

Supporting International Students

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Who am I?

- Head of International College, English Language Centre
- Experienced EFL and EAP educator AND former international student
- PhD in Linguistics
- Experience in teaching credited-modules (MA Fashion Marketing, MA Fashion Management, MA Luxury Brand Management, UG linguistic modules)
- Experience of leading a module (Research Skills for MA Fashion Marketing)
- Passionate about supporting international students and staff working with them

Things to consider when teaching/supporting International Students

How much experience do you have working with / teaching international students?

In your opinion, what do they struggle with?

What was the biggest challenge for you?

What do you think your role is in supporting international students on your programme?

Do you know of other services on campus that can support your students?

What are your strategies to cope and help?

International Students in your classes

- Sometimes uncomfortable to ask questions/ask for help (Chinese students → saving/losing face)
- Sometimes demanding all your attention, wanting to negotiate their marks (Middle-Eastern and Indian students)
- Coming from different educational systems, often completely unfamiliar with UK HE – so double transition to PG and to a different system
- Cultural barriers – gender roles, directness, and authority figures
- (Chinese students) sometimes scared that if they speak a lot of English and spend a lot of time with non-Chinese people, they will lose their culture/identity

[Based on my experience]

Low Context Cultures

- Verbal messages are explicit. The focus is rational
- Low context cultures are more egalitarian and power is decentralized
- Relationships grow quickly, they can come and go (transactional)
- Privacy and personal space is important
- Time is money – scheduling is important and time is a commodity
- Learning is individual. Speed is preferred

Germany, Scandinavia, UK, America, France, Australia and Israel

Source: Hall, Edward T. (1959). *The Silent Language*, and *Beyond Culture* (1976).
See also: Kim, Pan and Park (1998). 'High- Versus Low-Context Culture: A Comparison of Chinese, Korean, and American Cultures.'

High Context Cultures

- Verbal messages are implicit, non-verbal elements are significant. Content and shared background is key. Identity is rooted in your family, social groups and culture
- Authority is normally held by one person. Respect for elders and people in power is very important
- Relationships grow very slowly over time and building trust is vital
- Space is communal and personal space is less important
- Time is flexible. The focus is the quality of the time spent, not on being punctual
- Learning is communal. The focus is on being a team and helping each other

China, Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Greece, Japan, Portugal and Italy

International Students outside your class (daily life)

- Not used to living alone, cooking and cleaning
- Might not be familiar with personal tutor system
- Most likely not aware of email etiquette
- Might need info in writing – at first they find it very difficult to understand spoken English, different accents, and colloquial language
- Not used to “quiet hours” (overnight) – might spend nights studying / watching films / talking to family at home
- Often reluctant to ask for help (dyslexia, mental health) due to stigma in their culture
- Feeling homesick, overwhelmed, missing familiar food (especially at the beginning)

General tips for everyone

- Don't equate a person's intelligence with their language level
- Avoid certain language (see next slide)
- Don't ask: do you understand?
- Academic hospitality – they will really appreciate if you meet them half-way (deficiency model is not useful)
- Be welcoming
- “Language problems” may actually be culturally based ways of seeing the world.

Andrade, M. S. (2006). 'International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors.' Journal of Research in International Education, Vol. 5(2), 131-154.

- Promote intercultural friendships – they are very beneficial (and these students want to learn about your culture)

Language Tips

- Avoid figurative language (e.g. idioms and proverbs)
 - Idioms: to get out of hand, to call it a day, to hang in there, to be a piece of cake, to pull yourself together
 - Proverbs: actions speak louder than words, absence makes the heart grow fonder, don't cut off your nose to spite your face, don't judge a book by its cover
- Avoid phrasal verbs: to sign up, to fill in, to put off, to call off, to look out for
- If possible, follow up in writing – e.g. send an email with the information, give them a post-it, note it down for them
- Speak clearly and using non-confusing language (avoid phrases that can be misinterpreted)
- Be careful with colloquialisms, slang and technical language – if necessary, rephrase

Tips for Teaching

- Emphasize key points on slides or via intonation
- Rephrase to enable better understanding
- Recap at the end of the class if possible
- Provide glossaries or refer to existing ones
- Build students' confidence over time
- Call out specific students by name – if you ask a question to everyone, you'll face silence
- Make your assessment briefs as accessible as possible (ELC can help you with that)
- Manage expectations, be explicit (don't take anything for granted)
- Incorporate induction / general practical intro to programme at the beginning, and set the rules

Tips for Writing Feedback

- Use simple and explicit comments – what the problem is, and point to a solution (not necessarily just correcting) – e.g. problem with sentence structure, consider linking / breaking it into smaller parts / check verbs etc. OR: how does it relate to the task? Show link.
- Refer to where they can find help – referencing guides, Writing Development team in the library, ELC, resources on Blackboard
- If feasible, allow the student to read the comments before supervision
- If you use a particular error correction code/system, explain it at the beginning of the academic year/semester or when you discuss the assessment brief or give feedback

Other Useful Reading

- McDonald, Ian (2014). 'Supporting international students in UK Higher education institutions.' *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 18:2, 62-65.
- Ploner, Josef (2018). 'International students' transitions to UK Higher Education – revisiting the concept and practice of academic hospitality.' *Journal of Research in International Education* 2018, Vol 17(2), 164-178.

Supporting Services

- **Student Support Centre** (Minerva) – help with enrolment, housing, legal issues, finance (including hardship funds), visa advice
- **Student Wellbeing Centre** (Marina, next to Swan) – learning differences, counselling, mental health support + lots of self-help guides online
- On-campus **Health Centre** (GP)
- **Writing Development** team in the Library – learning developers and subject librarians – writing, critical thinking, exam revision (not language specialists)
- **MASH** team in the library – supporting maths and stats
- **Multifaith Chaplaincy** (Witham House)
- **Residential Wardens** – working 6pm to midnight, point of call for students in accommodation and able to refer to other services (Wardens are PG students)
- **Students' Union** – Amina Akugri (VP International), International Student Association

English Language Centre

- In-sessional courses – short, voluntary, non-credited and non-assessed courses (4-6-8 weeks) on various aspects of academic English and study skills: academic writing, listening, critical reading, presentation skills, seminar discussions etc.
- Special course for MA students: English for Dissertation Writing
- Special support for PhD students (English for PhD)
- One-to-one appointments throughout the year
- Grammar Clinic
- Social events – ELC Book Club, ELC Afternoon Tea

Website <https://elc.lincoln.ac.uk/> email englishlanguage@Lincoln.ac.uk