International Journal of Educational Management

Chinese and Vietnamese international students in Australia
Huong Le, Jade McKay,

Article information:

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2002),""Push-pull" factors influencing international student destination choice",
International Journal of Educational Management, Vol. 16 Iss 2 pp. 82-90 <a href="https://
doi.org/10.1108/09513540210418403">https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540210418403

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald
for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission
guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company
manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as
well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and
services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the
Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for
digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Chinese and Vietnamese international students in Australia

Huong Le and Jade McKay
*Deakin Business School, Department of Management, Deakin University,
Geelong, Australia*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the voice of Chinese and Vietnamese international students through studying the similarities and differences in their learning experiences and the reasons underlying their experience.

Design/methodology/approach – In total, 57 Chinese and Vietnamese international students participated in focus groups and interviews regarding their experiences of higher education and their suggestions for improvement.

Findings – The findings show that Chinese and Vietnamese students had varying levels of challenges and different progress in the adaptation process and that Chinese students were more vocal and less satisfied with their experience of higher education than Vietnamese students. This is due to the mismatch in their expectation and the actual experience and the cultural influence.

Research limitations/implications – The sample size is relatively small. This study only looked at Vietnamese and Chinese students in one university, which might have limitations in relation to subjectivity and bias.

Practical implications – The findings provide useful implications for educators, institutional leaders and support staff to improve facilities, teaching quality and service to students.

Originality/value – In the current era of internationalisation, commercialisation and mobility in institutions around the world, this study advances current research and provides timely insight into the experiential differences of the Chinese and Vietnamese student experience and their voice.

Keywords Voice, Confucianism, Chinese, Experience, International student, Vietnamese

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

With the rising number of international students entering higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world, enhancing their experience in higher education (HE) takes on increasing importance. This paper examines the voice of Chinese and Vietnamese international students through studying the similarities and differences in their learning experiences within an Australian HEI and provides underlying reasons for their experiences. When used in this paper, we define "student experience" as encompassing key aspects of the engagement of students within HE, including the academic, social and cultural.

The importance of garnering insight into the experiences of these students lies in the premise that when students feel that their experience in HE is positive, their overall satisfaction is more likely to be high (Ahmad, 2015; Ali *et al.*, 2016; Arambewela and Maringe, 2012). The experiences of international students must be a key consideration given that in 2010, there were 4.1m globally mobile students recorded and this figure looks set to rise with estimates of there being 7m by 2020 (Abdullah *et al.*, 2014). In the Australian context, HEIs are not only intensifying recruitment efforts, but exploring the experiences and responding to the unique needs of international students (Gomes, 2017; Marginson, 2012; Pham and Tran, 2015; Tran, 2011). According to Russell *et al.* (2010), accompanying this growth in the HE sector is a notable "increase in awareness of the range of student needs that must be met, the development of strategies to meet those needs and the conduct of research to strengthen both understanding and strategy" (pp. 235-236). We see this awareness and research to improve their experiences as critical in the current era both in Australia and other western countries.

Developing this insight is problematized by the fact that while international students are "seen" in HE, Abdullah *et al.* (2014) posit that they are not really "heard" and "their 'voice' within the global HE system 'remains invisible'" (p. 247). This is a view supported by Gargano (2009), who maintains that the experience of these students is yet to be rigorously researched. These missing voices are compounded by the fact that international students are often indiscriminately grouped together and homogenised (Russell *et al.*, 2010; Song, 2014). This study contributes to the literature by providing a platform from which the voices of Chinese and Vietnamese international students can be "heard" and by unpacking the broad brush term of "Asian students" which dominates the discourse (Green, 2007; Lin and Scherz, 2014; Lin and Yi, 1997; Ramburuth and McCormick, 2001; Wong, 2004). We offer an insight into the challenges they face and their ideas for improvement. Understanding the reasons behind their challenges and listening to voices of specific national groups of international students about the ways to enhance their experience in HE becomes all the more necessary in light of increasing efforts by western HEIs to attract and retain international students coming from those countries.

The need for further understanding the voices of Chinese and Vietnamese international students is timely. As of August 2014, both groups were among the top five nationalities enrolled in all sectors in the Australian education system (AIE, 2014). Although China was still ranked first in the top five nationalities of Australia's enrolments, the numbers of students enrolled decreased (139,526) and only grew 8.3 per cent as compared to 2013. However, enrolments from Vietnamese international students grew 20.2 per cent in 2014, placing them third in the top five nationalities of international students. Despite these student numbers, little research has been done to compare the two groups, especially in relation to Vietnamese international students. This paper, therefore, provides narratives of these two cohorts to reveal insights that may prove useful to educators and institutional policy makers. This paper contributes to the current literature by identifying that a positive student experience is determined by the match between student expectations and their actual experience. This means the greater divergence between their expectations and actual experience, the lower their level of satisfaction will be. This is not necessarily a reflection on the quality of the HEI, but it implies that expectations should be managed more effectively. We also contribute to the literature by arguing that international students from each country might have varying levels of difficulties, and therefore, to manage their expectations and experience effectively, we need to understand the underlying reasons and the voice of each cultural group, which helps provide relevant implications to attract students from these particular countries.

Literature review

An extensive body of literature surrounds the experiences of international students in HE and it is a topic which has garnered increasing attention around the world (Beech, 2018; Cantwell *et al.*, 2009; Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Madge *et al.*, 2015; Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, 2017; Sheridan, 2011). Arambewela and Maringe (2012) see this as a result of mounting pressures in an increasingly volatile international education marketing environment responding to student diversity, retention and demands for change (see Nyland *et al.*, 2013).

