MISMATCHED EXPECTATIONS:

A CASE STUDY OF ASIAN STUDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract: This paper reports on findings of a qualitative study conducted from May to June 2002 at two New Zealand tertiary institutions. Twenty-three (n=23) Asian students participated in semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the research was to identify the possible causes for mismatched educational expectations of Asian students and New Zealand teachers.

On investigation, it seemed that the mismatch emerged from language problems encountered by Asian students and in the significant perceptual differences between Asian students and New Zealand teachers in some fundamental conceptions about learning and teaching. This mismatch had a powerful impact upon the Asian students' learning processes and learning outcomes. Expectation violations were seen to be counter-productive to learning. However, if they were well managed, it appeared that they could significantly enhance the process of learning.

This paper recommends that New Zealand teachers and Asian students develop cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills to bridge their differences and to accommodate change. It is believed that internationalising New Zealand academic programmes to meet the needs of international students and to meet the challenges facing the New Zealand education export industry is a priority. It is recommended that teachers and students jointly create a synergetic culture in which differing views are respected and accommodated, common agendas are shared, cultural borders are crossed, and problems are resolved.

Key Words: NESB, International, Teaching, Learning.

INTRODUCTION

It is now estimated that 65,000 international fee-paying students are studying at New Zealand schools, tertiary institutions, and language schools, contributing $1.14 billion to New Zealand economy and directly and indirectly creating 100,000 jobs for New Zealanders (Taurima, 2002; Cumming, 2002). 85% of these students come from Asia and half of them come from Confucian-heritage countries: China, Korea and Japan. The education export industry has the potential to become a sector worth three to four billion dollars a year to the economy"[1] within the decade. Of the total number of international students enrolled in public tertiary

[1] "Foreign students yield big money", *New Zealand Herald*, 10 May 2002.

institutions, universities account for 59%, and polytechnics account for 40%[2]. New Zealand enjoys a very good reputation for its education standards, its security, its living environment, and its living standards (Gamble & Reid, 2002; Mao, 2002). The industry has brought a range of benefits to New Zealand society,[3] such as a significant increase in income, internationalisation of academic programmes, broadening of local students' horizons, the good influence of the Asian work ethic, intercultural understanding, and cross-national friendship and attachments (Shepheard 2002, p. 61).

Unfortunately, "signs of fraying about the edges"[4] are appearing as lately there has been an increase in the number of complaints prompted by poor quality.[5] Some international students have complained that they have become "cash cows" of the New Zealand's failing education system". According to a recent report of a survey conducted by the *Chinese New Zealand Herald*, all six international students who were interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with New Zealand's current education practice (Tang, 2002). According to Mao's (June 2002) study, New Zealand's education export sector is facing a crisis because of its unchecked growth, the shortage of qualified ESOL teachers, teachers' poor knowledge of the learning needs of international students, unsatisfactory learning situations in schools, lack of learning support, poor quality of money-oriented commission-earning agents, and the social problems faced by international students. To maintain our image and reputation, it is important that these student concerns be addressed.

There is an ethical obligation, as well as a professional one, for New Zealand lecturers who have direct contact with international students. These students have paid a huge sum of money to study in our programmes. Ethical responsibility requires New Zealand lecturers to tailor their teaching to the needs of these customers by making appropriate adjustments to their lesson planning, course delivery, and assessments. At the same time, of course, lecturers have to meet the needs of the local students so both sets of needs have to be considered. In addition, lecturers, who are bound by the regulations and prescriptions stipulated by the NZQA, must maintain and protect the professional standards which are the "trump card" (Taurima 2002) and the base for education export.

The aim of this paper is to provide some insights into how Asian students have experienced learning in two tertiary institutions and in so doing hopefully provide some data that may allow teachers to better cater for student needs.

Review of Literature

Teachers and students bring to the classroom different sets of expectations derived from their cultural values, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Hofstede, 1986). Culture plays a crucial role in shaping the perceptual processes of teachers and students so that they develop culturally prescribed interpretative frameworks. These in turn affect their interpretation of the meanings of teacher-student relationships, classroom interactions and

[2] *Foreign Fee-Paying Students in New Zealand: Trends: A Statistical Overview* prepared for Export Policy Project by Strategic Information Resourcing Division, New Zealand Ministry of Education, June 2001.

[3] *Export Education in New Zealand: A Strategic Approach to Developing the Sector.* New Zealand Ministry of Education, August 2001, p. 11.

[4] *New Zealand Herald* editorial: "Overseas students need care", 14 June 2002.

[5] "Fee-payers speak out about poor deals", *New Zealand Herald*, 18 June 2002.

performance (Trenholm & Jensen, 2000). Governed by cultural norms, the interpretative framework can generate problems if different participants lack knowledge of the cultural rules that are used to interpret one another's conduct (Gamble & Gamble, 1999). Disparities in interpretation will result in different role expectations in the interactional process by which different participants "create, relate, organise and realise meaning" (Riley, 1985, p. 2).

Teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds may differ significantly in interpreting their respective roles in classroom interactions, and in their conceptualisation of what constitutes learning and teaching (Widdowson 1993). It is this individual interpretation and conceptualisation that guides their classroom behaviour and performance. Fundamental differences in the culture of learning and teaching, coupled with ignorance of these differences amongst students and teachers, contribute to colliding expectations (Li, 2002; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996).

