Investigating international student transition to Higher Education using Rich Pictures

Background and Context

On arrival at a new campus in a new country, international students are at a crucial stage in their academic careers, transitioning from study or work in their home countries to study in an unfamiliar environment in a different country. The transition time can be relatively smooth and uncomplicated but for many it can be stressful and difficult.

Our research involved using collaborative group work techniques to gather information with focus groups discussions. A collaborative drawing technique known as a rich picture (RP) was employed in order to gather insight into transition because visuals have the vast capacity to communicate irrespective of possible language, culture and education barriers. The RP is a familiar tool used in information systems (Bell, Berg & Morse, 2016) to gather understanding about human activity for system design to assist the exploration of different viewworlds within a complex situation.

Seventy-one students at three different universities in Scotland took part in this research. A student-led analysis of 16 RPs provided a nuanced understanding of social, cultural, economic and academic issues that are of concern to many international students. This analysis sought to identify areas that could be further investigated in order to improve the international student experience.

References


No rules for drawing

- Cabaret style tables with participants in groups of three to five
- Coloured pens
- Large flipchart paper
- No artistic ability required
- Instructions: 'Tell us all about your experiences on your course of study and what it is like being an international student in Scotland'

Content Analysis

- We employed five Computer Science students to work as analysts on this project.
- The performed ‘crowd inquiry’ content analysis based upon the rich pictures and audio-tape recording.
- Every picture was scrutinized and every icon was coded. The transcripts, if possible, were coded to match each icon.
- They categorised each icon into four separate themes (social, cultural, academic and economic) and noted if the image was positive, negative or neutral.
- If there were any parts of the picture that were not described through the transcription, the students made assumptions based on the iconography. These assumptions were documented separately.

Results

- WEATHER: usually negative in correlation and occurred in 9 out of the 16 RPs.
- SIGHTSEEING: visiting popular landmarks in Scotland and the UK.

Individual Workshop Core Themes:

- Social
- Cultural
- Economic
- Academic

Combined Core Themes:

- Loneliness
- Accents / Language
- Resilience
- Socialising with Friends
- Daily living expenses
- Study-life balance
- Exercising

Dr Tessa Berg
School of Mathematics and Computer Science

Emma Guion Akdag
School of Social Sciences

Jenny Coady
School of Mathematics and Computer Science

Connor Preston
Mark Goldberg
Kevin D Brown

Matthew Clancy
School of Mathematics and Computer Science

Matthew Gunn Davis

Content Analysis (1)

- Repetition of common themes: No rules for drawing
- Repetition of common themes (2): Transitions to Higher Education
- Repetition of common themes (3):

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School of Social Sciences

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