Many studies have explored international student experiences as they relate to specific countries, including, for example, the UK (Bamber, 2014), Korea (Jon, 2012) and Mexico (Cantwell *et al.*, 2009). Breaking the research down, the documented themes and issues relate to a varied range of social, cultural and academic aspects of the international student experience including: perceptions of discrimination, mental health and well-being (Bradley, 2000; Han *et al.*, 2013); culture shock (Yang *et al.*, 2018; Zhou *et al.*, 2008); graduate employability (Crossman and Clarke, 2010); use of health, counselling and support services

(Forbes-Mewett and Nyland, 2013); social networks (Schartner, 2015); and student learning (Barnhardt and Ginns, 2014; Tran, 2008. However, prior literature tends to group all overseas students as "international students", paying less attention to the student experience of specific cultural groups. The focus on two specific cultural groups (both from the Confucian heritage) in a comparative approach is important because each culture may exhibit different challenges and levels of satisfaction, yielding a better understanding of their needs.

The challenges experienced by international students studying are particularly well documented. They include challenges relating to: transition (Andrade, 2006; Lamberton and Ashton-Hay, 2015); adjusting to academic requirements and managing the demands of study (Wearring *et al.*, 2015; Wong, 2004); loneliness (Sawir *et al.*, 2008); issues with teaching (Edwards and Ran, 2006); help seeking (Lee *et al.*, 2014); and, expectations of HE (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012). While there is an extensive body of research on the international Chinese student experience (Edwards and Ran, 2006; Gu, 2009; Smith *et al.*, 1998; Tran, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2015, 2017; Yang, 2007), less is known and documented about the experiences of Vietnamese international students in Australia, with few exceptions (Pham and Tran, 2015; Tran, 2011; Wearring *et al.*, 2015).

Paralleling these documented challenges is a large body of literature surrounding the "cultural clash" that can occur when collectivist East Asian students enter HE in individualist western countries (Littlewood, 2001), where they can experience an opposing educational culture (Wong, 2004). Triandis (1993) suggests that collectivism is a cultural syndrome identified by shared attitudes, beliefs, norms, roles and values, in which the interests of the group are prioritised over individual interests (Littlewood, 2001). Hofstede (1986) found strong individualist orientation amongst those in Australia, America and Europe and strong collectivist orientation in East Asia and Latin America. These cultural influences were found to affect student attitudes, approaches to learning, motivation, group work and class participation. Such cultural differences can make adjusting to life and study in a Western country difficult for Chinese and Vietnamese students who have been found to experience "culture shock" (Zhou *et al.*, 2008). We do, however, agree with Wong's (2004) assertion that while culture "influences" students, it does not "bind" them. Indeed, studies have shown that East Asian students are much more adaptive than usually given credit (Wong, 2004).

In an extensive review on international student-related research, Abdullah *et al.* (2014) found a gap in the scholarship surrounding the international student voice and the need for these students to be "heard". Since the 1990s, a number of educators and social researchers have pointed to the exclusion of student voices from conversations about learning, teaching and education (Fielding, 2004) and have taken steps towards redressing this exclusion. As a result, studies are increasingly foregrounding the student "voice" in the HE debate. But what remains absent in the higher education discourse, is the "voice" of the international student from specific cultural groups.

As a paradigmatical approach popularised in the west, Cook-Sather (2006) explains that it is a way of thinking premised on the following convictions: that students have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and education; that their views warrant not only the attention but also the responses of teachers; and that they should be afforded opportunities to shape their education. Cook-Sather (2006) views the key goal to make students feel as though their opinions matter, and for teachers to listen actively and be involved. This perspective challenges dominant images of students as silent, passive recipients of education:

> Constructivist, critical, multicultural, and anti-racist pedagogies emphasize the importance of listening, arguing that teachers can improve their practice by listening closely to what students have to say about their learning […] and that listening to students can counter discriminatory and exclusionary tendencies in education […] (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 10).

Listening to what international students have to say about their experiences of HE, thus has within it the potential to not only counter discriminatory practices, but improve the overall satisfaction of these students. Given the high number of international students studying in western countries, this must be a key focus.

Methods

This paper is part of a larger study that examines the overall experience of Chinese and Vietnamese students within a university in Australia, including both on-campus and off-campus experiences. However, this paper only presents the learning experiences of these two groups. The chosen university could be considered a well-ranked university in Australia that has attracted very large numbers of international students annually. Selecting the sample from one university setting has been done in prior studies (e.g. Clemes *et al.*, 2013; Fullana *et al.*, 2016; Hendrickson *et al.*, 2011; Mercer-Mapstone and Matthews, 2017; Wearring *et al.*, 2015).

The study adopted an exploratory approach in the Australian university, entailing in-depth interviews and focus groups (FG) with a semi-structured schedule of questions. Chinese and Vietnamese international students were selected given that Chinese students are the largest group at the university, and while the Vietnamese group is much smaller, it features within the top five countries of origin of international students and has the highest increase in numbers at this university. Further, these countries have commonalities in culture; namely that they are both collectivist countries (Hofstede, 1986) and both experience the influence of Confucianism, valuing the effortful, respectful and pragmatic acquisition of essential knowledge in addition to behavioural reform (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). These factors lend themselves as a good rationale for a comparison between the two groups and for further understanding their voice and experiences in HE. Prior literature has also drawn their student sample from Confucian cultures (see Green, 2007).