There is extensive literature on cross-cultural differences in educational expectations in New Zealand. Ward's (2001) research highlights the educational, social and cultural impact of international students on domestic students, educational institutions and local communities. Mills' (1997) study of Asian students' experiences in classroom interactions at Lincoln University suggests that these Asian students, while concentrating on language problems, failed to pay due attention to developing communication competence that would have assisted them in their intercultural interactions and acculturation. The research done by Gunn-Lewis and Malthus (2000) explored the importance of dialogue with adult overseas students at UNITEC, especially with Asian students. They believed that these dialogues would allow researchers to identify students' perceptions of teaching practice, and that this would help them develop ways of providing ongoing learning support.

Bennett's comprehensive study of Asian students (1998) evaluates the importance of the presence of Asian students in institutional orientations, both to Asian countries and to New Zealand's international educational programmes. He provided a solution to the "paradox": if Asian students adopt faulty learning strategies, why do many of them outperform their western counterparts and why does performance surpass expectations? According to Bennett, the answer lies in the many areas where Asian students are proficient: respect for authority, team spirit, diligence, attentiveness, commitment to course requirements and to success, effective techniques of deep understanding in their learning approaches, high-achievement motivation, and persistence in their efforts. He challenged the stereotypes held by "most New Zealand lecturers" (p. 59) who believe that Asian students are passive participants in tutorials. A large body of research worldwide supports his arguments (Shepheard, 2002; Biggs, 1998; Watkins & Biggs, 1996; MacFarlane, 1998; Slambrouck, 1999; Otsuka, 1996).

Ward (2001) points out that there is insufficient research on the impact of Asian students on New Zealand classroom interactions, teacher-student relationships, and the process and content of classroom activities. In her view, New Zealand educators, particularly those at the tertiary level, need to bring an international perspective to the classroom.

This paper will explore the expectancy mismatch between Asian students and New Zealand lecturers in an attempt to highlight some important issues in intercultural classroom communication. Hopefully, this exploratory research will help contribute to the study of the weak research paradigm referred to by Professor Colleen Ward.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The criteria for participant selection was as follows: participants would be Asian students who were studying or had recently studied 140 Business Communication for the New Zealand Diploma in Business at either The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand or the Wellington Institute of Technology. Some students were concurrently studying other diploma courses, such as 110 Introduction to Commercial Law, and 130 Organization and Management. Some had quite a range of subject experience prior to enrolment either at the above two institutions or at other New Zealand tertiary institutions.

Twenty-three (23) Asian students participated in the survey: 12 in three group interviews, four in face-to-face interviews, six in audio-conferencing interviews and one in writing. They came from different cultural backgrounds: 15 Chinese, five Indians (including Fijian Indians), two Sri Lankans, and one Burmese. The respondents had been in New Zealand for between three months and six years. Eight interviewees were New Zealand permanent residents, and fifteen were international full-fee-paying students. Some of these students had bachelors' degrees from their home countries. Unfortunately, the unavailability of Japanese and Korean students prevented us from interviewing the students from these two countries. China is the largest provider, but Korea and Japan provide the next largest number of international students in New Zealand.

Procedures

This study employed a qualitative research method. Semi-structured interviews (individual interviews, focus group interviews) were the main data collection instruments. To obtain reliable and impartial data, we decided that we would not interview our own students, and, at the request of some participants, four interviews were conducted in Mandarin. We believed that if the participants spoke in their own language to tutors other than their own, they would feel at ease in expressing their ideas clearly. For the purpose of research, all the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and translated into English.

A focus group interview mode was adopted in this research. It was hoped that this mode of research, relying on interaction within a group through briefings, debates, and arguments, would generate new ideas and data across a range of experience and opinion (Morgan, 1998). Participants would, we hope, feel more at ease and be more spontaneous in these group situations (Lim & Tan, 2001).

Findings

The data suggests that there exist disparities in expectations between Asian students and New Zealand teachers. These expectancy disparities, it will be argued, result from students' inadequate language proficiency and the differing concepts of learning that exist between Asian students and New Zealand teachers. Both of these factors contribute to difficulties in the process of learning and cultural adaptation.

Language problems

This study confirms some of the research findings (Mills, 1997; Gunn-Lewis & Malthus, 2000, for example) that language difficulties constitute a primary factor impacting on the learning and cultural adaptation of Asian students. The current research data shows that language difficulties did affect students' effective classroom interactions, classroom performance, and cultural adaptations.

In some cases, the students' English was not up to the standard required by the prescription and certainly not good enough to master the concepts included in the course. These students had to juggle with their English, the course content, and cultural adaptation. At the time when this survey was conducted, some interviewees had not reached the IELTS level needed for coping with their tertiary studies. Language issues consequently became an important factor to be reckoned with. Jane[6] (27 May 2002) expresses the views of some Asian students who had similar language problems:

> Because of our language problem, it is difficult for us to communicate with the Kiwi students. They have very strong accents that make it more difficult for us to understand. They become impatient because when we talk, we go through the process of translation. Group discussions become quite a pain in this way.

