor of first-year GGPA and final GGPA. More importantly, researchers consistently found a positive correlation between GRE scores and degree attainment (Kuncel, Hezlett, & Ones, 2001).

One of the significant factors for the academic success of foreign students in the United States is English proficiency and English language deficiencies might cause foreign students' academic difficulties and dissatisfaction of overall experience (Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Stoyhoff, 1997). Selvadurai (1998) indicates several problems faced by international students at American universities, among which language ranks highest. He indicates that proficiency in spoken and written English is the greatest contributing factor to international students' academic success. Trice (2001) highlights the same problem among international graduate students. He concludes that English language proficiency is critical to succeeding in graduate study in the U.S. Language proficiency has also been found to be related to overall satisfaction with experience in the host country; that is to say, difficulty with English diminishes the overall experience of foreign students by undercutting satisfaction with their academic programs (Fletcher & Stren, 1989).

Cummins (1980) distinguishes basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency and notes that mastery of appropriate communication skills for academic success is a complex and formidable task for international students. Researchers have also found that language skills requirements vary by academic disciplines and the academic atmosphere at different colleges and universities in which international students study (Light, Xu & Mossop., 1987). Academic performance in the hard sciences, which requires more quantitative competencies, is less affected by English-language proficiency than academic achievement in the humanities and social sciences (Light, et al., 1987).

Kuncel and colleagues (2001) report that graduate school performance is multidimensional in nature. Although English proficiency is a critical element in post-baccalaureate success among international students, Light et al. (1987) indicate that motivation and attitudes, previous knowledge of a field of study, faculty evaluations, and students' perceptions of their own success are additional variables that affect international students' academic success. Abel (2002) cites time management, classroom dynamics, and social and educational assistance as additional factors of academic success and states "academic success seems to correlate modestly with attitudes toward learning and study strategies" (p.13). Weinstein and Mayer (1986) emphasize the importance of active learners

developing their own learning strategies and then actively organizing and adjusting study behaviors.

It is known that international students at U.S. universities encounter various difficulties or problems (Selvadurai, 1998). Different educational policies and administration efforts have been presented to address international students' needs. In their study, Baron and Strout-Dapaz (2001) report that librarians and international student support staff from 123 colleges and universities in the United States agree that the major challenges international students face are language/communication problems, adjusting to a new educational/library system, and general culture adjustments. They recommend a model for library skills training for international students. Murphy, Hawkes and Law (2002) point out that web-based orientation programs can be a particularly effective means of responding to the academic, social, personal, and financial needs of international students in helping them prepare to enter into their new intercultural educational experiences.

Kim (2005) has found that international students exhibit difficulties in three listening and speaking areas: class-note taking skills and comprehension problems, a lack of second-language confidence, and unfamiliarity with the academic classroom discourse patterns and expectations. In addition, Kim (2005) also provides a specific list of teaching strategies and classroom management techniques for instructors, such as avoiding inaccessible vocabulary; culture-specific words or slang; making use of non-verbal communication strategies; using visual aids to enhance students' comprehension; providing outlines and key terms on handouts, the blackboard, and/or overhead projector transparencies; providing feedback that emphasizes the value of students' contributions; and avoiding assumptions that international students naturally understand educational and course expectations.

For the comprehensive adaptation, Lin and Yi (1997) provide guidelines for a culturally sensitive program based on international students' acculturation and adjustment process. This program consists of four stages. In the pre-arrival adjustment stage, the main goal is to prepare necessary information about American culture, geographical environment, education system, and housing information. In the initial adjustment stage, the main goal is to orient students, reduce cultural shock, and initiate social network. In the on-going adjustment stage, it is important to help international students with bi-cultural conflicts to achieve a balance between adapting themselves to new environments and keeping their own identities. In the return-home adjustment stage, students need to know the return home readjustment process, prepare transition from academic study to employment, and overcome the return home anxiety. Only the first three of these stages are applicable to this study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The targeted population was East-Asian international graduate students. All participants were from China or Korea and have never been educated in an Anglophone country. These East-Asian countries were chosen as a criterion because of the similarities in the potential exposure and use of English as a second language in the countries' respective education systems. Furthermore, none of the countries were ever colonized by an English-speaking nation, rendering it highly unlikely that English is spoken as a native language in the home domain.

Sampling was based on four strategies as outlined by Glesne (1999, p.28). These strategies include homogenous sampling (all cases from the same geographical region), maximal variation (the unique cases of students from various disciplines), snowball sampling (asking participants to refer the researcher to other potentially willing and available participants), and convenience sampling (using relatives, friends, and peers who meet the criteria through personal contacts as well as departmental contacts).