There are a number of reasons that using the student evaluations in relation to student voice could be problematic for our research purposes although student evaluations were conducted on every unit, lecturers and other support at the end of a term in order to improve students' learning experience. First, the student evaluation is anonymous so we are not able to identify if the comments are from international or local students or from which cultural groups of students while our research focuses on Vietnamese and Chinese students to explain the reasons for their specific challenges. Second, using student evaluations could have a potential bias as students' comments might correlate to how well they performed in their assessments of a specific unit, rather than their overall experience of learning at a university.

This study involves two stages of data collection. First, we interviewed Vietnamese and Chinese students after the interview questions were piloted with four Vietnamese and Chinese students. Second, we conducted FG with Vietnamese and Chinese students. In-depth interviews and FGs were chosen as they afforded an insight into students' narratives and their voice. A number of open-ended questions were asked in regard to their experiences in teaching and learning (T&L), and other support services. Except for one interview which was conducted in Vietnamese as per the student's request, all interviews and FGs were conducted in English. Interviews allowed individual students to reflect in depth on their experience while FGs provided collective perspectives. Each interview lasted approximately 45 min while the FG lasted approximately 2 h.

All Chinese and Vietnamese international students enrolled in degree courses at the selected university were invited to participate. Eligibility depended on enrolment in a course for at least six months so that they had experience with the university T&L and support services. Ten interviews ($n = 10$) and three FGs ($n = 25$) with Chinese students and ten interviews ($n = 10$) and two FGs ($n = 12$) with Vietnamese students were conducted, totalling 57 students.

A research assistant who could speak Mandarin helped in FGs with Chinese students. The presence of the student research assistant helped students feel comfortable to share their narratives. A Vietnamese research assistant was not required in the FGs with Vietnamese students as students felt comfortable to share their experience in English only. All interviews and FGs were digitally recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

A coding system was devised to identify and develop concepts and categories based upon research questions and the literature (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Two transcripts were analysed to develop codes. After the coding process, certain themes were revealed which linked issues together. This helped yield patterns and regularities, which then became the categories or themes, compatible with the purposes of the study. Themes and categories were subsequently confirmed and refined (Miles and Huberman, 1994) in relation to what emerged from the data, and relative to the literature. We compared both data sources to see the differences. Themes were critically reviewed as part of an ongoing process.

Findings and discussion
From the analysis, four themes have emerged in relation to the experiences of Chinese and Vietnamese students and their voice: discrepant expectations in T&L, language challenges, social networks and suggestions on how their experiences can be improved.

Discrepant expectations in teaching and learning
We found a number of discrepant expectations in T&L. First, many Vietnamese students were disappointed by the large number of academics from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, who spoke English with an accent. They indicated this problematized existing language barriers. For example, one Vietnamese student spoke about trying to "choose an Aussie" tutor, but found themselves with predominantly Indian or Chinese tutors. Chinese students voiced similar complaints although not all of them raised this issue. One student referred to "Indian and Asian teachers" who they had difficulty understanding due to their accent:

> […] before I come to […] University I thought the teaching staff is very professional and all local teacher. But I saw many Indian teacher and Asian. Because when they teach the lecture, the Indian they talk very fast and have very strong accent. So sometimes we cannot understand. Because English is not […] their first language (FG5, CSHy).

The language barrier proved a major hindrance for these students particularly when asking questions and understanding the response given by teachers. These findings vary from Wearring *et al.* (2015) who found that Vietnamese students in an Australian university had greater difficulty understanding "Aussie accents".

Second, both groups of students expressed concerns towards standards of teaching but to a different extent. While many Vietnamese and some Chinese students interviewed, spoke of teaching staff in high regard, saying they were "very nice" and "very good", some Vietnamese students and a particularly large proportion of Chinese participants expressed concern that academics, regardless of cultural background, "don't know the answers". Other Chinese students said, "[…] they just follow lecture notes and read through the lecture notes. They don't explain […] in plain language" (FG5, CSCa). Chinese respondents questioned their tutor's subject knowledge and ability to teach to an international audience. The above finding might reflect students' high expectations regarding T&L in Australia where the experience is different from what they expected.

Third, some Vietnamese students and a large proportion of Chinese students indicated that they did not receive sufficient support from academic staff. For example, one Vietnamese student said, "when I […] ask about the assignment, they just answered like 'you need to know about that, don't ask me about that question'" (VS8), while a Chinese

respondent claimed, "[…] when I have assignment issues and we want to find […] the staff […] we never find them […] and […] If I have to send an email, [it] takes five or four days to get back to me. I couldn't get any help from staff" (FG5, CSCa). Another student had a negative experience with the assignment guidance: "[…] the instruction for assignments is not really enough to tell what we actually need to do […] that's why people get confused and ask again and again" (CS4). Another student did not understand why a staff member became defensive when they sought extra exam information:

> […] the unit coordinator said, "no"[…] I can't give you lot of information, if you think I am not good you can write some complains to the faculty. I think "why you said that? The student just asking you to give some suggestions […] you didn't need to be angry". I think the unit coordinator is not good (CS8).

Prior research indicates clear gaps between student expectations of HE and the reality and the impact this has on overall experience and satisfaction (Arambewela and Maringe, 2012), and this is supported in our study. Indeed, respondents' reported dissatisfaction stemming from mismanaged expectations. Edwards and Ran (2006) identify a range of issues relating to student–teacher relationships, whereby international students are disappointed with the reality of lecturers being too busy, unavailable and uncaring.