Language problems, the study found, have a significant impact upon students' attitudes towards teaching, learning, and learning support. Phil (27 May 2002) felt that it was unfair for teachers to penalise international students for their English by giving them low marks in spite of the fact that they had spent more time and effort to complete the assignments than their fellow Kiwi students. John (24 May, 2002) argued,

> Teachers treat us like the local students. They may think it is fair but it is unfair to us international students whose English is a second language.

Emily (24 May 2002) also considered that equal treatment was, in fact, unfair. In her view, local students did not have any language problems at all, but international students had difficulty understanding teachers' lectures, "strange" accents, slang, idioms, and the local culture. She maintained,

> If we do not understand, we will fall behind. Yet, nobody would bother to look into the matter.

Hanah (23 May 2002) expressed a similar feeling of frustration and attributed her failure in achieving a "pass" to language problems. She claimed that her language competence was quite ineffective in helping her to understand the distance learning course materials. She found the course materials too theoretical and too difficult for her to understand and yet she did not know how to ask questions because, she said, "I cannot ask questions because I do not understand what I am reading."

International students are expected to have acquired the necessary language skills to cope with their academic studies when they are enrolled in the course. The language proficiency of some international students may be adequate for computing and accounting subjects, but it may not be good enough for the "wordy" or "conceptual" subjects such as 130 Organization and Management and 140 Business Communication that require "a high standard of accuracy in written language."[7] Language problems can therefore hamper the process of learning, enculturation and effective communication, and can contribute to negative perceptions.

The data, however, indicates that those with adequate English skills found the course (140 Business Communication) very "practical", "useful", "helpful", and "interesting". Judy (11 June 2002), who has a full-time position, argued:

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[6] For ethical reasons, all the names in this paper are fictitious.

[7] *NZQA: New Zealand Diploma in Business: Regulations and Prescriptions Handbook, 2002*, p. 10 & p. 106.

> The course was not hard for me. If I had had plenty of time, I would have enjoyed it. I found it useful in terms of my work. I was so tired after doing two courses at once. ... The problem I had was managing my time.

Differing expectations and learning conceptualisations

The New Zealand Diploma in Business (NZDipBus) requires that education providers develop students' critical thinking capacity, effective interpersonal and intercultural communication skills, skills of independent thinking in analysing, and problem-solving, and abilities in verbal and non-verbal, oral, written and graphic communication. Students must be able to apply a range of business skills, principles, and technical knowledge to a specific business field.[8] Teaching approaches are thus bound by NZQA regulations and prescriptions that spell out assessment criteria, learning outcomes and performance objectives. Teachers are encouraged to adopt an interactive approach, which includes role plays, group work, case studies, problem-based learning, discussion, and research visits.[9] Students are encouraged to base their learning on participation, to work independently and co-operatively, and to apply theoretical and problem-solving skills to all tasks.[10] The current research data suggests that not all Asian students were well prepared to meet the challenge of the unfamiliar learning situations, differing conceptions of learning and role expectations.

Differing expectations in different educational contexts

It seems that one of the biggest challenges for Asian students is the adoption of New Zealand learning concepts and role expectations. Most of them reported difficulties in fitting into the New Zealand education context. They felt worried because the learning strategies they were familiar with were not applicable to the new situations.

New Zealand teaching approaches contrast sharply with those in Asian countries. Cathy (24 May 2002) saw the differences between Chinese and New Zealand teaching approaches as follows:

Chinese teaching approaches emphasise knowledge transmission through the use of textbooks. Students try to absorb and digest what is being transmitted. Here teachers do not emphasise knowledge transmission. Instead, they emphasise autonomy and knowledge application.

Judy (11 June 2002), who went from primary and secondary schools to university in Sri Lanka, described the differences in teaching approaches this way:

In Sri Lanka, we took notes. We looked up the references. This (New Zealand learning experience) is completely different for me. Going for a lecture (in Sri Lanka) is completely different. I can see a basic difference in that Sri Lankan methods is giving you all the "book knowledge". So it's very different. Book knowledge – something you had difficulty applying to the situation. ... In New Zealand, you get all the practical aspects. You are in that situation while you are studying.

Haley (23 May 2002), who had gained a BSc degree in China, found it difficult to adapt to the teaching approaches in New Zealand. When she was at a Chinese university, she said, she was a top student. At that university, students were told what to do and there was a textbook

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[8] *Ibid*, p. 104.

[9] *Ibid*, p. 109.

[10] *Ibid*, p. 110.

as a blueprint, but in New Zealand, students were expected to be responsible for their own learning and were expected to read many different books on their own.

Tom (11 June 2002) held a similar view. He was happy with his studies at the institution and he seemed to appreciate the educational differences in New Zealand. He was particularly interested in the "democratic teaching environment" which was different from the "autocratic" one in India. In his opinion, New Zealand educational emphasis on theoretical applications was more suitable for him than the pure theoretical studies he had experienced in India.

Differing expectations in teaching and learning

There is a consensus among the interviewees that New Zealand teachers were "kind", "helpful", "friendly", "humorous", "sincere", and "responsible". However, differing expectations may have resulted in misunderstanding between Asian students and New Zealand teachers.

Lene (24 May 2002) admitted that the methods of New Zealand teachers were very good but she said,

> These methods do not apply to me. We do not know their purposes of teaching, their course requirements, the objectives of each lesson and the assessment criteria. They need to find some ways to teach us international students, ways that are appropriate to our needs.

