

Challenges and Barriers for International Students in Romania

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Abstract. The phenomenon of medical migration refers to medical doctor travelling far and wide in search of new knowledge and skills, has been practiced for several centuries. Romania, Great Britain, France, Germany have all attracted international students at different times by their dominance of medical education and practice. In the 19th century, American physicians travelled to Europe, especially France and Germany, to pursue medical education. When they returned, the knowledge and skills these physicians brought back to the United States profoundly changed medicine in America. Since the end of World War II, the United States has been the preferred destination for medical doctor from all over the world for training in graduate medicine. However, these recent international physician visitors differed from previous generations in that they frequently did not return to their native country. Following a framework created by the literature, the primary purpose of this study was to examine the needs of international students within their academic and social communities. The implications of these findings are discussed. Recommendations are made for how higher education institutions can help facilitate these students' integration into their new communities.

Keywords: International Students, Medicine, Education, Challenges, Language Barriers, Culture

1. Introduction

The increasing globalisation created a remarkable prerequisite for individuals in the labour force for who can communicate in several languages. The uses of mutual languages are in areas such as the service sector, technology, media, diplomacy, and certainly sciences. Many countries such as South Korea, China and Romania frame teaching programmes to teach at least one foreign language at the two different school levels. However, some countries such as India, Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Philippines even make use a second approved language in their administrations. Romania has only just recently been putting considerable significance on foreign language teaching and learning, particularly the English Language.

1.1. Romania and Medical Education

In Romania, the Medical School is a department of a medical University, which typically includes also Dentistry and Pharmacy departments as well. The name ‘facultate’ is used for departments in their universities too, but the Medicine departments distinguish themselves by the length of studies (6 years), which grants to graduates a status equivalent to that of a Master in Science. The Medicine departments are also marked by reduced flexibility; a student in a university can take courses from different departments, like Chemistry and Geography, while the medical universities do not have any extra offers for their students, due to their specialisation. Admission to medical faculty is usually awarded by passing a Human Biology, Organic Chemistry and/or Physics test. The program lasts 6 years, with first 3 years being preclinical and last 3 years being mostly clinical. After these six years, the student has to take the national licence exam and as well has to write a thesis in any field he/she studied. In the end the student is awarded a Doctor-Medic (‘titlu onorific’) (shortened ‘Dr.’), which is not an academic degree (analogous to Germany). In order to practice all of medical school have to go through residency and specialisation exams. All Romanian medical universities offer a way to obtain a degree in medicine, dentistry, and/or pharmacy. On the other hand, not all programs offer it in English and there are special admission requirements for international students, which need to be fulfilled before enrolling.

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The Faculty of General Medicine, Pharmacy and Dental Medicine of the Western University “Vasile Goldiș” in Arad provides a coherent educational medical system, a branched out academic supply, based on recognised norms in the national and European academic education, as a Higher Education Institution Organizing.

The academic curricula and the content of the analytical programmes of the Faculty of General Medicine, Pharmacy and Dental Medicine with its specialisations, as well as the master and doctoral programmes are in compliance with the European system of transferable credits (ECTS). The credits and the curricular content are nationally compatible and in accordance with the norms imposed by the European Union. Focusing on teaching and learning methods, the students are one of the major objectives’ in the efforts made for permanently raising the quality of the teaching process, in the sense of integrating the Faculty of General Medicine, Pharmacy and Dental Medicine into the European Field of Education and Research.

1.2. Foreign Students in Foreign Countries

Finding supreme suitable teaching and learning methods has all the time been a prime research concern. From the perspective as a professor-student, two most important instructional patterns dominated the literature, to be precise the professor-centred approach where the professor is seen as knowledgeable source of authority, knowledge and model while the students are seen as merely receivers of the lecturer’s knowledge and secondly the student-centred approach where organisation, decision making and content are commonly determined by the students’ awareness and requirements and the professor’s part is mainly to support the learning process and donate to the development of students’ cognitive abilities and skills. The co-operative element by drawing on social constructivism has. Even if the former method prevailed in the Romanian educational system until recently, due to late 20th century and early 21st century research and developments in economic, social, psychological and technological knowledge, the shift to the latter paradigm has become more and more visible. One of the fundamental features of the student centred approach is joint learning, whereby learners discover knowledge and transform it into concepts, reconstruct it and expand it through new learning experiences by active participation, transactions, and dialogue between students, their peers and professors [1].