The existing research points to the challenges experienced by Asian international students in relation to different learning styles (Wong, 2004). Those students may struggle with various issues such as critical thinking, group work, language learning issues (Sawir, 2005) and essay writing (Green, 2007). These findings potentially explain why students in this study required such support from academics while staff might expect that students are required to be active and independent learners, global citizens and able to learn in a multicultural context. The disappointment might be explained by critical gaps between staff and students relating to divergent views on quality of education, levels of student support, English language proficiency and cultural integration (Le *et al.*, 2017).

Finally, Chinese students spoke of feeling discriminated against by teachers: "There is tutorial discrimination as some do not like Chinese people. They will fail you, with no reason […] I feel like they do not like Chinese people" (CS2). They perceived that lack of cultural awareness seemed to affect marking, the attention provided to international students and the level of support offered.

As a result, the overall level of satisfaction was notably different between the two groups. Vietnamese students were generally satisfied with their experiences of HE as one student stated:

> They give us lots of examples what's going on in the world, what happened in the past. They really teach us how we're going to work […] in the real environment. I know it's hard but it's useful to help us to start thinking, not only memorizing. If you start thinking you will learn better than memorizing because you only memorize it for short period of time but if you understand it, start thinking about it, get the problem solved (VS10).

However, there were mixed views amongst the Chinese students; some were found to be satisfied while many others were less satisfied with their experiences of HE. Many Chinese students said they had expected classes in Australia to be "a lot of fun" but their actual experiences were different. As one said, "[…] it is kind of hard to practice […] language skills in the class, so you just sitting there and listening to the lecturer, and in the tutorial you do the same thing, sitting there and listening" (FG4, CSF7). These negative feelings indicate a discrepancy in their expectations of when and how teachers should provide support and their disappointment on the quality of teaching, assessment and teacher standards.

Previous literature compares approaches to study of Chinese and Australian students and found notable differences (Smith *et al.*, 1998). They identified variances in relation to a range of factors – including interest in academic learning, confidence in learning ability, desire to excel academically. They claim that, although there are some similarities, because

of the fundamental differences between the two cultural groups, it is difficult for them to be directly compared. Renshaw and Volet (1995) found Chinese students differ in terms of tutorial participation and systemic approaches to study. Our study adds to the literature by providing evidence that both Vietnamese and Chinese groups require greater contact and support in relation to tutorials, assessment preparation and online classes but Chinese students seemed to have much higher needs in this aspect.

Their views imply a lack of adaptability and lack of understanding of the multicultural environment in Australia, which may be due to the learning environment in their country of origin, China, where more teacher-dependent orientations are fostered rather than independent learning. Our findings are different from prior studies such as Gu (2009) who found that Chinese students were quite adept at managing the demands of learning and living, albeit in the UK. Edwards and Ran (2006, p. vi) suggest that Chinese students experience the same challenges as other international students; however, they also have unique and specific needs, "often related to their Confucian heritage". Confucianism may explain why both groups have high expectations of their teachers as a centre of knowledge.

Language challenges and improving process
Language difficulties were common challenges affecting both Vietnamese and Chinese students in this study. The language challenges were also found to impact other academic related challenges such as learning, interaction with the teachers and assessment.

All Vietnamese participants alluded to their challenges with English language proficiency, especially in relation to speaking and writing. As one said, "[…] although I got 6.0 in my IELTS, I was still worried about my English. Because you knew studying English in Vietnam was totally different […] from doing everything in English in Australia" (VS5).

Contrastingly, there was a mixed view among Chinese students. Some said how difficult it was studying in English:

> […] the language is very hard for us […] all the books […] every material is printed in English, it is quite hard to understand and […] convert into Chinese […] I believe any other international student will have that too. If […] the native students don't study, they can read and understand. But if we don't study, it is really hard for us to catch up (CS7).

However, several Chinese students from medical science and nursing courses did not seem to worry about language challenges but more about their study skills: "[…] my language is getting improved […] I can't say I don't have any problems with the referencing […]" (CS1). Those students could express their views clearly and confidently.

These language-related difficulties articulated by Chinese and Vietnamese students are well documented in the international education research. Wong (2004), for example, identified cultural and language barriers as the main challenges experienced by international students. Birrell (2006) similarly points to the challenges with language skills that international students experience, and particularly Vietnamese students (Wearring *et al.*, 2015). However, Green (2007) found that issues in assignment writing of students from Confucian heritage cultures are not necessarily due to "language problems" but due to the different ways of thinking and learning influenced by their cultures. Our findings add to the literature by confirming that Chinese students have varied levels of language competencies and we cannot simply group them all as having "language problems".

Not surprisingly, their competence in English may also affect their perceptions of teaching staff as indicated in the previous theme. Past studies indicate that English language proficiency is one of the most significant issues facing international students (Andrade, 2006). This issue also relates to inter-cultural miscommunication between students and educators (Hui, 2005), explaining why respondents experienced challenges in working with local and CALD academics.

The adaptation process to improve English was found to be different between the two groups. All Vietnamese students indicated that their language was improved and they did not worry about English as such. Some Vietnamese students actively participated in on-campus activities and expanded networks with non-Vietnamese to improve their English. However, not all Chinese students shared the same sentiment. One mentioned that, "[…] you can see my English is not good […] I don't have […] Australian friends here, all my friends are from China; they talk in Chinese" (CS2). This quote is one example of how the Chinese students in this study seemed less adaptive than the Vietnamese groups in their language improving processes even though they are both from the Confucian heritage.