Hanah expressed a similar view. She said she could not see any logic in the course materials for distance learning. To her the course materials were too general, too loose, too unclear, and too difficult for her to continue her study.

Emily (24 May 2002) was very happy with the teaching by one particular teacher whose lessons, in her view, were well prepared, logically structured and skilfully delivered, with handouts and objectives. This teacher used many technological aids, such as PowerPoint, OHPs, and even different coloured pens. She said that she could pass the course by just reviewing the handouts and the notes taken. She complained that many other teachers did not write enough on the white board and that she had to rely on listening to take notes. This was very difficult for her. She concluded,

> We have a habit of preparing our lessons well before class. But most teachers do not tell us what is to be studied the next day. We preview our lessons and get well prepared for the class, but the teachers come to teach something else. Their lessons are unpredictable. We cannot learn much from these teachers.

A similar theme emerged from another interview. Ron (24 May 2002), for example, described how his expectations were not met by his teachers.

> In class they give us so many kinds of course materials that I do not know where to start. In China we knew what we were going to study well before class, but it is not the same here. We do not know what they are going to do and how we can prepare for the class. We want to preview what is to be studied the next day, but we are not allowed to know. We won't know until the beginning of the class.

The data shows that Asian students are not used to the participative approach. Not only is this approach very popular in New Zealand, it is also an approach recommended by the NZQA New *Zealand Diploma in Business: Regulations and Prescriptions Handbook, 2002.* Although many interviewees expressed their interest in participative learning, they did not

seem to fully accept it as a way of learning in the repertoire of their learning approaches. Asian students are used to being an audience in class or in a group, and in even in smaller groups, they remain quiet. Phyllis (27 May 2002) reported,

> In the group discussion, I prefer being quiet. I cannot contribute much to the discussion... I listen and think. I do not talk. The Kiwis talk very fast, and I cannot follow them. Their English is more difficult to understand. ... But in the group discussion, I get to know their ideas and culture.

She saw participation as a time to improve her English and cultural knowledge rather than a time to contribute ideas and questions to the body of the teaching session. In the learning repertoire of these Asian students, especially students from Confucian Heritage Countries, the participation discourse is interpreted as listening attentively to lectures and taking as many notes as possible. This is called "mental participation" by Cortazzi and Jin (1996). Asian students are afraid of "losing face" by exposing their weaknesses to the rivals who might see them as "stupid" (John, 24 May 2002). Jean (11 June 2002) noted that Asian students were shy and that they would not voluntarily ask questions or actively participate in group work.

Sally observed that there were elements of racial discrimination among the Kiwi fellow students. She argued that it would be unwise to put students with different attitudes into one group to work out solutions to the problems although other students expressed a preference for culturally mixed work groups (like Raji, 27 June 2002, for example).

Students bring into the classroom their set of expectations. Expectation clash is highly likely when different sets of criteria are used to make judgments. The implications of such a clash can be seen in 140 Business Communication.

Some of the interviewees thought that the Business Communication course should be an easy one because of its name. However, the data suggests that not all Asian students were well prepared for the challenges that they would encounter in this course. To them Business Communication involves writing letters, memos, and reports which, in their view, are too easy to be studied at the tertiary level. They did not seem to understand what was required of them and their expectations clashed with those of teachers, who were following a set prescription. The 140 Business Communication course was perceived to be difficult and frightening. Ron (24 May 2002) maintained,

> Now I know Business Communication is the most difficult course in this institution. ... We are required to write letters, memos, and reports. I think if we know the writing formats and if we can apply the rules, that is enough. It is that simple. But ... the course is time-consuming. .... We study the course for the first time; we did not know it is that difficult.

His frustration led to his negative attitude toward the teachers. His interpretation, based on his own perception was that "This is a sign of racial discrimination," because many Asian students failed the course. John[11] also complained,

> They don't want us to know what is being taught and what is to be examined. I think it is their racial discriminatory ideology engraved in their bones that makes them intentionally not communicate well with us... Their assignment questions and the final examination questions are so designed to fail us... They make every endeavour to fail you.

[11] John had studied in other tertiary institutions prior to this interview.

Both Ron and John attributed the Asian students' failure of the courses to teachers' "racial discrimination" rather than to their own performance. The clash in cultural values is obvious. In the Chinese classroom culture, very often teachers are held responsible for the learning outcomes of their students. A student's performance, good or bad, is believed to correlate with a teacher's performance. What is suggested here is that these Chinese students, still living in their own cultural world, may believe that their failure in the course resulted directly from teachers' ineffective teaching, rather than from their own ineffective learning. Differing expectations seem to generate very powerful negative attitudes towards the teaching they are receiving.

Differing expectations in assessment criteria

Many action words prescribed by the *NZQA New Zealand Diploma in Business Regulations and Prescriptions Handbook 2002* are used by New Zealand teachers to set out assignments, examinations and assessment criteria. These are words, such as *define, describe, explain, apply, outline, analyze, interpret, identify, discuss, distinguish between, demonstrate, outline, state, examine, appraise, investigate, assess, evaluate review, develop,* etc. Assignments and examinations which allow and encourage students to use critical, independent thinking, and to apply theories and their knowledge to solving workplace problems, become the major modes of assessment. Asian students who have usually never written an assignment before enrolling at a New Zealand institution may find these modes difficult to accept. They are used to being assessed by tests and examinations that are based on the lessons or texts covered in class, rather than from a variety of sources. The teacher and the textbook are seen as the prime authorities and therefore New Zealand teaching modes violate Asian students' expectations. The interview data suggests these unmatched expectations have caused many problems and misunderstandings.