The participants in this study included 6 male and 6 female graduate students. At the time of the interviews, they were between the ages of 20 and 40. Eight were Chinese and 4 were Korean. The participants were chosen from various colleges at the University of Florida: 1 from Journalism and Communications, 3 from Education, 5 from Engineering, 2 from Liberal Arts and Sciences, and 1 from Medical Sciences.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In the majority of cases, an East-Asian international graduate student who met the research criteria was contacted. They were then given a brief introduction to the research project and a description of the interview setting. Upon being given informal, verbal acceptance to become participants, appointments were made as to the time, location, and the specifics of how the interviews would be conducted. Before each interview, the interviewers provided an introduction, including the purpose and procedures of the interview. The participants then signed the informed research consent, approved by the University of Florida Institutional Review Board. Twelve face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were audio-taped. All of the interviews were conducted at the University of Florida in Gainesville, Florida.

After each interview session, the researchers transcribed the audio-taped interviews and the transcripts were open-coded. The research group then worked together to create domain analysis worksheets, which included the semantic relationship, a statement of the form in which it is expressed, an example sentence with a cover term, included terms that fit the selected semantic relationship and their locations on the transcripts (Spradley, 1980). The data collection resulted in 36 domains and over 40 pages of domain worksheets. The research findings are based on the information from the domain analysis worksheets.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Pre-arrival English Learning Experience**

Today, over half of the international graduate students in the United States come from Asian nations (Trice, 2001). With their hunger for a competitive education and determination to succeed at their goals, these students bring one major obstacle with them – a lack of proficiency in English.

The language preparation that these students make before arriving varies. However, we found that all of the participants had some previous experience with English language learning before arriving in the U.S. for graduate study.

Similar to the way in which most of the participants responded when asked when they had begun studying English, one participant said he “began studying English in middle school. It is the time when schools begin to teach English as a second language.” There were a number of other places where students were exposed to and practiced English before coming to the United States. Before arriving in the U.S., the participants studied English in the public school system – mainly middle school (aforementioned) and high school. After secondary school, they also studied English in private institutions and international organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). One participant described this organization as “being a kind of international organization for the education of children and youth. It exists in different countries, including the U.S.... you can learn other things like swimming there.” Several participants responded that they were exposed to English while studying at a university or college. One participant mentioned an English corner as a possible place to study English. He said that “the English corner is in the city, Gulou Square in Nanjing. About once a week, or maybe twice a week we get together, mainly Chinese people, and we just use the basic and simple English talk.”

With the exception of one participant who used spoken English in his undergraduate study, the participants reported that when they learned English in their home country’s education system, they did not learn by speaking with native English speaking teachers, but by a variety of other methods. Completing grammar, reading, and writing exercises were stated as ways of learning English along with listening to lectures and taking class notes from those lectures. Participants also mentioned memorization and recitation as means for learning English. As one participant said, “we did not have much time on writing. In middle school and high school, we memorize vocabulary, read and write, but [do] not [have] many opportunities in speaking.” It must also be noted that there were participants who claimed to be primarily self-taught. “Actually, I [started] learning English from college. I learned English by myself. I started to take English class but it was a very beginning English class” was what one participant said.

The time frame that the participants spent studying English before arriving to study in the U.S. also varied. Participants reported studying English in the public school system from three to ten years in duration. After high school, one participant spent two weeks in an English language training institution while another spent one month in a private language institution.

Despite the fact that many students in China, Korea, and Japan are taught English in secondary schools, participants reported that the way English is taught in their country has contributed to the limited level of spoken proficiency. Several participants stated that speaking was not a priority when they were learning English in their home countries. A participant matched those sentiments when he said, “we pay much more attention to vocabulary and grammar. On listening and speaking, I think personally I care about those skills, but do not think I had much practice.” Participants also reported that teachers of English in their countries taught English with the primary focus on vocabulary and reading, grammar, and writing.

Besides school and structured educational settings, participants reported that they had other opportunities to use English before arriving in the U.S. These experiences included speaking with native English speakers residing in their home countries, reading academic

journals and literature written in English, translating documents from English to native languages, and listening to the radio.

### **Relationship between English Preparation and First Year Study**

International students take the TOEFL test and the GRE test, which are both required for graduate school admission in the United States. Participants' methods of preparing for these tests varied. Some participants attended private institutions, some of them studied alone, while others got together to study as a group. They also reported using various materials to prepare for the tests. These included online materials, test books purchased from bookstores, and vocabulary books.