Social networks

Social networks were found to be important to both groups; however, different patterns between the two groups emerged. The Vietnamese students expressed a desire to make connections with local students while Chinese students were ostensibly more comfortable developing friendships with other Chinese students, and some even articulated negative experiences with local students.

Vietnamese students were notably disappointed that they could not make friends with Australian local students as they had expected. One lamented, "I don't have many Australian friends" (VS8). Another Vietnamese student commented: "The international students are sometimes really shy when they speak English to the local student, and then the local student is like 'I don't really get what they are talking about'. That sets a really big wall between them" (VS5).

Struggling to actively make friends with local students, the Vietnamese students tended to seek help from friends from the same country rather than from the formal institutional support services. One Vietnamese student said: "I have a friend who is really a smart […] girl. Whenever I get stuck, I would […] ask her to clarify my problem […] She is Vietnamese" (VS5).

Some Chinese students also found it difficult to initiate friendships with local students: "[…] it is harder to make friends with local students […] it's hard to communicate because of our language or maybe because of our background" (FG2, CSF6). Others indicated they were interested in using connections with local students to improve their languages but they said how difficult this task was. Only some Chinese students who studied in courses in which there were more local students enrolled, discussed positive experiences:

> I come here really want to make friends with Australian […] people […] I make a few Australian friends […] and I can practice my English […] (CS6).

> I was living with […] 5 Australian housemates, and they actually helped me [with] English […] When I am in class, I intentionally sit next to a student who looks blonde and white, so maybe we get a chance to talk (CS4).

In contrast to the Vietnamese students, dominant responses among Chinese students were more concerned with not having any Chinese and/or Asian international classmates. As one said, "I was most worried about if there were no Chinese or Asian in my class […] most of them are Australians" (CS4). Many others did not mention their need to make friends with local students.

Ultimately, social networks were seen by all to be a critical aspect of the student experience in HE. While Vietnamese students desired friendships with local students, Chinese students preferred socialising with other Chinese and Asian international students, a finding relating to the importance of "same culture networks" echoed in Sawir *et al.* (2008). For Chinese students, research has pointed to a "natural tendency to seek out other Chinese students who have a better understanding both of students' previous experience and of the challenges now facing them" (Edwards and Ran, 2006, p. iii).

Our findings on the Chinese student cohort certainly supports this and further indicates that communication with other Chinese and Asian students was found to be easier than with local students.

Student "voice": improving the experience of HE
Chinese and Vietnamese students were asked to provide recommendations to HEIs to improve the learning experience with regard to T&L, course structures, support services and university facilities. This is crucial for institutions to pay heed to given that the treatment of Asian international students in western HEIs can be far from exemplary (Tweed and Lehman, 2002).

Unlike the Vietnamese respondents, a significant number of Chinese students articulated recommendations for improving T&L. For example, one spoke about the need for improved "professional qualities" of teachers: "[…] training teachers to use a smart board […] Most of [the] teachers in my major don't know how to use that and almost every class, the first ten minutes they will learn how to use that […] It's a waste of time" (FG5, CSChi). This same student questioned the knowledge of teachers, suggesting that while teachers may be adept at highbrow theory, they "have lower practical skill about how to teach international student[s]. So I think maybe improve the teacher's professional skill about how to teach [in an] international, inter-cultural environment" (FG5, CSChi).

Further, students suggested that improvements needed to be made within the course structure and assessment. One Chinese student wanted "more after class sessions for international students" and another stated "they need to provide more for us [with] practical skills". Students stated courses should include more international teaching materials rather than just local texts and authors. Other Chinese students were concerned about assessment regarding exam length, as one said, "[…] the final exams need to finish within 3 hours but […] this is [to] shrink to 2 hours […] makes […] [it] harder than before" (CS6).

Both groups expressed their concerns about time management especially when many assignments and exams are scheduled in the same period of time. One Chinese student said, "[…] [it] is very hard to […] organise your own time to do assignment […] so I think teacher can help us […] give us the guideline how you organise your time" (FG4, CSF7).

While the Vietnamese students were not as vocal about this issue, these above quotes point to the need for educators to make explicit to students the academic skills of time management, exam preparation and online classes. Educators cannot afford to make assumptions about the understanding and knowledge of international students.

Another suggestion raised by Chinese students was to improve the communication about university facilities and services, and introduce "more approaches to access information". One student stated the university could promote its facilities through a newsletter or notice board:

> I think campus could release […] a discussion board everywhere around the campus, which lets students get more information to access the facilities. Otherwise the facilities and services are there but we don't know about them (FG5, CSCa).

Students also touched on the issues of cultural awareness and support services and the way international students are treated differently to their Australian peers, claiming, "sometimes they do ignore us" (CS1). Chinese students in particular wanted greater assistance from their teachers and support services staff. These findings infer that the university needs to create more effective ways to communicate support services to the students.

Some students spoke about the need for improvement regarding employability. They stated it is "difficult to find a job for an international student" and they "need help to write a resume". Another stated: "I think it might be better to have a Jobshop for just international students because […] it's quite difficult to find a job for an international student" (FG2, CSTr).

Many Vietnamese and Chinese students expressed their wish to have more opportunities to have internships and subsequently to find a job in Australia after graduation.