Having browsed the past examination papers, Hanah worked very hard to look for answers to the problems, as she was used to, but she felt very disappointed because

> I cannot find answers anywhere in the course book or anywhere else. I do not know if there are any answers to these problems. My understanding does not seem to meet the requirements.

Her learning experience in her own country had led her to believe there must be a *right* answer to every problem and it could be found in the textbook. She did not realise that for assignments and most examination items in Business Communication, very often there were no "answers" to "questions" or "problems", but *responses* to *tasks*, and that the responses could vary from one task to another.

Many interviewees shared her views. Sally (24 May 2002), for example, found the teaching unfair because, although she could understand the lectures, she still did not know how to complete her assignments. In her opinion, "examinations are more difficult than classroom lessons". Jack (24 May 2002) expressed his doubts about the fairness of the ways assessments are marked because there are no "answers," just different ways of doing assignments and even examinations. Not having adapted to the new culture of learning, many students felt puzzled and uncertain about the assessment criteria used by New Zealand teachers. Sally argued,

> We do not know our teachers' expectations. Their assessment criteria are generally not clear. We do not know how many points are required to answer certain questions... In providing answers, we feel uncertain because what we

> think is appropriate, but teachers may think otherwise. There are no standards to measure our progress.

Sally's remark reflects the influence of her cultural values. In her home culture, she was sure every problem had one, and only one, definite answer because all the "standard" tests and examinations could be computer-marked.

Case studies are very popular in the New Zealand education model. They are important elements of assignments and examinations, which require students to apply theories to solving problems within the area of study. This mode of learning, not well known in Asian cultures, is extremely difficult for students from these cultures where they are expected to acquire knowledge first (while in schools or universities) and apply the acquired knowledge in the future (after they graduate) (Ross, 1993). Learning and application are separate. Uncertainties and frustration are discernible in the interview data.

Some interviewees attributed such uncertainties to their lack of understanding of New Zealand culture and business experiences. Jane (27 May 2002) confirmed,

> We do not have any work experience and cultural knowledge in New Zealand. Teachers often talk about New Zealand markets and business. We have difficulty understanding the courses because they all involve New Zealand cultural background, history, the legal system, and etc. We have lots of difficulties doing assignments and examinations. When we are asked to discuss some topics with the Kiwi students, we simply do not know what they are talking about.

Hanah also found it difficult to complete an assignment that required understanding and knowledge of New Zealand society. Lene felt Asian students were disadvantaged because of the lack of New Zealand experience. She maintained,

> In New Zealand, you have to look for your own answers, such as in case studies... All the courses require business experience.

Like some other Asian students, she was sure that there were "answers" to case studies that could be found in textbooks or teachers' handouts. She did not seem to know that in case studies students are required to provide their responses to the tasks rather than provide "answers". They believed the "answers" could also be sought from business experience. As a result, Jane complained,

> It is unfair. We are disadvantaged only because we do not have any New Zealand business experience.

Jean (25 May 2002) also found case studies very difficult, especially in distance learning. In spite of the help from lecturers, the unfamiliarity of the learning concepts was very daunting to her. She said she had made a mistake in choosing the Business Communication course as it requires a wide range of knowledge and skills.

New Zealand tertiary education models emphasise the development of students' independent and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers serve as facilitators to help students to develop such thinking and skills while students themselves are responsible for their own learning. Such an educational philosophy seems to contradict some Asian educational philosophies that emphasise teachers' roles as authority figures and the major sources of learning.

To Diane, teachers who emphasise learner autonomy, independent thinking and immediate application of theories were seen as abdicating their responsibilities. Her following statement may serve to illustrate such a clash in cultural values:

> I came to study the course because I do not know it. If I had known the course, why should I have to bother to learn it once more? Yet they want us to be self-reliant. What is your responsibility? We have not got what we have paid for.

It seems that she did not appreciate her learning experience in New Zealand. She failed to see New Zealand teachers' intentions and the fundamental principles behind these teachers' pedagogical innovations.

Clashes in role expectations impacted strongly teacher-student relationships although the magnitude of tension can be reduced when students have developed familiarity with New Zealand culture, especially the classroom culture.

Cultural adaptation

The data shows that many of the interviewees had been in New Zealand for almost six months when this research was conducted. They were undergoing a process of cultural adaptation, in which the students must learn both perceptual rules - rules for interpreting the contexts - and behaviour rules - rules for fitting themselves in the new environment (Anderson, 1994, p. 295). The newly arrived need to work towards a fit between person and environment. However, these environmental and situational demands can challenge one's values, beliefs, preconceptions, interpersonal relationships, and skills. The challenge can bring about conceptual changes if the host cultural values, beliefs, and norms are compatible with those of the strangers (Posner, *et al*, 1982) but the cross-cultural adaptation is almost never a complete process. A perfect fit can never be achieved.

Adaptation involves interaction. Interaction can develop, as well as deter, one's process of cultural adaptation. There will consequently be no substantial conceptual changes without adequate interaction.