Participants reported spending one to three months preparing for the TOEFL test, but on average they spent two months to less than three years preparing for the GRE test. Participants felt that the TOEFL is an appropriate tool for the testing of grammar and listening skills. They also seemed to feel that the TOEFL is much easier than the GRE, which made it unnecessary to spend very much time on the TOEFL as opposed to the GRE. For the GRE test, participants reported that it is generally helpful to understand academic English because of the inherent abundance of necessary vocabulary. Most of them obtained a high enough test score for admission to graduate study after preparing for the tests, so our data show that their English test preparation was effective because they obtained desirable scores.

The opinions about the effects of English test preparation on graduate study varied but there was one common, yet important, factor. Generally, these students thought taking the English tests helped them to improve their English skills, but the tests were not quite as useful for academic performance during first year of graduate study. Specifically, the participants in this study reported that the GRE did not have much relevance to their graduate study during the first year. These participants' majors can be classified into quantitative majors like Engineering, Science, or Medical, and this finding was contradictory with the findings of an Educational Testing Service (ETS) study (Wilson, 1986). The ETS study suggests that inferences based on GRE scores regarding the subsequent academic performance of applicants, especially those applying for admission to primarily quantitative departments, are likely to be as valid for foreign applicants as for U.S. applicants. For the TOEFL, most participants revealed that the TOEFL test helped them to improve their English skills but did not correlate to academic performance during the first year. According to Simner (1999), ETS has repeatedly advised university administrators not to employ the TOEFL as the sole criterion for university admission due to the weak relationship between TOEFL scores and academic achievement. Both policy makers and administrators should avoid using the TOEFL score solely for decision-making purposes.

The participants reported that participation during class and their attempts at making an intelligible speech or presentation were primary stressful experiences in the first year of graduate study in the United States. They also stated problems with using English in writing, having speaking and comprehension difficulties, and studying in English as the main causes of the stress.

Most of the participants insisted that overall English language preparation before arrival in the U.S. was effective in relation to the first year of graduate study. They said the overall English preparation was helpful for them to achieve high scores on exams and to

receive satisfactory to excellent grades, to communicate with classmates, and to adapt to the new environment.

To investigate whether there is a relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement, Brooks and Adams (2002) analyzed the examination results of one cohort of first year business students. The cohort was surveyed using a simple measure of students' familiarity with spoken English, which is called Frequency of Speaking English (FSE). The results show that domestic students scored significantly higher than international students in their FSE scores, and similarly, in their academic results, domestic students achieved significantly higher marks than international students. The results of Brooks and Adams' paper coincide with the opinions of the participants in this study.

### **First Year Graduate Study Experience**

A great deal of research on international student populations highlights difficulties such as language barriers, academic problems, interpersonal problems with American students, loss of support, and alienation (Leong & Chou, 1996; Mori, 2000). Among these problems, language difficulty appears to be the most challenging issue (Mori, 2000). In most cases, the participants talked about their language difficulties in nearly every component of language performance – listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

The first difficulty was listening and understanding English in class. Although different participants reported varying levels of listening skills depending on previous English communication experiences, most of them note listening skills as a weakness, especially in classes where instructors lectured with few visuals or contextual supports. One participant said, "I couldn't understand what [somebody] said." Another said, "it's difficult for me to understand the lecture from the professors." When asked "what percent do you think you understand in the first class," an engineering major who participated in this study said that "about 20-30 percent and I did not know what he's talking about." There are different reasons why Asian international students have difficulties in listening and comprehension. First, they have had little practice in listening when they studied English in their home countries and most of them had little to no English speaking and listening experience before they came to the United States. With weaker listening skills, some students have difficulty comprehending lectures that take place in open, noisy spaces. One participant reported that it was easier for him to listen and understand in small groups or communicate face to face. Another barrier to comprehending lectures was the instructors' accent and/or rate of speech. Some participants reported having difficulty understanding non-native speakers because of the accent and less-understandable English. On the other hand, others said talking with non-native speakers was easier than talking with American professors because the latter spoke very quickly. Our research also uncovered some strategies international students used to overcome or compensate for their listening skills, such as guessing, asking the speaker to repeat, reading slides or handouts instead of listening to the lectures, and relying on visual clues.

