

The Library and Information Needs of International Students in the United States

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在米留学生の図書館におけるニーズ及び情報ニーズ

要 約

全米の短大や大学における留学生の存在は、受け入れ大学および大学関係の学術コミュニティーに様々な恩恵をもたらしている。しかし、留学先の大学に多くの利益をもたらす一方で、未解決のいくつかの複雑な課題も存在している。特に、有意義な中等後教育を経験するには欠かせない大学図書館やそれに付随する情報提供機関は、留学生に関する多くの問題を抱えている。幸運にも、近年留学生数とその影響力が増すにつれて、これら図書館で必要とされているものや情報ニーズ及び、留学生という大切な図書館利用者の行動に直接焦点をあてた研究も進んできている。また、これらの必要性を満たす最善策を示唆した研究も増えている。当論文では、そういった研究の最も顕著な結果の概要と、結果が及ぼす重要な影響についての概要を紹介する。

Key words: international students, academic libraries, information needs, information behavior, information literacy

1. Introduction

International students are an indelible part of the fabric of post-secondary institutions in the United States today. In fact, according to the most recent figures provided by the Institute of International Education (2009) in their annual *Open Doors* report, the number of international students in the U.S. reached an all-time high of 671,616 students during the 2008–2009 school year, a 7.7% increase from the previous year. The report also reveals just what a broad array of countries international students studying in the U.S. actually come from. Although the Institute of International Education (2009) notes that students from the top five countries of origin (1. India, 2. China, 3. South Korea, 4. Canada, 5. Japan) made up 50% of all of the international students in the U.S., the complete list is extremely diverse, representing countries from all corners of the world and cutting across a broad array of native languages, cultures, and educational backgrounds.

The presence of international students on college and university campuses across the U.S. serves to enrich both their host institutions and their academic communities in countless ways. Not only do these students frequently represent the educational elite of their respective countries and are therefore often readily able to contribute positively to the academic achievements of their host institutions, but they also enhance campus diversity and can help foster global awareness (Wang & Frank, 2002). However, along with the long list of benefits that international students bring to their host institutions, they also present a complex set of challenges to be met. Though many international students from countries where English is widely spoken and Western academic conventions are predominant may not have too many difficulties in adjusting to academic life at a U.S. university, others may have to make significant linguistic, cultural, and educational adjustments in order to succeed (Baron & Strout-Dapaz, 2001). Fortunately, most universities have established offices of international student affairs to aid and assist these students as they become accustomed to their new academic surroundings and expectations, in addition to student associations and intra-departmental support systems for graduate students. Unfortunately, due to differences in many international students' educational backgrounds and experiences and the great diversity amongst this broad range of students, many needs are often not adequately addressed.

In order to be able to best assist the growing contingent of international students with the challenges they face as they adjust to a new educational context, it is critical that all aspects of their academic experience be fully examined and understood. As a central part of any successful academic experience in the U.S., the university library, in particular, may

present its own challenges to many international students who may not be fully aware of the range of services it can provide or may be lacking in the library, information, and technological skills needed to make full use of them. As Bordonaro (2010) put it, "In the current academic era in which internationalization efforts at universities in both the United States and Canada are intensifying, it might behoove us to better understand how international students use our libraries" (p. 273). Fortunately, as both the number and impact of international students has grown in recent years, so has the amount of library and information science (LIS) research focused directly identifying the library and information needs and behavior of this important user population and illuminating a variety of ways that these needs may be better met. This growing body of research is important because, as Yi (2007) concluded, "it is necessary for, and incumbent upon, academic librarians and educators to fully understand the patterns, strategies, and problems of international student information needs so as to improve academic library resources, service quality, and teaching efficiency for international students" (p. 671). Yet, even as the amount of related research has expanded in recent years, implementation of findings and recommendations has been slow and sporadic (Kumar & Suresh, 2000), not to mention that entirely new avenues of inquiry are almost constantly being uncovered. This paper seeks to provide an overview of the most salient findings of the relevant research on the library and information needs of international students in the United States and an outline of the most important implications these findings may suggest.