The growth of the semantic web has made collaborative learning possible and necessary for most human activities taking place online and offline. Its increasingly visible impact on education/instruction/training worldwide [2] has prompted us to implement a collaborative web-based tool (wiki) in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), in particular English for Academic Purposes (EAP) for a student population with basic Internet skills and intermediate level of English (B1-B2, cf. Common European Framework for Languages - CEFL) in Romania, an EU developing country. This signifies an experiment for students and professor alike.

1.3. Leaving Home and Discovering a New World

A medical degree is a form of transnational currency and the global scarcity of doctors of medicine created extraordinary opportunities for medical migration. Doctors act in response to opposing push and pull factors as they leave their home countries and work elsewhere. A marginal amount roam to help in less well-resourced regions or in aid work, but many roam hoping for enhanced environments simply to discover that jobs are vacant in areas where home doctors choose not to work. The choice to leave home is generally an immense one and requires significant organisation and determination – it is occasional for this to be remorse or stress free. Therefore, medical refugees and their families, if they follow them, often arrive bearing a mix of feelings, opportunities, and appreciative.

1.4. Language Barrier for International Students

The expression “language barrier” is metaphorical expression used predominantly to indicate the difficulties students face when they have no language in common and try to communicate with each other. Only little communication occurs unless one or both parties learn a new foreign language, which calls for an investment of time and effort.

People travelling abroad often encounter language barriers. A person who comes to a new country at an adult age, when it comes to language learning is a burdensome process and this can have particular difficulty

"overcoming the language barrier"[3]. Similar difficulties occur at multinational meetings, where translation services can be costly, hard to obtain, and prone to error. Language problems influence not only information-gathering abilities but also help-seeking behaviours. The lack of proficiency in English could be a major concern for international students, since in our time, more and more students study abroad.

All the problems students that study outside their home countries, "language barriers" turn out to be the biggest problem for international students, especially in Romania. Additionally, this makes a lot of students feel helpless and over stressed. Many researches demonstrates the difficulty of language barrier for international students, remarks that the problem of language barrier lies at the identification of the classroom atmosphere and the faculty-student relationship as cause of difficulties for international students. In all the factors, he supposed that the language is "the first barrier encountered by international students". Not simply language barrier will cause international students' anxiety; there is a second language anxiety, educational stressors, and sociocultural stressors as the three biggest challenges for international students. In order to solve the stress that international students have, some scholars gave some suggestions, including deal with the problems with a positive attitude and educate international students to use various ways to help them solve their problems, especially during the orientation periods.

Optimum communication and understanding requires language fluency whereas a partial language barrier creates impediments to teaching or learning that are not easily circumvented. It can be problematic to share humour, mistakes, or anecdotes, which sometimes make for the most lasting courses. Finally, the language (and also cultural) divide made receiving constructive response from the residents difficult.

Upon arrival to a new country, international students face diverse trials in adjusting to learning and living in their new "home" country. Supplementary, their adjustment problems might vary by country of origin, race and ethnicity, English language proficiency, and whether or not they come from collectivist or individualist cultures.

Surrounded by the adjustment challenges they face are:

- Finding accommodations, the means of obtaining food and other essential items for daily life;
- Learning the academic culture including how to interact with faculty and other students, and different styles of teaching; and
- Making new friends and developing a new social support system.

While the first set of these encounters occur during their initial transition, the others might be more time consuming and last longer. In addition, given the heterogeneity of the group, English language proficiency and experiences with discrimination may be additional hurdles to overcome for some students. These experiences of adjustment may have an impact on students' psychological well-being. Below, we review the research literature on these students' experiences in four general areas: initial transition, academic life, social life, and psychological experiences.

