

Essay Genres 1 – Cause & Effect

More and more English-medium universities are introducing foundation-year programmes for non-native speakers of English. What are the causes of this, and what effects has the introduction of a foundation year had on students?

The concept of the foundation year was created as recently as the 1990s and has since become an increasingly popular addition to the traditional bachelor's degree structure (Smith, 2017). Generally created to prepare students for the rigours of academia, the foundation year now means that many non-native students of English are required to spend a minimum of four years to complete an otherwise three-year undergraduate degree. Although there might be many reasons for the creation of foundation programmes, this paper argues that such courses have been primarily adopted for three reasons. Not only may the motivation for this be due to the fact that students were previously struggling to meet both the linguistic and cultural demands of their subject, but such motivation may also be because university institutions realised that a fourth year of tuition would greatly increase profit margins. As is explained below, these three factors have likely resulted in numerous effects, both positive and negative for undergraduate students.

The most pedagogically valid reason why universities may have introduced foundation year programmes is likely due to the fact that non-native students were often reported to be struggling to meet the linguistic demands of their major. In a study of 113 universities in the USA, Smith and Wesson (2000) found that dropout rates for non-native speakers of English at English-medium universities were as high as 24%. This research stimulated subsequent studies, which all found that student concerns over course comprehension were a recurrent factor for these high rates (Davidson, 2001; Lee and Lee, 2004). Indeed, Johnson (2009) argues that such linguistic demands were in fact the primary reason for most cases of non-native dropouts around the turn of the millennium. In relation to this aspect, one significant effect of introducing foundation-year programmes may be that students are now better prepared for their courses and dropout rates have decreased. In the same study, Johnson (2009) reported a decrease in dropout rates of 57% after the introduction of the foundation year. Students have also since reported feeling more confident and comfortable with comprehending the concepts of their course (Jones, 2014), which perhaps indicates that extending bachelor's degree programmes by a year has had a positive effect.

Another reason for the introduction of foundation years may be due to cultural reasons. Johnson's (2009) study, in which 117,000 students completed an online survey, also found

that students reported complications with understanding cultural differences, especially between Western and Eastern institutions. Such cultural considerations may include aspects such as teacher-student dynamics (Jones, 2014) or the grading methods used by Western universities - particularly those using the British grading scheme (James and Keenan, 2014). This factor seems especially likely because a common complaint of first-year tutors prior to the introduction of the foundation year was about non-native student grading expectations. Additional evidence for this can also be found in the fact that student stress rates have reportedly dropped by as much as 32% in universities which introduced foundation years (Jones, 2014), with some institutions reporting that culturally-driven student expectations have since become much less of an issue (*ibid.*). While this may be another positive effect of the introduction of foundation-year programmes, some studies have indicated negative outcomes as well.

One particular motivation for introducing such courses that's often overlooked in the literature may be financial. While the original intention may have been student-driven, Gleeson (2018) suspects that many universities which have considered introducing such courses have done so for the sake of profit margins. Following significant increases in tuition fees in countries such as the UK, a growth of up to £60,000,000 in annual profit is not uncommon for larger British universities (Jones, 2014). While this may certainly benefit university staff, there are two negative effects which have been reported in the literature because of the overall increase in tuition fees. The first, as highlighted by Benton (2016), is that parents may want to have input into the type of course their child selects due to the increased cost of such courses if they are paying for the course. Secondly, and most importantly, students without much parental support are leaving university with considerably larger sums of debt, and this debt may be having a negative effect on alumni reports of personal wellbeing (Gleeson, 2018).

This essay has determined that there are three primary reasons for the recent popularity in introducing foundation-year programmes. The first motivation discussed is supporting students with the linguistic demands of studying in a foreign language, in which it would appear that the foundation year has had a positive effect in reducing student anxiety and dropout rates in this matter. The second motivation is likely regarding student understanding of cultural differences, and this would certainly appear to be evident in the fact that non-native students today have much more appropriate expectations of their tutors. The final aspect, however, has not had such positive results. As is commonly the case for most businesses in the 21st century, the need to increase profit margins may be driving universities to introduce more and more foundation-year programmes, which appears to not

only be having a negative effect on student-parent relationships, but has also meant that students have become burdened with increasingly larger debts and financial stress. Whether or not U.K. and U.S. universities in particular will consider lowering their fees to alleviate these problems remains to be seen. Word count: 890

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Essay Genres 1 – Problem & Solution

What are the main problems associated with air quality in developing countries, and how might these issues be resolved?