2. Defining the Library and Information Needs of International Students

2.1. Basic Needs

In many ways the basic library and information needs of international students are not all that different from their American classmates. Looking at these needs in terms of what the students are asked to produce, namely their course assignments or graduate student research projects, both international and American students involved in the same discipline or concentration must eventually complete the same basic coursework while (ideally) making use of the most appropriate library and information skills and services in order to do so. Bibliographic literacy, including research skills and techniques, information literacy, including the evaluation and appropriate use of sources, as well as computer literacy, or the ability to use technological tools effectively, are all skills that come into play for all university students as they carry out their studies.

But while both American and international students can be seen as sharing many of the same fundamental library and information needs or requirements, the degree to which they already possess or are already familiar with the skills necessary to meet those needs may be dramatically different from the outset, with international students often lagging

significantly behind their U.S. counterparts in many regards. Furthermore, Clankie (2000) notes that many universities incorporate the teaching of important library and information skills into regular, first-year coursework that is often missed by international students who must take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes instead. While it is easy to understand that American students and international students may be starting their post-secondary academic careers in the U.S. with a very different conception of library and information services, there are also great differences amongst the international students themselves, as it must not be forgotten that these students comprise a very disparate group as a result of their distinct educational backgrounds and experiences.

In relation to international students' abilities to utilize the technological tools that are becoming increasingly essential when working with libraries and course-related information, research not only reveals a great disparity within this user population, but within the research itself, especially as it has progressed along with technology over the past twenty years. In a 1993 study, Allen found that "not all international students arrive in the United States with appropriate information retrieval skills to take advantage of automated bibliographic access systems" (p. 323). A later study by Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1999) found one of the effects of this lack of library and information skills to be that international students had higher levels of library anxiety than American students.

More recent studies along these lines, however, such as that of Jackson (2004), have found evidence to support the notion that international students may have "have lessened the gap in their technical computer skills, and that their exposure to libraries far exceeds what was once evident in the library literature" (p. 206). In the same vein, Martin, Maxey-Harris, Graybill and Rodacker-Borgens (2009) concluded that "contrary to expectations, this exploratory study did not find that the library skills of international students were less developed than those of US students" and "that international students seek information in the same basic way as US students and the skills needed to find information is similar" (Conclusion, para. 1). Martin et al. also pointed to several important reasons why this shift is occurring:

Technology is closing the gap between undergraduate and graduate international and US students. Not only are international students coming from their countries using computers and libraries in their countries, the improvements in database user interface has reduced the need to understand library terminology which helps all students to navigate and achieve their research needs. In addition, the increasing use of technology in libraries and the willingness of international students to devote more time and energy to library research is helping to rapidly close the gap between international students and US students in using the library. (Conclusion, para. 8)

Clearly, the rapid pace of technological change and its permeation around the world has

had a great impact on spurring the development of library and information skills of many international students prior to their arrival in the U.S., though it is important to note that not all international students may have had such opportunities.

2.2. Unique Needs

One area in which many international students demonstrate a distinct area library and information needs from the majority of their American counterparts is in support of their acquisition of the English language. While there is a great deal of literature documenting all aspects of the process of ESL students learning English, there is relatively little research that investigates the specific ways in which the academic library may play a role in these students' language development. One notable exception is the 2006 study by Bordonaro who sought to uncover how ESL students used the university library as a resource to support self-directed language learning. Bordonaro (2006) found a number of ways in which ESL students used the library: "as a study hall for both individual and group work, as a material repository for both academic and leisure material, as a place to receive instructional assistance, and as a place to engage in both planned and unplanned socializing" (p. 522-523). Another more recent study by Bordonaro (2010) found evidence to support the notion that non-native English speakers may be engaged in incidental language learning when searching library databases as well. Though obviously more research is needed to determine the extent to which making use of the academic library in support of English language learning leads to real and lasting improvement, its potential value in fostering a whole range self-directed learning activities cannot be overlooked.

3. The Obstacles to Meeting International Students' Needs

While an analysis of the academic library and information needs of international students shows that they may not be entirely different from those of their American student counterparts, an examination of the research on the various barriers that may impede these students' needs from being met reveals a whole host of unique obstacles that those involved in higher education must proactively work to counteract. Indeed, parallel to the vast array of problems that international students face in using academic libraries is a concomitant amount of related research on these issues. By examining the findings from these studies, it is hoped that recommendations can be made that will lead directly to improved service to this vital user population.