Another reported problem was the difficulty in speaking English in class and communicating out of class. In addition to the lack of practice in spoken English in their home countries, serious barriers were the participants' attitudes toward language learning and the lack of motivation and confidence while speaking English. Some reported feeling uncomfortable speaking in English; some were afraid to talk to professors; and some were



not confident in communicating with others. The lack of spoken proficiency, the negative attitude, and the lack of confidence in speaking in English have caused some international students to communicate less in English and more in their native language. For example, some participants only spoke with students from their home country in their home language; some seldom communicated with American faculty and students in English; and some talked a little. Others even reported that they wrote emails in order to avoid talking to professors. Although most participants thought education in their home country and English tests helped them to obtain vocabularies, some participants found that they sometimes had difficulty using appropriate words, or social language to describe or express their opinions or feelings. Several participants also mentioned that it was easier to talk about academic issues than to talk about daily life or other things. For example, a participant said “I had no problem talking about physics,” while another said, “I had little difficulty in discussing a research topic.” A participant from social sciences found it was more difficult to communicate socially as opposed to using academic English.

In this research, very few participants talked much about reading skills because English education in their home countries and English tests prepared them with sound reading ability. But some participants did mention reading efficiency problems. One of the participants said, “I can read and memorize while I am reading. But after I finished it, I lost what I read. Sometimes I need to translate it into my native language.” It seemed that the problem was how to use English to think while reading. Writing was not mentioned as much as listening and speaking skills as well, but some participants said it was a usual and serious weakness among international students.

In sum, East Asian international students have varying abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. Most of them agree that their receptive knowledge of English is better than their productive knowledge. In addition, they point out that listening and speaking have more of an influence on their graduate study than reading and writing. They have to take more time and make more of an effort to keep up with the academic progress in their academic study, especially in the first year. At the same time, they participate less in class and communicate less with native English speakers during the first year.

### **Social Life in the First Year**

Language is the most important media for human beings to communicate with others and develop social relationships in society. Therefore, East Asian international students' language barriers also have a negative influence on their social activities. The participants in our research mentioned several factors affecting their communication and relationships with American faculty members and students, such as a lack of time, open-mindedness, research interest, personality, American people's preference and ability to help international students, familiarity with American culture and conversational topics and language proficiency. However, the most-often-mentioned factor was the language barrier.

Several studies have found that international students were disappointed with their low level of social contact with Americans and that they felt isolated on American campuses (Chen, 1999). This was also consistent with the findings in our research. One participant said, “In the first year I don't think I had much of a relationship with native speakers because I was very busy taking five courses. I don't have to communicate with them and also I think

the language proficiency is also a problem for social networking with other graduate students. I think in the first year as an international student I feel a little bit isolated.” Another student had a very bad experience while participating in a group project. She said, “In the class I felt isolated and lonely. I remember, for one project, I did not like the two persons in my group, and I did not know how to do the project, because they did not talk with me. So it was a very bad experience.”

As mentioned earlier, low language proficiency discourages East Asian international students from communicating with peers and faculty members; as a result, they only pursue relationships with people from their home country or other non-English countries. Interestingly, some participants reported that they were less likely to socialize with faculty members, whereas they would attempt to socialize with native English-speaking students.

### **English Language Improvement**

In our research, very few participants said that there has been no improvement or very little improvement in their English skills. However, the kinds of skills that were improved and how much they had improved varied among participants and their previous level of pre-arrival English proficiency. Some participants improved a lot in listening skills, some improved their reading skills, some improved their speaking skills, and some made the biggest improvement in writing. Some students reported they improved in two or more of the English proficiencies. Based on the outcomes, it was really difficult to conclude what skills and how much improvement were made by these Asian international students. To answer that question, further study with a concentration on this particular issue is needed. However, as several participants reported, the improvement of English skills was a gradual process and patience was required.

All participants provided us with much information on how to improve the different English skills. For listening and speaking skills, there were various ways to improve. These included watching TV or listening to radio, listening to pre-recorded lectures, developing friendships with native speakers and communicating with them, adapting to different American accents, becoming a teaching assistant, taking English classes, living in an English environment, adapting to the culture of speaking in the United States, practicing speaking regularly, being conscious of the language, and attending the English study group in the community.

### **Academic Success Factors**

The different culture, new educational system, and language barrier place more pressures on international students than their native English-speaking counterparts. Although some of the participants in our research have had unsuccessful experiences in their first year of graduate study, most of them have been successful in their academic fields. Based on their experiences and reflection, several factors are very important for international graduate students to be successful in their academic study.