2. Initial Transition

When the new international students arrive in a new country, there are some tasks: finding a place to live, getting a social security number, registering for classes, and learning to use a mean of transport that suits them best. Compared to their domestic counterparts, international students tend to experience greater modification difficulties and more distress during their initial transition into the university and report greater academic and career needs. During this transition, language barriers in particular can negatively impact students' well-being and their ability to adjust. Their English level competency or discomfort about speaking English may slow their interaction down within the new community in order to fulfil their initial needs. On the other hand, students with higher levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy will likely experience reduced levels of stress and increased levels of adjustment. To deal with the primary life stress that might lead to academic stress, it has been recommended that orientation programs include attention to a variety of stressors students could face within their environment and ways of coping with these stressors. In addition, it has been put forward that contact with co-nationals be promoted as this contact may be smoothing and encouraging when the students initially arrive.

3. Academic Life

Surrounded by the academic life, challenges such as English language barriers international students face can help to develop relationships with their professors and other daily contact persons, as also in most cases getting used to teaching and curriculum differences such as the expectation for class discussion or questioning the professor. English language proficiency is an imperative factor in predicting students' academic achievement. For example, language proficiency is positively correlated with freshmen academic performance. Curriculum and teaching procedures are another adjustment concern for international students. These concerns encompass study techniques, test taking, classroom instruction, and oral communication such as class discussion. Explorations and research suggests that implementing strategies and programs for dealing with these anxieties during the first semester will enable international students to adjust to their new academic life.

4. Social Life

International students also face the challenge of making new friends, coping with loss of social support from at home, and developing a new social support system. Loss and lack of social support in particular have been found to lead to lower academic achievement and negative psychological experiences such as confusion, tension, and depression. Once the students arrive at the new country, specific reactions to the host country and culture may vary. Even though some students become very much tangled in the host country's culture, others may feel negative and become distant. A student's home culture, being extroverted, communication skills in English, and positive approach to forming relationships with Romanians are noted as variables relating to this attitude.

5. Psychological Understandings

Psychological understandings include occurrences such as disorientation, homesickness, depressive reactions, and feelings of alienation, isolation, and powerlessness. International students, like their domestic matching part, experience academic stress. However, international students usually do not have similar resources to combat this stress. These stresses joint with a lack of resources could lead to stress-related illnesses such as depression or anxiety. There is some evidence that students' country of origin determines the amount and type of psychological reactions they show. European students, for example, report experiencing less acculturative stress than the ones from Asia, Central/South America, and Africa. Non-European international students may experience discrimination which may lead to lower self-esteem, depression and other mental health problems. It may also encourage them to form relationships with other international groups rather than the groups from the host culture.

The literature acclaims numerous approaches to aid international students in order to cope with the trials summarised above in order to enable their adjustment. These include accommodations connected to a number of student services, especially those provided by the international student office and counselling centre. Other suggestions concerned ways to reduce stigma attached to counselling and alternative types of counselling such as going to the student or including a faculty member in the meetings. Social support groups and activities on campus to encourage relationships with people from the host culture were also suggested to help the students deal with cultural stress.

6. Cultural Differences for International Students

International students' relations to other cultures may continue to affect their academic performance and learning responses in ways beyond language interference. For instance, students from some Asian, European, and Latin American cultures may have been taught that it is a sign of disrespect to look directly at professors when they are speaking, to question them directly, or to differ from their thoughts and feelings [4]. Tolerances and understanding of audience differ between cultures as well; students may have been taught that to state their opinions directly and forcibly in discussions or writing is egotistical as well as disrespectful.

They likely have also been shown not to speak in class unless called upon. Depending on their school culture, they may have had more practise memorising information than asking questions or sharing their point of view.

In general it is not hard for foreign students to learn a new language in a foreign country, for the following reason it can be said, ‘wenn man sich in eigener Muttersprache richtig und gewöhlt ausdrücken kann, kann man auch eine Fremdesprache richtig erlernen und übersetzen.’ [5] (translation: ‘if one properly masters one’s mother tongue, one can accurately translate and learn a foreign language’), especially living in a country which is very welcoming to foreign students.

7. Conclusion

In Romania, English language is becoming more and more important in the society. Medical English is taught from the perspective of medicine and health care first and foremost while reinforcing vocabulary acquisition, grammar and structure secondly.

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