Undoubtedly the largest area of research related to the academic library use of international students revolves around the barriers that obstruct their successful utilization. In this research, there seems to be general agreement about the main issues which work to impede international students' effective use of library and information services. These

issues can be broadly classified as problems with language and intercultural communication, difficulty adjusting to a new educational environment and its conventions regarding appropriate use of information, and a lack of sufficient experience with academic libraries or even awareness to the services they can provide (Baron & Strout-Dapaz, 2001; Curry & Copeman, 2005; Liu, 1993; Natovitz, 1995; Wayman, 1984).

3.1. Language and Cultural Barriers

As many international students come from countries where English is not widely used, it is easy to understand that using English as the linguistic medium in which to conduct library and information research or to communicate with librarians may present immediate challenges for large portions of this user population. While the majority of international students attending post-secondary institutions in the U.S. need to attain a certain score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), many of these students remain of a limited English proficiency and do not have sufficient command of English library terminology and related jargon (Kamhi-Stein & Stein, 1998; Liu, 1993). DiMartino, Ferns, and Swacker (1995) found that international students' limited English vocabulary also had a negative effect on their ability to search CD-ROM databases. In a more recent study, Mehra and Bilal (2007) found that the Asian students involved in their study had "difficulty in using digital interfaces mainly due to their inadequate level of English language skills" (p. 9). Amsberry (2008) went as far as to proclaim language to be the "primary barrier" to these students making effective use of academic libraries. Contrary to the overall body of related research, however, Liao, Finn and Lu (2007) recently concluded that "in accordance with the ongoing improvement of the English proficiency level of international students within the past decade, language barriers are less severe than they were previously" (p. 7). Though this study may be cause for cautious optimism, language issues will most likely remain foci of related LIS research for many years to come.

In addition to the predominant research focus on linguistic concerns, several studies also pointed to related cultural communication differences as the cause of breakdowns in some international students' information-seeking behavior (Jackson, 2004; Moeckel & Presnell, 1995). Liu and Redfern (1997), for instance, found evidence to suggest that Asian students often avoided consulting with reference librarians because of their ingrained cultural norms even when their own information retrieval attempts proved unsuccessful. Similarly, Wayman (1984) discussed the negative impact that differences in discourse patterns and non-verbal communication can have when international students actually do seek out face-to-face support. It seems clear that both language and cultural concerns remain causes for concern when considering the information needs and behavior of

international students today.

3.2. Different Academic Expectations

While it is easy to see how the need to use a foreign language may hinder international students' effective use of academic libraries, these linguistic challenges are only heightened by the concurrent demand that these students adhere to the requirements of a new educational environment and its distinct conventions for the appropriate use of information. Though many of these related academic skills are directly taught in these students' ESL classes in the U.S., or even in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes they took in their home countries, the literature on this subject reveals that international students regularly enter U.S. universities without adequate preparation for the research requirements of their coursework or the ability to draw on what they have learned appropriately when needed (Benesch, 1996; Horowitz, 1986; Leki & Carson, 1994; Moulton & Holmes, 2000; Pennycook, 1996; Shih, 1986). In particular, the ability to incorporate information from multiple sources in their own academic writing was found to be lacking by Moulton and Holmes (2000), while a plethora of studies have demonstrated that international students often have difficulty effectively gathering, evaluating, and properly citing sources (Badke, 2002; Baron & Strout-Dapaz, 2001; Hughes, 2009; Leki & Carson, 1994; Morrissey & Given, 2006; Wayman, 1984). More precisely, Badke (2002) warned that international students may have trouble understanding academic rules regarding plagiarism because of different cultural approaches toward source use and citation. Given the relatively strict stance taken on these issues throughout the American higher education system, it is not hard to picture the difficulties that such educational adjustments may present to international students.