In terms of university facilities, both groups spoke of the "capacity of the library" as one Chinese student explained: "Over the exam period, the library […] is too crowded […] I need to get up at maybe around 8 o'clock […] so that I can get a seat and a table, otherwise there is no seat […] So maybe expand the library, get more tables […] more computers" (CS7). Other Chinese students suggested: "I think [we] need more printers and computers, because sometimes I can't find a computer in [the] library" (FG2, CSF7). Consequently, Vietnamese students suggested a lot of time was "wasted" trying to find a space to study given that they "spent most of the time in library" (VS10).

Drawing on the "voices" of these students, the issues surrounding teaching and teachers, course structure, support and facilities were seen to be critical to improving their overall experience in HE.

Conclusion and implications
This study has provided a glimpse into understanding the voices of Chinese and Vietnamese international students in one Australian HEI. It shows there are variances in the experiences of these two groups. The findings provide evidence that cultural factors, such as the Confucian heritage, may have some influence on students' experience, but not to the same extent for all cultural groups. By drawing on the rich qualitative data, this study advances the current literature by providing the key differences in the Chinese and Vietnamese students' learning experience and their voice and by explaining the reasons of Chinese and Vietnamese students' experience, which was determined by the match between their expectation and their actual experience. The divergence between their expectations and actual experience was influenced by cultural factors. While many Chinese and Vietnamese students in our study have similar challenges as compared to other international students, they have varying levels of challenges as well as different progress in the adaptation process. Thus, to better understand and enhance the experience of specific cultural groups of international students, we need to understand the voice of each cultural group and the reasons underlying the gap between their expectation and experience. These findings also imply that international students cannot be homogenised into the one collective.

This study contributes to theory and practice in a number of ways. First, our findings further give voice to the impact discrepant expectations can have on the international student experience, particularly in T&L. Vietnamese students were disappointed by the heterogeneous and multicultural mix of teachers in the university. The Chinese students expressed similar sentiments and pointed to how this compounded their language challenges. Chinese students in this study also found the teaching staff to be unsupportive, at times discriminatory and aloof. These findings can be explained by the influence of the Confucian culture on students' high expectations of teacher knowledge and skills. In terms of implications for teaching practitioners and support staff specifically, while cultural influences may play a part in these perceptions, it is clear that greater expectation management would benefit both staff and students. For example, making explicit the support and teaching that they can expect upon entering university in a new educational culture, may go some length to combatting discrepant expectations. The findings also point to a need for greater professional development of staff in dealing with international students such as further cultural diversity training for staff and students to ease the communication challenges between them. Institutions and academics need to demystify how Australian HE works and the experience they can expect. Furthermore, university teachers need to make explicit their hours of availability, the extent of the support they offer and where students can go if they require additional support.

Second, the findings highlighted that both groups indicated difficulties surrounding mastering the English language and its attendant complexities of grammar, writing and speaking, but to a different extent. All Vietnamese students alluded to their language barriers while the Chinese students seemed to have varied levels. Prior research on this topic overwhelmingly suggests it is a continuing issue. However, Gunawardena and Wilson (2012) found that other international groups such as Indian sub-continent students did not share the same language issues due to their early education in English. The insights provided into these language challenges have implications for academic leaders, teaching practitioners and those in support roles. Knowing Vietnamese students, in particular, desire better support around language barriers and challenges is critical. Addressing this challenge may also help HEIs in attracting and retaining students from both countries.

Third, while both groups placed notable importance on developing social networks, Chinese students sought friendships with fellow Chinese and Asian students, and Vietnamese students more actively sought to develop friendships with local Australian students. Both pointed to the difficulties in trying to develop social networks with Australian students on account of cultural differences and language barriers, and this affected their overall level of satisfaction. Sawir *et al.* (2008) highlight the loneliness and isolation that can arise from a lack of social networks and another type of loneliness experienced by international students – "cultural loneliness" – which is triggered by an absence of their preferred cultural and/or linguistic environment. They found "same culture networks" are critical for these students. We would extend this claim and assert that same culture networks take on increasing importance when there is a lack of connection between local and international students. These findings imply that HEIs need to foster and facilitate greater bonds between international and local students (Sawir *et al.*, 2008). But equally important is that friendship networks with students from a similar cultural background be nurtured (Edwards and Ran, 2006). In articulating these recommendations for improvement as voiced by Vietnamese and Chinese international students, this study goes some length to aid HEIs in their attracting and retaining of students from these two countries, and implications for both policy and practice. Indeed, addressing the issues and challenges delineated by the Vietnamese and Chinese students in this study relating also has the potential to improve teaching practice and better inform support efforts.

Finally, both groups of students suggested that the key to improving the international student experience in general lies in improvements to T&L, course structure, support services and facilities. The implications of these findings for practice are that academics and support staff need to have a good understanding of students' cultural differences and expectations given that those students are new to the country and to the learning environment. Further, a provision of more learning spaces, other facilities (i.e. parking) and internships are key points for institutional leaders, policy makers, academics and support staff to pay attention to.

This study has, however, a number of limitations. The sample size is relatively small. This study only looked at Vietnamese and Chinese students in one university, which might have limitations in relation to subjectivity and bias. Further, selecting students sample from one university limits our ability to validate the findings from another university setting, which might have a different academic quality and ranking. However, the findings of this study help us understand underlying reasons of Chinese and Vietnamese students' learning experience, which are influenced by the Confucian culture. Future research would consider comparing student experiences across a wider range of nationalities across multiple Australian HEIs using different research designs such as survey, experiment or mixed methods.