The first factor is the familiarity with academic language in their particular academic area. One participant said, “my language skills are not good enough. Fortunately I know most words used in my research field, so I do not have much difficulty in discussion in the group meeting.” It may be the reason why lots of international students found it was not

difficult in communicating with professors using academic English but not easy to communicate about daily life.

The second factor is the familiarity with research in the area. Although there are various cultural differences between Western and Eastern societies, there are more commonalities in academic research areas, especially in the natural and engineering sciences, because they often use the same numbers, formulas, and research methods. Therefore, it is important for international students to become familiar with their academic areas, which is usually the main topic of communication between graduate students and their professors.

The third factor is self-study ability. In the first year of graduate study, it is very common that international graduate students understand or communicate little with professors and other native students in the class and they are also easy to be isolated or separated from the class or study groups. One of the best ways to compensate for that weakness is to study by reading the textbooks and supplemental materials (e.g. handouts).

The fourth factor is to take more time and make more effort to study and use the English language. Because international graduate students have language barriers in understanding in class and have little communication with classmates and professors, they need more time and more effort to make sure that they are progressing academically. The progress should include all English components: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

Qualitative research almost invariably sheds light on some existing phenomenon that we have not taken the steps to examine what the phenomenon means from the perspective of those who live it.

In our interviews and analyses, we gained a fuller understanding of the challenges of preparing to study in an unfamiliar language and surviving academically and culturally during the first year. We found ourselves better-informed about these students who risk communication and culture to grow and succeed academically. Learning in a foreign land is no easy feat as students undoubtedly must give up some of who they are in order to survive in the classrooms and this society. The East Asian international graduate students who shared their stories with us almost universally shared their sense of courage, hope and determination to succeed. And to have been accepted to a major American university is a success in and of itself. They were willing to come to this country with an obvious disadvantage and take on every challenge that the education and cultural system threw their way. Not only have they inevitably succeeded for getting this far, but they have succeeded by developing methods and strategies to help the next wave of East Asian international students seeking admission into American graduate schools.

Due to the nature of their professions, policymakers and administrators may not work closely with this population of students. Therefore, they may not understand the complexities that international students face. Research shows that existing campus services are designed primarily for domestic students, and many of the needs of foreign students are not met by these services (Davis, 1999). From our research, policymakers and administrators should take note that the language abilities and English language learning experiences of international students differ from person to person and despite the fact that they may have earned high scores on admissions and proficiency examinations, support services and

mentoring programs should be implemented and monitored so that this student population is supported in the United States higher education system. Based on our research findings there are four specific implications that provide evidence for stronger support services for international students.

First, administrators and policymakers should not depend on TOEFL and GRE scores alone for admissions and curricular decisions. As mentioned in the study, there are several researchers who have proven that these are unreliable measures of future academic performance. We would suggest that interviews are much more reliable. Specifically, colleges and universities should take advantage of teleconferencing and videoconferencing to interview international students. This would allow for both language assessment and overall program-to-student fit, which cannot be comprehensively tested in TOEFL and GRE tests.

Secondly, administrators should encourage the creation of clubs and organizations to promote native and non-native student interaction. International students are often isolated from non-native speakers of English. One such program is the University of Florida's *Global Coffeehouse Program*, where both international and American students are encouraged to meet and converse over coffee and light refreshments. Another is the *Conversation Buddy Program*, currently a requirement of some courses required for English of Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) endorsement in the University of Florida's School of Teaching and Learning. These types of programs provide much needed language assistance and practice as well as familiarity with American culture for non-native English speakers and provide American students the opportunity to learn about the cultures of those who are members of their departments and the University community. These programs could be implemented at both the departmental level and/or University-wide.

Third, administrators should provide mandatory workshops for all faculty members. All faculty members should be aware of the challenges that their international students face. Topics of these workshops could include, but not be limited to, the role of English in non-English speaking countries, international educational operation systems, cultural differences and communication barriers, and specific teaching strategies and classroom management techniques, etc. These workshops not only help these students adjust to academic life at American institutions, but also improve the harmonious relations between international students and faculty.

Finally, administrators should increasingly promote the awareness of existing services and programs. As we found in our research, most international students have difficulty adjusting in the first year of graduate study. If services and programs have already been created for international students, they should be informed about these programs upon arrival on campus. This could be done through international student orientations that address more than just immigration laws. Although these laws are important, what students seem to need more is understanding and compassion from administrators, faculty members, and peers as well as knowledge of the plethora of services that could make their matriculation at an American institution a successful and enjoyable experience.

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