The data from the research supports Ward's (2001) finding that social isolation and difficulty in meeting and developing friendships with locals, despite their strong desire to do so, is a feature of the life of most Asian students. The current research data indicates that, except for classroom contacts with teachers and some fellow students in group projects, Asian students had little interaction with local Kiwis and fellow Kiwi students. Emily reported,

> We do not have any interactions with Kiwi students.... We do not know how to make friends with them. We do not know their names. We can see they are busy too. Racial discrimination is visible, of course. Anyway, they are very helpful. But it is difficult to make friends with them.

Phyllis provided a similar story,

> After class, we do not have any interactions with local students. The people around us are Chinese friends. When I have difficulties, I ask my friends for help.

Some participants did not like the idea of making an appointment. It seemed to them that making an appointment with one's own teachers made the teacher-student relationship too formal and too business-oriented. Cathy argued,

> They (New Zealand teachers) are business-like. In class, I teach and you learn. After class, it is my own time. No one can deprive me of my private time. If you want to see them, you have to make appointment. It is awkward to us. Sometimes

> our questions are not many and it may take them a few minutes. But they want us to make an appointment. It is not like in China, we can ask our teachers anytime anywhere. Therefore, we do not or cannot ask them questions.

Students in China are not encouraged to ask questions unless invited by the teacher because asking questions would disrupt the class. The questions by a particular student may not be questions to others. If they have any questions, they opt to ask the teacher immediately after class or ask their fellow students. Finola said,

> If I have questions in class, I do not want to ask the teacher. The teacher might think how stupid you are; I have explained this very clearly in class, but you still do not understand, where were you then?

Some students feel lonely, helpless and desperate. Learning support provided by host institutions does not seem to meet their needs and expectations. They seem to live in an unfriendly learning environment. Emily felt that she was "often overwhelmed with loneliness." John (24 May 2002) complained,

> Is it possible for them to employ someone who is bilingual to help us? I have been studying in New Zealand for more than two years, but I have never seen someone offer any assistance to us international students. They want nothing else, but MONEY. They do not want to work to earn money, but just sit there and collect money... Our tuition fees are many times those of the local students. They treat us like the local students. But what we have got is not half that of the local students. They have to realise we are their customers... I respect you, of course, but you must offer me something.

Adaptation involves not only the classroom culture, but also the students' social life. It is generally believed that wide networks of friendship (co-national networks, networks of host nationals, and multicultural networks) will quicken the process of international students' cultural adaptation (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977). However, those participating in our survey did not seem to have established such networks. Cultural disparities become huge communication barriers as happened in Cathy's case:

> We do not want to live with Kiwis. I do not like their foods. I often went hungry when I home stayed with a Kiwi family. They are too busy to talk to us. We are their customers only. They see our money. They count every item we eat. We lose our freedom and dignity. They do not know we do not like their foods and we are hungry. They do not allow us to make our own food.

The current study reveals that many Asian students have realised that, as strangers in the New Zealand culture, they have to adapt to all the aspects of social and academic life in New Zealand and that they have to change their belief systems and assumptions. They acknowledge the fact that they are studying for New Zealand qualifications and that they need to comply with the prescriptions and norms. Finola commented,

> I think we have to be self-reliant... Studying abroad is not easy. On many occasions, we have to rely on ourselves. They might have realised that not all Chinese students are working hard or are very good students at all. In order to correct the Kiwi teachers' stereotypes we have to know what we are doing. Teachers are teachers, after all. It is our mutual adaptation that can make a difference.

Cathy agreed, but she felt that there is a greater need for students to make radical changes in their leaning approaches than for the New Zealand teachers to change their teaching styles:

> I think New Zealand teachers teach the ways they are familiar with. It is difficult to expect them to adapt their teaching methods to suit us. They are also teaching other local students, too. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect teachers to adjust their teaching methods. It is we who have to adjust to the new teaching methods. We have to quickly adapt ourselves to the new environments. We have to try to understand their teaching procedures. I think we have to realise that we cannot expect NZ teachers to help much. We have to rely on ourselves. We have to study by ourselves... What I mean is that we have to come to terms with their teaching. It takes time.

Haley believed that it would be unrealistic to expect Kiwi teachers to adapt their methods to the needs of Asian students,

> I don't think it is realistic to expect Kiwi teachers to make any changes in their teaching models. It has taken centuries for them to develop such an educational system. It is we who have to change. I find that it would suffice if teachers would be kind enough to offer some help.

Diane seemed to share a similar view that, although teacher adaptation was important, a change in students' expectation of learning was crucial for their progress. She admitted that she did not like the New Zealand education model, but she said she had to adapt. Lene, however, believed that teachers need to take initiatives to adapt their teaching to the needs of their customers,

> We sometimes simply cannot communicate. We do not seem to think the same. There are certainly differences in our thinking processes. Our suggestions do not seem important to them, but we think that there should be adaptation on their part.

In cross-cultural adaptation, Asian students engage in cultural learning and skill enhancement through interaction and have to make appropriate changes to fit in with the learning environment even though they may feel traumatised by the cultural differences. There are, of course, individual variations in the degree of success in cultural accommodation.

DISCUSSION

The findings reported in the previous section highlight some important issues in New Zealand's export education: language problems, differing expectations, learning conceptualisations and cultural adaptation. This section will discuss the importance of internationalisation of New Zealand's academic programmes, cultural awareness, and the need for conceptual change. These three areas of study, it is argued, will contribute positively to the New Zealand education export industry.

