

# Catering the Needs of Gen Y from Overseas in Australian University

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the particular cultural diversity issues experienced by Gen Y from overseas, studying in Australian universities. The authors interviewed 8 postgraduate international students from Gen Y group on their study experience and examined the existing support mechanism provided by universities in Australia. This research also compared Gen Y's specific needs and the general supply of study support provided by universities. The research found there is imbalance between needs and supply. Gen Y either is unaware of such old fashioned support, or reluctant to access the services in the way prescribed by the university. Gen Y felt the support provided is unattractive or unappealing for them to access; the delivery method of such support does not match what Gen Y preferred. The authors recommend: More up to date platform for communication between the University staff and Gen Ys; More consultation with Gen Y and draw their input in the process of design and delivering of such support; University is to upgrade facilities to accommodate the needs of Gen Y and to be perceived as COOL for Gen Y communication styles.

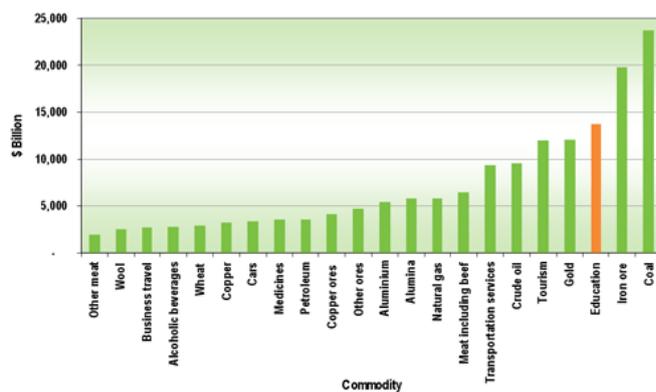
**Keywords:** Cultural Diversity, Gen Y, International Students, Study Needs, Study Support

## Introduction

The aim of this paper was to explore some learning experiences of a specific international student population by interpreting 8 participants' experience to explore strategies for teaching and learning in a cross-cultural learning environment, which would help to improve the practice of providing supports to international students and to accommodate the needs of Gen

Y students' needs. This project differs from many others in that it is from the perspective of Gen Y students from overseas.

International education has been a major growth industry globally over the past 30 year (Chirkov, Vansteenkiste, Tao, & Lynch, 2007; Forbes & Hamilton, 2004; Satoshi, Gregory, & Andrea, 2008; Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) trade data for 2008 confirms that education is the nation's third largest export industry, behind coal and iron ore and well ahead of the next service industry, tourism. According to the ABS figures, Australia's education exports increased from \$12.2 billion in 2007 to \$15.5 billion in 2008, up 23.4% from the previous calendar year. Over the 10 years to 2008, and education exports have grown at an average annual rate of 15%, compared with an average annual rate of 6% across all services exports. (ABS, 2008). The chart below shows that education is now the third largest export earner for Australia.



(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008).

Every year, Australia welcomed thousands of international students from all over the world. A record 543,898 international students attended Australian institutions in 2008, the first time the figure exceeded 500,000 in a calendar year. Young Chinese have been motivated to study overseas by the expected good career they could get on their return home or by remaining overseas to work. There has been a continuous flow of Chinese students going overseas for their tertiary education in the past 20 years (Davey, 2005; Gareth, 2005; Kim, Guo, Wang, & Agrusa, 2007).

The international education market has developed rapidly throughout the Western world (Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Yao, 2004). Currently, China is the largest exporter of international students and it provides 15.2 per cent of total international students globally (AEI, 2005, 2006; Chinaview, 2006; Hui, 2005; Kim et al., 2007; Labi, 2006; OECD, 2006). In the

Australian case, Chinese student number rose rapidly that they are now by far the most important group of international students. Around 47.5% of international students enrolled in Australian higher education were from China. Accordingly, Chinese students have become the largest group of international students studying in Australia (Birchard, 2006). Australian higher education market and contributes to the national economy and financial health of individual institutions (Gatfield & Larmar, 2008). Therefore, it is very important in understanding about international students and their needs' and expectations are met while studying in Australia. However, despite an increasing role that the Chinese market plays in sustaining the Australian education export industry, the education experience of Chinese students has not always been reported positively. The importance of this market to the educational sector gave rise to questions about the way in which Chinese international students perceived their Australian education and how satisfied they were with both their socio-cultural and educational experiences.

