



Developing Library Services for International Students in China's Universities: What Does the Literature Tell Us?

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Abstract. Despite the rapid growth of international students in China's universities, university libraries are not fully prepared. The new requirements of this rapidly emerging community have not been fully understood nor well addressed. This paper reports on a research study that aims at developing library services for international students, on the basis of identifying and understanding of their requirements. This study adopted an inductive literature analysis approach for the analysis of 52 articles retrieved from international and Chinese academic databases. Fourteen library service requirements emerged from the analysis in four main categories: academic support requirements, physical environment requirements, resource and collection development requirements, and librarian outreach support requirements. Further conceptualisation of the research findings revealed three core library service requirements: academic development requirements, leisure/recreational requirements, and language and cultural learning requirements. This study focuses on China's university libraries; however, the research findings provide useful implications and insights that can be shared across international borders.

Keywords: Chinese universities · International students · Literature review
Library services · Requirements

1 Introduction

The recent achievement and development of China's economy has encouraged its universities to build and enhance their international presence and reputation. This internationalisation strategy has been heavily weighted by the Chinese central government [1]. In 2010, the China's Ministry of Education launched a "Study in China" program, which ambitiously aimed at attracting at least 5,000,000 international students to study in China's universities [2]. In the 2015/2016 academic year, 442,773 international students studied in China, and the number is expected to be significantly higher in 2016/2017 [3]. To support this program, the central government provided a total of 20 billion CNY (approximately 3 billion USD) in for setting up scholarship packages, and upgrading university teaching, research and social facilities, including university libraries and library services [4].

International students have different information needs from those of the native students [5–7]. Zhao and Mawhinney [8] claim that non-native and native language speakers demonstrate evident differences in the searching, evaluating, writing and citing processes. Therefore, Dimartino and Zoe [9] point out that university libraries should provide well-tailored academic instructional services to international students, which are critical to their academic success in the new environment. Saw et al. [10] claim that university libraries have a vital role in helping international students adapt to their new environment, reducing cultural and language barriers, and obtaining information about the social and university environments.

Some Chinese researchers assert that Chinese university libraries should become the support platform for this new and fast-growing community [11, 12]. Nevertheless, China's university libraries are simply unprepared to provide the services international students need [11, 13]. Some researchers [14, 15] claim that no comprehensive services have been provided, nor has any attention or systematic effort been made to investigate and resolve this problem.

Thus, in China's universities, international students are not sufficiently included in the current provision of library services. This paper reports on one of the very early research studies, which aims to articulate specific and pragmatic strategies for the development of library services in China's universities through identifying and understanding the requirements of international students. This paper focuses on the literature review stage of this research project and its findings.

2 Review Methods and Processes

The literature review was carried out in two stages. The first stage aimed to perform a general review and to provide a theoretical and contextual basis for more systematised literature retrieval and analysis in the second stage. Specifically, the review has two main aims: (1) to identify what library services have been provided to international students on a global scale; (2) to gain a general understanding of the present international student services provided in China's university libraries.

Stage two systematically retrieved and analysed academic works both in English and Chinese. Two sets of databases were systematically searched. The first set included three international databases: Web of Science, ScienceDirect and Emerald. As the second set, three Chinese academic databases were searched: CNKI, Wanfang and CQVIP. In general, the search returned 532 articles, including 63 articles in English and 469 articles in Chinese. After careful screening, 57 articles were included for the analysis: 40 in English and 17 in Chinese.

An inductive analysis approach was adopted. Specifically, a grounded theory (GT) analysis approach was adopted, as proposed by Strauss and Corbin [16], which is widely recognised as particularly useful for generating a theory closely related to the context of the phenomena being studied [17, 18]. Specifically, the data analysis adopted two GT analytical techniques, coding (open, axial and selective) and constant comparative analysis. Open coding was used to anticipate and label new library service

requirements as indicated in data. When a new requirement emerged and was open-coded, it was compared with the existing list of open-codes to check and verify if it was completely new, if it already existed or if it could be merged with the existing codes to formulate new requirements. Axial coding was used to develop vertical relationships between different codes, which connected the individual requirements that emerged and formulated subcategories around the axis of a category. Finally, selective coding focused on identifying horizontal relationships among the emerging categories and on checking and verifying the research findings [16]. Theoretical saturation was achieved in the literature analysis-until no new open codes emerged from the data analysis.