3.3. Unfamiliarity with U.S. Academic Libraries

Another common deficiency found in the information behavior of international students can be traced to a simple lack of familiarity with the nature of academic libraries in the U.S. Research has shown that many international students do not sufficiently understand American library classification systems, subject headings, basic reference tools, or self-service methods of accessing materials (Curry & Copeman, 2005; Liu, 1993; MacDonald & Sarkodie-Mensah, 1988). Similarly, Allen (1993) found services like online catalogs, interlibrary loan, and database searching to be new to over half of the international students involved in her study, though, as mentioned previously, more recent research seems to indicate that international students may no longer be so different from their American peers in regards to their ability to use the tools of information technology.

In a different line of inquiry, Wang and Frank (2002) demonstrated that "international

students tend to underuse the available information services” because they “may not be fully aware of the readily available professional assistance on information-related issues” (p. 208). Compounding the problems brought about by this lack of awareness, several studies reiterated the finding that many international students may not seek out assistance from library support staff because they do not fully understand the role of reference librarians (Curry & Copeman, 2005; Liu & Redfern, 1997; Wang & Frank, 2002). Interestingly, Onwuegbuzie and Jiao (1997) and Jiao and Onwuegbuzie (1999) found that many international students harbor conscious feelings of inadequacy toward using the library which lead directly to increased library anxiety. Though, somewhat surprisingly, “mechanical barriers” such as the use of printers, copy machines, fiche readers, and change machines were cited as the primary impetuses of library anxiety among this population of users (Jiao & Onwuegbuzie, 1999). Although quantified in a different way, Gilton (2007) surmised that international students’ library anxiety may contribute precipitously toward the degree of culture shock experienced by anyone living in an unfamiliar context for an extended period of time. Regardless of the specific source, it is clear that international students face a host of barriers against effectively utilizing library and information services.

4. Implications

Working to counteract the wide range of obstacles that serve to impede the use of library and information services by international students presents immense challenges to those involved in fostering their development as library users. Fortunately, a great deal of research has attempted to provide suggestions as to how this may be better accomplished. In an overview of this research, several general categories of measures that can be taken to support international students as more effective library users can be seen: direct instruction of library and information skills, improved collaboration between academic librarians and ESL instructors, a commitment to providing more personalized services as well as services in users’ first languages, and a focus on providing adequate faculty and staff training.

4.1. Direct Instruction of Library and Information Skills

Providing direct instruction of library and information skills to international students has been advocated widely in the literature of recent years as one of the best ways to meet the underlying needs of this unique student population (Badke, 2002; Ball & Mahony, 1987; Garcha & Russell, 1993; Jackson, 2004; Martin et al., 2009; Wang & Frank, 2002). Although basic information literacy classes and limited orientation tours have long been part of the support provided to international students, Allen (1993) warns that

libraries need to tailor these sessions directly to the needs of the particular users in attendance. Of particular concern to Allen (1993) was that these instruction sessions were often predominantly geared toward undergraduate students and did not address the needs of the larger proportion of international students undertaking graduate study.

Beyond establishing the basic rationale behind direct library instruction, several other researchers have also sought to determine how these sessions can be made most effective. Not surprisingly, Bilal (1989) found evidence to support a positive correlation between student language level and the acquisition of library skills. Of more usefulness, Badke (2002) called for an expansion of the scope of library instruction sessions to “move beyond the basics of information literacy to what may be called ‘academic literacy’” (p. 60). Conteh-Morgan (2002) recognized the need for library instructors to draw on aspects of second language acquisition theory and noted several points that may inform library instruction. Similarly, several studies sought to provide a set of best practices for communicating with international students in library instruction sessions (see Amsberry, 2008; Gilton, 2007; Kamhi-Stein & Stein, 1998; MacDonald & Sarkodie-Mensah, 1988). Suggestions include knowing as much about the levels and backgrounds of the student audience in attendance, drawing on the precepts of scaffolded, experiential learning, and limiting the use of idioms, cultural references, and jargon, among many others (Amsberry, 2008; Gilton, 2007; Kamhi-Stein & Stein, 1998; MacDonald & Sarkodie-Mensah, 1988). Beyond merely fostering improved communication, some authors have stressed the potential positive contribution that librarians can make toward actively assisting non-native English speaking students with the identification and development of language learning opportunities associated with library- and information-related activities (Bordonaro, 2010; Reznowski, 2008).

