

Conference Abstract

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The reflective learner — Chinese international students' use of strategies to enhance university study

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Many students gain access to New Zealand universities with IELTS bands 6 (and in some cases, even lower). The IELTS Handbook tells us that a student at this level 'can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations'. Given that a New Zealand university lecture room or tutorial is far from a 'familiar situation' for most Chinese international students, and the language of many of their textbooks is often more than 'fairly complex', their language resources are obviously stretched. This paper draws on findings from a longitudinal study of twelve Chinese international students in their first year of study at a New Zealand university, using semi-structured interviews with grounded methodology. The purpose of the study was to investigate the expectations, emerging issues and processes of adjustment the students went through to achieve success in their studies.

This paper looks at some of the strategy use reported by the participants, how they have reflected on these strategies as a means of overcoming the problems imposed by the limitations of their linguistic knowledge and their fit with the learning practices generally sanctioned by university teachers. Implications for the preparation of students for university study are discussed.