Understanding the characteristics of our clients that are international student population was viewed as a vital first step in targeting strategies to cater students' needs to encourage students' engagement with host institutional services and programs (Krause, 2005).

### ***The Gen Y***

Generation Y (Gen Y) is the generation following Generation X (Gen X). Students born between the early 1980s to early 1990s are included. Gen Y, also known as Generation Next (Gen N or Net Gen), iGen, Millennials or digital natives to reflect their upbringing in a milieu where communications technology is a given. Gen Y, like other generations, has been shaped by the events, leaders, development and trends of its time. The web, as a source of information for Gen Y, is important to students' learning and day-to-day life (Chung, Fam, & Holdsworth, 2009; Maringe & Carter, 2007).

Gen Y students are an increasing proportion of studying overseas worldwide. Having grown up with computers, Gen Y students are characterised as generations learning differently to previous generations. They prefer to be constantly and immediately in touch with their peers through Information and Communication Tools (ICTs) distinguish them from previous generations of students (Goh et al., 2007; Melles, 2003).

### ***Gen Y and Digital Technology***

Gen Y grew up amidst a time during which the internet caused great change to all traditional media (Gardner & Eng, 2005; Hartman, Moskal, & Dziuban, 2005). Junco and Mastrodicasa (2007) expanded on the work of Howe and Strauss to include research-based information about the personality profiles of Millennials, especially as it relates to higher education. They conducted a large-sample (7,705) research study of college students. They found that Net. Generation college students were frequently in touch with their parents and they used technology at higher rates than people from other generations. In their survey, they found that

- 97% of students owned a computer,
- 94% owned a cell phone, and
- 56% owned an MP3 player.
- Students spoke with their parents an average of 1.5 times a day about a wide range of topics.
- 76% of students used instant messaging,
- 92% of those reported multitasking while IMing, and
- 40% of students used television to get most of their news and 34% the Internet.
- 56% reported downloading music using peer-to-peer file sharing (15% reported downloading movies and 16% reported downloading software).
- 69% of students reported having a Facebook account, typically logging in twice a day.

In summary, the instant communication framework Gen Y developed through extensive computer usage has led to a need for more professional feedback than that of past generations. Communication platforms such as SMS, e-mail, video chat, and blogging have engendered a mindset that necessitates constant communication with others. That mindset has carried over into the workplace.

Universities need to acknowledge that those Gen Y students who come to university are likely to be more representative of their generation's stereotypes, having had to utilise their IT skills to gain entry in a competitive environment (Richardson, 2006). It is important for universities to take account of generational trends and to research into the learning preferences and expectations for the current generation. Reflecting on current preferences and trends can help in making informed predictions of future learning needs and the infrastructure required to support it. This paper addressed study support issues through a survey of postgraduate students' experiences and expectations of the study support with their university, as part of a broad pilot project to explore use of a range of tools to promote engagement with a student cohort dominated by Gen Y-age students.

## Method

This qualitative research interpreted the realities of a specific ethnic group from the cross-culture perspective. Four males and four females Chinese students from CQ University were interviewed. All participants were from mainland Chinese, ranging in the Gen Y age from 23 to 26 years old. Their lengths of residency in Australia varied from one year to three years. Participant D, F, G and H were currently studying in Master of Accounting program, A was currently studying in a Master program by research, B was studying in MBA, C was studying in a Master in Education program, and E was studying in a Master in Marketing program (See Table 1). As a researcher with a Chinese background, I have an advantage of being able to establish a friendship and trust with the participants. I had known most of the participants and had many casual conversations with them before the data collection process. The in-depth interview was semi-structured and conducted in Mandarin. Interviews were tape recorded, with the permission of the interviewees. The tapes were then transcribed and translated back-to-back from Mandarin into English and vice versa by a professional interpreter to achieve the best degree of accuracy. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The interview questions were general, broad, open-ended and flexible. The guiding interview questions were structured into several categories based on the literature reviews: study experience, students' expectations, culture adjustments, study environment, student support services, and overall satisfaction.