4.2. Improved Cooperation between Academic Librarians and ESL Instructors

Related to the recommendations aimed at improving communication between library instructors and international students attending library instruction sessions, a great deal of research has sought to expose and outline the benefits that may be achieved by improving the collaboration between academic librarians and ESL instructors (Conteh-Morgan, 2001; Kamhi-Stein & Stein, 1998; Natowitz 1995; Sarkodie-Mensah, 1998). Conteh-Morgan (2001) proposed a novel approach which involved the collaboration between an ESL instructor and an academic librarian in constructing the syllabus for an ESL course to be taught entirely by the ESL instructor. Conteh-Morgan (2001) summarized the presumed benefits in this way: “Using the language specialists to teach both language and information skills, both of which are necessary for this specialized group of students’ academic success, can only mean the enhanced language and library skills, and ultimately, empowerment of

students" (p. 36). Similarly, Bagnole & Miller (2003) made a call for "the creation of a university-based English for Academic Purposes (EAP) content-based course in information literacy for undergraduate and graduate students in various disciplines" (Abstract). This proposal, with its focus on implementing the teaching of content within such classes, is consistent with those proposed by Kasper (2000) and Kamhi-Stein & Stein (1998), who also advocated for an increased focus on cross-disciplinary collaboration. Though not specifically mentioned in the literature, the call for improved collaboration can also be extended to even include EFL instructors and academic librarians abroad who may be better positioned to address the specific library and information needs of students planning on studying in the U.S. well before they are required.

4.3. Targeted Support

Another approach towards better meeting the unique library and information needs of international students is to provide services specifically tailored to them. As many international students have limited English proficiencies, especially in relation with library terminology and jargon, Sarkodie-Mensah (1992) suggests that reference librarians make a concerted effort to familiarize themselves with international students' speech patterns, focus on the words said by an international patron rather than the intonation pattern used, and exercise tactfulness in both what they ask and say. De Souza (1996) further stresses the importance of asking structured yet open-ended neutral questions when conducting reference interviews with international students. Interestingly, in a survey of academic library job announcements from 1966–2006, Zhang (2008) found that only 24.7% of the overall job announcements that called for foreign language ability (only 20.6% of the total job announcements surveyed) concerned librarians who would be asked to interact directly patrons in the foreign language, reference and library instruction librarians. Running somewhat counter to this trend which seems to deemphasize any role that foreign language services may provide, Chau (2003) believed that "furnishing translated services guides to lessen language barriers is a way of acknowledging the significance of international students and supports efforts to retain them" (p. 392). Undoubtedly, there are many other ways that library services can be tailored to better accommodate the unique needs of international students.

4.4. Adequate Training

Though not perhaps immediately apparent as a measure which works to counteract the many obstacles that international students face in making effective use of library and information services, fostering the development of the skills necessary for working with international students amongst the faculty and staff of academic libraries in addition to

providing cross-cultural and diversity awareness training has been identified as another viable option (Greenfield, Johnston, & Williams, 1986). Along the same lines, holding sensitivity workshops for relevant library staff has also been proposed in the literature (Ball & Mahony, 1987). While these findings may seem quite dated, the heightened institutional awareness they suggest remains an important consideration to keep in mind.

5. Conclusion

The library and information needs of international students in the United States clearly present an array of challenges to the higher education system implicitly committed to supporting their educational endeavors. While these challenges often serve to limit these students' capabilities of making effective use of academic library and information services, at least initially, they can also be thought of as providing unique opportunities for meaningful learning to occur. Although the related research in this area is susceptible to frequent turnover, overreliance on isolated contexts, contradictory findings, and implications that are not always seen through, it is fortunate that there remains an established and growing body of literature which all members of the higher education community can consult. However, as size and needs of this important student population continue to grow and evolve along with the services that academic libraries and information outlets provide, the need for further research will only increase. As new avenues of inquiry present themselves, it is incumbent upon all faculty, librarians, and support staff concerned to remain up-to-date with the findings and their implications, take appropriate actions to implement revisions of practices when necessary, and contribute to the pool of collective knowledge of these issues as much as possible. Only with continued efforts to identify, understand, and resolve these complex challenges will progress be made toward better meeting the complex needs of international students.

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