References

Abdullah, D., Aziz, M.I.A. and Ibrahim, A.L.M. (2014), "A 'research' into international student-related research: (re) visualising our stand?", *Higher Education*, Vol. 67 No. 3, pp. 235-253.

Ahmad, S.Z. (2015), "Evaluating student satisfaction of quality at international branch campuses", *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 40 No. 4, pp. 488-507.

AIE (2014), "Monthly summary of international student enrolment data", Department of Education and Training Australian Government, Australian International Education, ACT, Canberra.

Ali, F., Zhou, Y., Hussain, K., Nair, P.K. and Ragavan, N.A. (2016), "Does higher education service quality effect student satisfaction, image and loyalty? A study of international students in Malaysian public universities", *Quality Assurance in Education*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 70-94.

Andrade, M.S. (2006), "International students in English-speaking universities adjustment factors", *Journal of Research in International Education*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 131-154.

Arambewela, R. and Maringe, F. (2012), "Mind the gap: staff and postgraduate perceptions of student experience in higher education", *Higher Education Review*, Vol. 44 No. 2, pp. 63-84.

Bamber, M. (2014), "What motivates Chinese women to study in the UK and how do they perceive their experience?", *Higher Education*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 47-68.

Barnhardt, B. and Ginns, P. (2014), "An alienation-based framework for student experience in higher education: new interpretations of past observations in student learning theory", *Higher Education*, Vol. 68 No. 6, pp. 789-805.

Beech, S.E. (2018), "Adapting to change in the higher education system: international student mobility as a migration industry", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 44 No. 4, pp. 610-625.

Birrell, B. (2006), "Implications of low English standards among overseas students at Australian universities", *People and Place*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 53-64.

Bradley, G. (2000), "Responding effectively to the mental health needs of international students", *Higher Education*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 417-433.

Cantwell, B., Luca, S.G. and Lee, J.J. (2009), "Exploring the orientations of international students in Mexico: differences by region of origin", *Higher Education*, Vol. 57 No. 3, pp. 335-354.

Clemes, M.D., Cohen, D.A. and Wang, Y. (2013), "Understanding Chinese university students' experiences: an empirical analysis", *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 391-427.

Cook-Sather, A. (2006), "Sound, presence, and power: 'student voice' in educational research and reform", *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol. 36 No. 4, pp. 359-390.

Crossman, J.E. and Clarke, M. (2010), "International experience and graduate employability: stakeholder perceptions on the connection", *Higher Education*, Vol. 59 No. 5, pp. 599-613.

Edwards, V. and Ran, A. (2006), *Meeting the Needs of Chinese Students in British Higher Education*, University of Reading, Reading, MA.

Fielding, M. (2004), "Transformative approaches to student voice: theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities", *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 295-311.

Forbes-Mewett, H. and Nyland, C. (2013), "Funding international student support services: tension and power in the university", *Higher Education*, Vol. 65 No. 2, pp. 181-192.

Fullana, J., Pallisera, M., Colomer, J., Fernández Peña, R. and Pérez-Burriel, M. (2016), "Reflective learning in higher education: a qualitative study on students' perceptions", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 1008-1022.

Gargano, T. (2009), "(Re)conceptualizing international student mobility: the potential of transnational social fields", *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 331-346.

Gomes, C. (2017), "Disconnections with the host nation and the significance of international student communities: a case study of Asian international students in Australia and Singapore", in Tran, L. and Gomes, C. (Eds), *International Student Connectedness and Identity. Cultural Studies and Transdisciplinarity in Education*, Vol. 6, Springer, Singapore, pp. 93-111.

Green, W. (2007), "Write on or write off? An exploration of Asian international students' approaches to essay writing at an Australian university", *Higher Education Research & Development*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 329-344.

Gu, Q. (2009), "Maturity and interculturality: Chinese students' experiences in UK higher education", *European Journal of Education*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 37-52.

Gunawardena, H. and Wilson, R. (2012), *International Students at University: Understanding the Student Experience*, Peter Lang, Bern.

Han, X., Han, X., Luo, Q., Jacobs, S. and Jean-Baptiste, M. (2013), "Report of a mental health survey among Chinese international students at Yale University", *Journal of American College Health*, Vol. 61 No. 1, pp. 1-8.

Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D. and Aune, R.K. (2011), "An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 281-295.

Hofstede, G. (1986), "Cultural differences in teaching and learning", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 301-320.

Hui, L. (2005), "Chinese cultural schema of education: implications for communication between Chinese students and Australian educators", *Issues in Educational Research*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 17-36.

Jon, J.E. (2012), "Power dynamics with international students: from the perspective of domestic students in Korean higher education", *Higher Education*, Vol. 64 No. 4, pp. 441-454.

Lamberton, G. and Ashton-Hay, S. (2015), "Preparing Chinese international business students for the transition to undergraduate study in Australia", *Journal of Research in International Education*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 155-171.

Le, H., Koo, F.K., Arambewela, R. and Zutshi, A. (2017), "Voices of dissent: unpacking Vietnamese international student experience", *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 280-292.

Lee, E.J., Ditchman, N., Fong, M.W., Piper, L. and Feigon, M. (2014), "Mental health service seeking among Korean international students in the United States: a path analysis", *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 42 No. 6, pp. 639-655.

Lin, J.C.G. and Yi, J.K. (1997), "Asian international students' adjustment: issues and program suggestions", *College Student Journal*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 473-479.

