Understanding the EAP Writing and Online Learning Needs of Chinese University Students: A Multiple-Method Needs Assessment Study

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The development of educational partnerships between U.S. and Chinese universities looking to internationalize is leading to a growing demand for online English language courses for students seeking to improve their English prior to U.S. arrival. The purpose of this study was to identify the current English for Academic Purposes writing (EAPW) and online learning needs of the students from a major Chinese university. A multiple-source/multiple-method approach to data collection was implemented. The results showed that half of the participating Chinese students were ready for basic EAPW and the other half for first-year EAPW courses. Although most of the students in the study were already exposed to (mostly passive) online learning practices, they would need to be taught interactive and collaborative online learning techniques in order to perform well in an online EAPW course. The study found that the Chinese participants have good command over some important EAPW features, especially when these occur in familiar tasks. Overall, the study suggests that EAPW course designers do not need to overhaul their EAPW curricula, but rather shift their focus to incorporating and scaffolding culturally-sensitive assignments, interaction, and technical support.

Introduction

U.S. and Chinese universities are at the forefront of curricular internationalization worldwide (Obst, Kuder, & Banks, 2011, p. 13). China is the U.S.’s major partner in joint or dual degree programs. The students