The data were organized and coded into themes derived from the literature. The reason for selecting the open-ended interview is to allow the interviewees talk about issues that were important to them and gave them an opportunity to tell their personal experience. In addition, the in-depth interview is the best way to deeply explore the respondent's point of view, feelings and perspectives (Kratwohl, 1998).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of participants in Gender, Age and Education

Participants	Age	Male/Female	Studying Program
A	23	M	Master by Research
B	23	M	MBA
C	23	M	Master of Education
D	25	M	Master of Accounting
E	25	F	Master of Marketing
F	24	F	Master of Accounting
G	24	F	Master of Accounting
H	24	F	Master of Accounting

## Results

Several interesting themes emerged from the survey results. The research found there is imbalance between needs and supply. Gen Y either is unaware of such old fashioned support, or reluctant to access the services in the way prescribed by the university; Gen Y felt the support provided is unattractive or unappealing for them to access; the delivery method of such support does not match what Gen Y preferred. This research also summarised Gen Y's overall responses to the general supply of study support provided by universities (see Table 2) and listed Gen Y's specific needs of support (see Table 3).

Table 2. Comparison of Gen Y's specific needs and the general supply of study support provided by CQ University

Study Support Services provided by University	Gen Y's Overall Responses
Accommodation Service	Good intend but not really helpful
Orientation Program	Not really helpful but enjoyed the food and drink
Welfare/Counselling Service	It is embarrassed to talk personal issues to a stranger
Computer Facilities	Facilities are too old and the rooms are too noisy
Government Information	Will access it from the net when need it
Fees and Finance assistance	Don't need it

Table 3. Gen Y's specific needs

Gen Y's Specific needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget accommodation on campus</li> <li>• Budget restaurant/canteen on campus</li> <li>• Simple cooking facilities on campus</li> <li>• Interactions with local communities</li> <li>• Employment service</li> <li>• Work experience arrangement</li> <li>• Emergency first aid training</li> <li>• Health clinic on campus</li> </ul>

Besides Gen Y's specific needs, students also expressed their suggestions on some issues related to teaching and studying,

### *Library service*

Majority of students expressed that they use online searching for their study and do not really borrow books from the library but more demand for group study environment 24/7 for their

study. That means that library will experience fewer students coming to borrow books but to provide more digital library services and to increase more group study environment to accommodate the learning preferences of Gen Y students. This is supported by Gardner and Eng's study in 2005.(Gardner & Eng, 2005).

### ***Flexibility units***

A key characteristic of Gen Y is their belief that they can learn outside classrooms, when they are interacting with their peers. Students expect some portion of their unit materials to be accessible online to give them the flexibility to juggle other responsibilities alongside study.

### ***Creative Teaching***

Majority of students expressed that the teaching styles are too conservative and not creative. Students suggested that lecturers could use more modern IT to supplement the teaching to make the learning more interesting, such as using YouTube, iPod, Video chat and Blogging to stimulate students' learning spirit.

In summary, this study found there is imbalance between needs and supply. Gen Y either is unaware of such old fashioned support, or reluctant to access the services in the way prescribed by the university; n Y felt the support provided is unattractive or unappealing for them to access; the delivery method of such support does not match what Gen Y preferred. The authors recommend: More up to date platform for communication between the University staff and Gen Ys; More consultation with Gen Y and draw their input in the process of design and delivering of such support; University is to upgrade facilities to accommodate the needs of Gen Y and to be perceived as COOL for Gen Y communication styles.

## **Conclusion**

With China's economic reform, the financial situation of many Chinese families has changed and the number of Chinese Gen Y students who were studying overseas has greatly increased. These students came from a country that is so far away from Australian in distance, culture, political system, and language impact on students' studying and living in Australia. Universities need to acknowledge that those Gen Y students who come to university are likely to be more representative of their generation's stereotypes, having had to utilise their IT skills to gain entry in a competitive environment. It is important for universities to take

account of generational trends and to research into the learning preferences and expectation for the current generation. Reflecting on current preference and trends can help in making informed predictions of future learning needs and the infrastructure required to support it.

This paper is an exploratory study. It does not aim to draw definitive conclusion; rather, it serves to provide a point of entry into understanding Chinese Gen Y Chinese students' study experience in Australia. This study helped the Chinese Gen y students to clarify their situation and existing difficulties for their study in a foreign country. It also provided the insight of cross-culture learning and living experiences of Chinese Gen Y students at an Australian university, as well as suggested strategies for institution and student service department that can be used to help Chinese Gen Y students to adjust their study experience.

This qualitative study focused on graduate Chinese students learning experiences in an Australian university. There have a number of limitations and assumptions in the research process. The findings are derived from a small sample of Gen Y students and are therefore cannot necessarily be generalized to all Chinese Gen Y students' experience. In addition. The sample size was only from one specific university. Therefore, additional research is required in this regard. However, further and more extensive research will be needed future study.

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