3 Literature Review Findings

The analysis pointed to fourteen library service requirements in four categories: academic support requirements, physical environment requirements, resource and collection development requirements, and librarian outreach support requirements. These categories and individual requirements are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Categories and requirements emerged from the analysis

Categories	Requirements	Requirements	Categories
Academic support requirements	1. Understanding academic principles and rules 2. Orientation courses 3. Information literacy education 4. Academic writing training	5. Comfortable and convenient space for study 6. Flexible space for seminar/discussion 7. Onsite technological facility 8. Bilingual environment	Physical environment requirements
Resource and collection development requirements	9. Academic resources 10. Leisure resources 11. Language learning resources	12. Multicultural librarians with good communication skills 13. Special liaison librarians 14. Convenient online/offline accesses to librarians' support	Librarian outreach support requirements

Effective academic support services are essential to international students [19]. International students often study with a limited understanding of the academic rules of the new educational institution. This results in major challenges, including problems with attitudes toward intellectual property [19] and understanding the academic rules for using information properly to avoid plagiarism [20]. As suggested by Gunnarsson et al. [20], university libraries should provide an introduction to the academic principles

and rules. In this case, as emerged in the analysis, three types of library services are extremely useful: library orientation courses, information literacy education and academic writing education [8].

Library facilities are frequently used by international students. For them, university libraries are often seen as quiet and relaxing places [21]. However, Song [22] identified that international students used the library primarily as a place to study, while domestic students viewed it as a place that provided resources for their research. Also, a bilingual library environment is highly valued for adjusting into the academic community, quickly locating library resources and services [15].

Moreover, the literature review showed that electronic resources are strongly preferred over print resources. However, a large proportion of international students do not know very much about the extensive databases and e-journals available to them [21]. Apart from using information for academic purposes, Datig [21] states that it would be “a nice perk” if university libraries could offer leisure reading in both English and student’s own language.

Also, through analysis, three specific librarian outreach support requirements have emerged from the literature analysis. The literature analysis shows that international students from different cultural backgrounds may have very different expectations of the librarians’ help. Curry and Copeman reveal that in Asian collectivist cultures, people tend to avoid disturbing others. Therefore, librarians need to show cultural sensitivity in their delivery of library services [19]. Additionally, Shao and Scherlen [23] assert that international students expect librarians to avoid the use of slang, jargon or long complex sentences, which may result in miscommunication between students and librarians.

4 Discussion

The findings were further conceptualised to understand the relationships between the requirements. Thus, a conceptual model is developed, as shown in Fig. 1. According to this diagram, four response strategies can be articulated.

- Librarian involvement: librarians are closely related to almost all requirements of international students. Librarians need to be culturally sensitive and bi-/multi-lingual and should always be reachable and ready to help when needed.
- Resource and collection development: international students require academic resources, leisure resources and language learning resources.
- Online/offline support: if on-site assistance is only available during library opening hours, international students should be able to receive 24/7 online supports through library web services.
- Space allocation: university libraries should provide easy and convenient access to technological devices, as well as flexible, moveable spaces for group work.

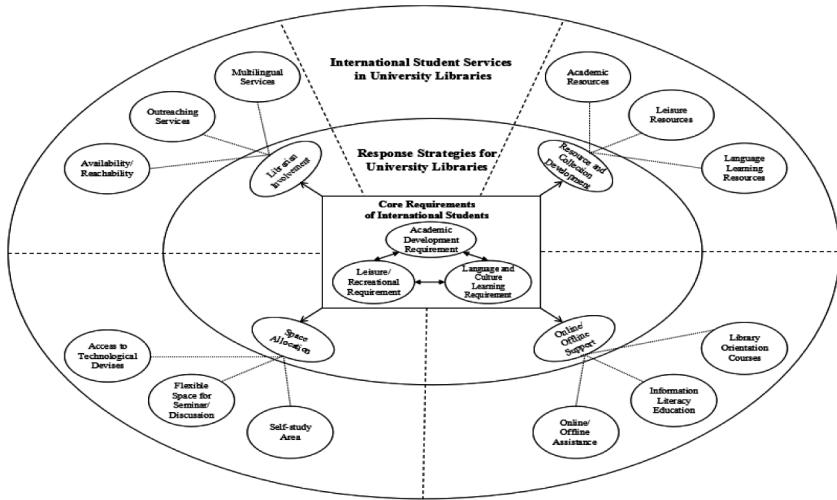


Fig. 1. Core requirements from international student and response strategies and services

5 Conclusion

This paper reports on one of the early research efforts, which aims to articulate strategies for the development of international student services in China's university libraries. The literature analysis revealed three core library service requirements: academic development requirements, leisure/recreational requirements, and language and cultural learning requirements. Furthermore, four response strategies were formulated: librarian involvement, resource and collection development, online/offline support and space allocation. Among these strategies, librarian involvement has emerged as the central strategy and thus should be prioritised.

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