Lin, S.Y. and Scherz, S.D. (2014), "Challenges facing Asian international graduate students in the US: pedagogical considerations in higher education", *Journal of International Students*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 16-33.

Littlewood, W. (2001), "Students' attitudes to classroom English learning: a cross-cultural study", *Language Teaching Research*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 3-28.

Madge, C., Raghuram, P. and Noxolo, P. (2015), "Conceptualizing international education: from international student to international study", *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 39 No. 6, pp. 681-701.

Marginson, S. (2012), "Including the other: regulation of the human rights of mobile students in a nation-bound world", *Higher Education*, Vol. 63 No. 4, pp. 497-512.

Mercer-Mapstone, L.D. and Matthews, K.E. (2017), "Student perceptions of communication skills in undergraduate science at an Australian research-intensive university", *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, Vol. 42 No. 1, pp. 98-114.

Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed., Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Nyland, C., Forbes-Mewett, H. and Härtel, C.E.J. (2013), "Governing the international student experience: lessons from the Australian international education model", *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 656-673.

Pham, L. and Tran, L. (2015), "Understanding the symbolic capital of intercultural interactions: a case study of international students in Australia", *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 204-224.

Ramburuth, P. and McCormick, J. (2001), "Learning diversity in higher education: a comparative study of Asian international and Australian students", *Higher Education*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 333-350.

Renshaw, P.D. and Volet, S.E. (1995), "South-East Asian students at Australian universities: a reappraisal of their tutorial participation and approaches to study", *The Australian Educational Researcher*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 85-106.

Rose-Redwood, C. and Rose-Redwood, R. (2017), "Rethinking the politics of the international student experience in the age of Trump", *Journal of International Students*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. I-IX.

Russell, J., Rosenthal, D. and Thomson, G. (2010), "The international student experience: three styles of adaptation", *Higher Education*, Vol. 60 No. 2, pp. 235-249.

Sawir, E. (2005), "Language difficulties of international students in Australia: the effects of prior learning experience", *International Education Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 5, pp. 567-580.

Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C. and Ramia, G. (2008), "Loneliness and international students: an Australian study", *Journal of Studies in International Education*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 148-180.

Schartner, A. (2015), "'You cannot talk with all of the strangers in a pub': a longitudinal case study of international postgraduate students' social ties at a British university", *Higher Education*, Vol. 69 No. 2, pp. 225-241.

Sheridan, V. (2011), "A holistic approach to international students, institutional habitus and academic literacies in an Irish third-level institution", *Higher Education*, Vol. 62 No. 2, pp. 129-140.

Smith, S.N., Miller, R.J. and Crassini, B. (1998), "Approaches to studying of Australian and overseas Chinese university students", *Higher Education Research & Development*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 261-276.

Song, X. (2014), "Changing social relations in higher education: the first year international student and the 'Chinese learner' in Australia", in Brooke, H., Fergie, D., Maeorg, M. and Michell, D. (Eds), *Universities in Transition: Foregrounding Social Contexts of Knowledge in the First Year Experience*, University of Adelaide Press, Adelaide, pp. 127-156.

Tran, L.T. (2008), "Unpacking academic requirements: international students in management and education disciplines", *Higher Education Research & Development*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 245-256.

Tran, L.T. (2011), "Committed, face-value, hybrid or mutual adaption? The experiences of international students in Australian higher education", *Education Review*, Vol. 63 No. 1, pp. 79-94.

Triandis, H.C. (1993), "Collectivism and individualism as cultural syndromes", *Cross-Cultural Research*, Vol. 27 Nos 3/4, pp. 155-180.

Tweed, R.G. and Lehman, D.R. (2002), "Learning considered within a cultural context: Confucian and Socratic approaches", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 57 No. 2, pp. 89-99.

Wang, C., Whitehead, L. and Bayes, S.J. (2017), "'They are friendly but they don't want to be friends with you': a narrative inquiry into Chinese nursing students' learning experiences in Australia", *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, Vol. 7 No. 8, pp. 27-36.

Wang, C.C., Andre, K. and Greenwood, K.M. (2015), "Chinese students studying at Australian universities with specific reference to nursing students: a narrative literature review", *Nurse Education Today*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 609-619.

Wearring, A., Le, H., Wilson, R. and Arambewela, A. (2015), "The international student experience: an exploratory study with students from Vietnam", *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 71-89.

Wong, J.K.K. (2004), "Are the learning styles of Asian international students culturally or contextually based?", *International Education Journal*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 154-166.

Yang, M. (2007), "What attracts Mainland Chinese students to Australian higher education?", *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 1-12.

Yang, Y., Zhang, Y. and Sheldon, K.M. (2018), "Self-determined motivation for studying abroad predicts lower culture shock and greater well-being among international students: the mediating role of basic psychological needs satisfaction", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 63, pp. 95-104.

Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K. and Todman, J. (2008), "Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education", *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 63-75.

About the authors

Dr Huong Le is Senior Lecturer in Management at Deakin Business School, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia. Her research interests include employee well-being, justice and employee well-being, diversity and inclusion, and cross-cultural research. She has published in international journals such as *Journal of Vocational Behavior, International Journal of Human Resource Management. British Journal of Management, Social Indicators Research, International Journal of Manpower* and Personnel Review. Dr Huong Le is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: huong.le@deakin.edu.au; htklsargent@gmail.com

Dr Jade McKay is Research Fellow at Deakin Business School, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia. Her research interests include international education and management education.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: **permissions@emeraldinsight.com**