Internationalisation of curriculum and programmes[12]

The New Zealand Tertiary Education Strategy (July 2002) calls for improved global linkages (p.19), sustainable growth of export education capability centred on reputation for quality and pastoral care (p.24), and a focus on diverse learner needs (p. 26). Exploration of flexible delivery modes, adoption and replication of international best practice (p. 26), and reposition of the system in the global market (p.18) are also seen as important. The export industry is

[12] We use this expression to mean the process of making course content, assessment criteria, teaching methods relevant and applicable to a worldwide context.

[13] *Export Education in New Zealand: A Strategic Approach to Developing the Section*, August 2001, p. 41.

growing rapidly, but there is still much to be desired. Many of the programmes and curricula offered by New Zealand schools and tertiary institutions are still domestically focused (Ward, 2001), and it is high time that we considered "lifting the level of dialogue on international education issues."[13]

According to *Export Education in New Zealand,* little has been done to adapt academic programmes for international students (p. 32). The current data shows that the difficulties international students encounter are often taken for granted. Lecturers are too busy to provide additional support for international students and the host institutions are marketing to meet the EFTS (equivalent full-time students) targets. It has become an unchallenged belief that international students who wish to be awarded New Zealand qualifications must meet the same standards as local students and must be treated in the same way. "When in Rome do as the Romans do" is the popular response to any expression of concern about the problems experienced by international students.

Internationalisation of academic programmes requires reinvestment in staffing, resourcing, research, teacher training, and professional development. Host institutions, however, have little interest in such an investment (Ward, 2001).

Current research data strongly supports an adaptation of curriculum and course content as most interviewees found that courses were too domestically focused. In the courses, international students were expected to have a good knowledge of New Zealand markets, corporate structures, history, culture, and the legal system, as seen in course content, curricula, methods of delivery, assignments (case studies, for example), and examinations. It is true that these students must have such knowledge because they study for a New Zealand qualification, but it is important to point out that the New Zealand business model may not be a universal global business model that will help international students cope with international business in the future. Many of them will go back to their own countries (or to some countries other than New Zealand) when they complete their studies. Although they appreciate the practical aspects of the New Zealand education model, they do question its relevance and applicability to other societies.

Internationalisation of the New Zealand curricula and programmes would benefit both international and local students (Ward, 2001). Given its size, its geographical position, and its "modest international profile" (Ward, 2001, p. 41), the export industry requires "a tertiary education system that is outwardly focused" (*Tertiary Education Strategy,* 2002, p. 18). For an industry to survive and to expand, the needs of "customers" must be considered seriously. Courses and programmes that providers offer should meet the needs of international students as well as protecting domestic students' interests and recognising other social and economic priorities (Ward, 2001, p. 11). Institutional internationalisation would prepare local students to proactively engage themselves in the "global village" so would benefit *all* students, not just international students.

Cultural awareness

The data from this research has highlighted many of the problems that are related to limited cultural perspectives. Unrecognised differences in cultural values, beliefs, expectations of learning and teaching seem to have contributed to these problems.

Teachers enact pedagogies based on their epistemological beliefs, professional ideology and their interpretative systems. International students typically adopt learning strategies that they have developed from their previous learning experience. Although there is a certain amount of overlap or interface between teachers' and students' cultures, significant disparities in role identities and role expectations can result in conflicts in teacher-student relationships and in negative attitudes towards the host institutions.

Teachers, managers and administrators should develop awareness of cultural issues. They should avoid rigidity, stereotyping, and ritualised behaviour, should acquire a sound understanding of the fundamentals of intercultural communication, and should help international students to adapt to the social, cultural and academic life in New Zealand. International students also need to develop cultural awareness of New Zealand expectations to prepare them for the challenge in the new learning environment. Cultural awareness encourages openness, flexibility, empathy, and ethno-relativism but discourages cultural imposition and ethnocentrism.

Both teachers and students need training to develop a cultural awareness that will help them bridge their cultural differences. They must examine their belief systems, their assumptions, and the preconceptions that shape their perceptions and expectations, and ultimately find a common ground where all participants respect and share each other's views. It is, however, important to remember that there will always be disparities in teacher-student expectations, even in a homogeneous culture, and that it would be unrealistic to expect to remove all these disparities in cross-cultural classroom communication.

Expectancy violation, countervailing views, incongruent perceptions, and even conflicts do not necessarily have to be barriers to communication and positive educational outcomes. According to Burgoon (1995), colliding expectations can be both positive and negative. Positive violations will enhance favourable interaction and mutual understanding, but negative violations will increase uncertainty and have unfavourable consequences. A degree of heterogeneity and difference can be a powerful learning tool in a cross-cultural context. It is possible for differing student expectations and New Zealand teachers' pedagogical praxis to be contrapuntal; that is to co-exist simultaneously. To minimise the impact of negative expectancy violation, it is important for teachers to identify the disparities and to explain explicitly the rationale for a departure from students' perceived norms and educational models.

The data from this research supports the above argument. A careful examination of students' narratives and voices shows that many of the identified problems are culturally related. For example, Asian students may feel anxious if teachers do not provide them with set textbooks, handouts, and marking schedules for assignments and examinations. An empathetic teacher may realise that an auditory-alone teaching approach (used by some teachers, as identified by the interviewees) may not be appropriate for students whose mother tongue is not English. Asian students, motivated by their work ethic of high achievement, are used to the "preview-listen-review" approach. This approach emphasises reflection, precision, concretisation, sequence, in-depth and logical analysis, and dissection of the course materials students have covered in class (Rao, 2002). They are intolerant of ambiguity and uncertainty.

The survey data has identified a strong voice in Asian students' accounts that teaching by New Zealand teachers was "unsystematic", "unclear", "not logically and structurally presented", "inflexible", "rule-bound", "unpredictable", and "not student-friendly". Teachers

may produce powerful counter-arguments. The problem is that teachers and students use different frames of reference which lead to different interpretations. Teachers need to constantly examine their pedagogies to ensure their approaches are meaningful to the students. To achieve such a goal, teachers need to be aware of students' subjectivities, their cultural positions, and their prior learning experiences.

This cultural awareness will allow teachers to examine and reflect upon their underlying pedagogical principles and belief systems and will equip them with knowledge to understand, predict, and make informed decisions in addressing international students' concerns. It will also help management, administration, and learning support staff reassess and reposition the roles of the New Zealand's export industry in a competitive global market which requires internationalised education programmes.

Cultural awareness will allow both teachers and students to become tolerant of each other's differences and it will encourage the formation of a synergetic culture where a common ground is found, differences are respected, and views are shared. In such a culture, both teachers and students are welcome to cross each other's territory to become familiar with each other's terrain, and to explore an optimal expectancy match through positive expectancy violations.

To create such a cultural synergy, teachers need to take the first step. Asian students would welcome teachers developing a culture that meets the expectations of both parties. In such a culture, hopefully, students' voices would be heard, their concerns would be addressed, and teacher-student expectancy-fit would be achieved. The synergetic culture would give students room to communicate, to communicate in different ways, to communicate while maintaining their cultural identity, and to communicate while maintaining their self-respect (Malcolm, 2000). It would also facilitate student conceptual change.

Asian students are often dubbed as "passive" "rote learners" (Ballard & Blanchy, 1991, for example). Asian students need to change their learning concepts if they are to succeed in new learning environments. It is human nature to change to adapt to the environment. Learning approaches are not inherently unchangeable as they are contextually dependent and goal-oriented (Thomas & Bain, 1984; Dart, 1994). Students can and do have to change their learning approaches with the change of learning context, so it can be reasonably argued then that these "passive" Asian "rote learners" will change in the New Zealand learning context when exposed to new ideas, concepts, beliefs, assumptions, and new events. Our current research indicates that those Asian students did make significant changes in their learning behaviour by employing deep-learning strategies; some students had become top students in the class by the end of their first semester.

International students may hope that teachers would change their delivery methods. However, student expectations are often unarticulated. They therefore see themselves as having to conform to the norms and protocols of the host society.

Teaching, however, is a two-way process. While we expect our students to change, teachers must change too. Quality education, according to Beeby (1992, p. 249), "depends ultimately on the capacity and willingness of teachers to change their practice and their attitudes," and we have argued in this paper that teachers need to adapt their teaching approaches to suit the needs of international students (Ward, 2001). Effective teaching of any students means expert knowledge, effective delivery of content, and personal communication between teachers and students (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Teachers need to develop intercultural communication

skills to enable them to identify international students' learning needs and difficulties, and to develop materials suitable for international students. They must adopt appropriate teaching methods, and, most important of all, must address issues such as cultural imperialism and the stereotypical attitudes relating to Asian students and their learning approaches.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the expectancy mismatch between Asian students and New Zealand teachers. It was found that the mismatch was derived from language problems experienced by Asian students, by cultural incompatibilities and by differing conceptualisations of learning. This mismatch has had a negative impact upon Asian students' learning processes and learning outcomes. It was argued, however, that not all expectancy violations might be communication barriers. If the conflicts could be well managed, they could enhance the process of learning.

It was argued that both teachers and students need to develop cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills in order to bridge their differences and to accommodate the necessary change. Hopefully this will reposition them in a competitive global market. To achieve this goal, it is important to internationalise New Zealand academic programmes to meet the needs of international students and to meet the challenges in the New Zealand education export industry. It was recommended that teachers and students jointly create a synergetic culture in which differing views are respected and accommodated, common agendas are shared, cultural borders are crossed, and problems are resolved.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me from which country you came? Which ethnic group do you belong to?
2. Could you tell me how long have you been in New Zealand?
3. Why have you chosen the 140 Business Communication course?
4. How many other courses have you taken?
5. Are you happy with these courses? Why or why not?
6. What are the major difficulties you have encountered in your study of these courses? How have you overcome them? Or how do you plan to overcome them?
7. Could you please explain to me if there are any differences between New Zealand teaching methods and those in your country? Any advantages and disadvantages in these methods?
8. Could you describe a lesson that you think is the best lesson for you? Have you experienced such lessons before in New Zealand? Why or why not?
9. What do you usually do in the classroom and after class?
10. In your view, what should a *good* teacher do in class?
11. Are you happy with the way you are being taught? Why or why not? In your view, what are the best ways for New Zealand teachers to teach?
12. What suggestions would you like to make for New Zealand teachers to help you learn best in New Zealand?