Air is typically defined as being polluted when an excess of gases, particles and compounds are detected in the Earth's atmosphere at levels that cause harm to human life and the Earth's ecosystems. Not only are gases such as carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide likely responsible for climate change, but when combined with other pollutants such as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), air pollution may account for approximately seven million premature deaths annually (Smith, 2018). In addition to this, studies have indicated that children who are conceived in environments with high amounts of carbon and nitrogen are more likely to be born prematurely, develop autism or suffer more aggressively with respiratory conditions (Watson and Oliviar, 2017; Williams, 2018), highlighting the significance of the problem. While Europe and North America were producing approximately fifty million tonnes of sulphur dioxide per year during their peak in the 1970s, due to economic, political and technological developments, this figure had dropped to less than twenty million by 2016 (HWO, 2017). Asia, however, with its recent and exponential economic growth, is now producing almost sixty million tonnes of sulphur dioxide annually (ibid.) and is the largest emitter of carbon monoxide and dioxide from both factories and vehicles (Smith, 2018). Focusing on emissions from transportation and industry, this essay explores the key technological and political policies that could be implemented to help resolve the current global air pollution crisis.

As a result of fewer regulations in fuel and vehicle quality and significantly higher populations, many Asian city centres have now become toxic to human health (Williams, 2018). Since 2002, Delhi, Dhaka and Beijing have all reportedly seen mortality rates from lung cancer double even though the number of cigarette smokers has in fact declined (Yuang, 2012). One solution to this problem may be to replace fossil-fuel powered transportation with greener, renewable alternatives (HWO, 2017). In economically wealthier regions of China, a drive to upgrade to electric vehicles, both public and private, has in fact seen 'significant improvement in local air quality' (Lee and Shuang, 2016, p. 223). However, to enforce and implement this in more economically deprived cities will likely be a challenge due to the costs of those upgrades, although the price of an electric scooter has proven affordable on basic Chinese salaries (Lee and Shuang, 2016) and could benefit countries such as India and Pakistan. Greener energy policies will nevertheless need to be extended to include public buses and trains as well as private vehicles. To achieve this, Asian

governments will have to financially enforce and support these policies as well as encourage private sectors to invest in transportation initiatives, as was successful in Europe (Desmond, 2005). Although such procedures may be costly in the short term, these costs will likely be offset by the reduction in health-related issues. Ultimately, urban centres with high population densities perhaps have little choice but to enforce the technological solutions that can decrease the impact of transportation on air quality.

Another aspect of air pollution that requires both economic and technological intervention is industry. Mining, chemical and ore manufacturing, and factories which produce products purely for consumerist needs, are examples of some of the worst air polluters. Due to economic and social conditions, approximately 65% of these industries are concentrated in developing countries (Smith, 2018). To assist these industries in reducing their high levels of pollution, two approaches have been advocated by the US Department of Air Cleaning (2013).

The first approach is to assess an organisation's division of labour structure and its productivity. Companies in the US have reported saving thousands of dollars and have simultaneously reduced their emissions simply by ensuring that their company is running to optimum efficiency (ibid). This is not only a cost-effective solution, but it is achievable without the intervention of any government. The only drawback is that such improvements will likely require CEOs and senior management to have expert knowledge, to be aware of the most effective models for productivity and to be willing to train and educate their workforce in methods of reaching optimum efficiency.

The second potentially effective approach is the use of technology to eradicate industry-produced pollutants before they enter the atmosphere (US Department of Air Cleaning, 2013). To achieve this, businesses are now able to choose from a selection of industrial filters that work to oxidize harmful chemicals, such as catalytic oxidizers, which are reportedly 90% effective at breaking down VOCs (Cowes, 2000). However, industries which have boomed in developing regions are likely to have lower quality equipment and relatively unchecked regulatory practices. Therefore, dealing with air pollution from industries in this manner will probably require further top down measures and policies that can create trained and trusted regulatory bodies to maintain safety and quality procedures. Lee and Shuang (2016) highlight that such standards are only possible once a society and its government are economically strong enough to invest and maintain green practices. An immediate solution instead might be to introduce simple but affordable household purifiers. Such technology is widely used in homes across China and is generally of reasonable value (Williams,

2018), although such a solution arguably passes the responsibility of air purification onto the general population and is very much limited to indoor spaces.

This essay highlights how the problem of air pollution has shifted in recent years from the more economically stable regions to those that are still growing. Focusing specifically on transportation and industry, numerous solutions have been provided in order to combat these issues. Essentially, it has been argued in this paper that a top down approach is required in developing countries. Without the economic and policy-making support of the controlling authorities, it is perhaps unlikely that individuals and companies will self-enforce costly changes or have the knowledge or skills to adapt their practices. Although it is evident that such changes may be financially challenging in the short term, the long-term reduction in health-related strains on medical facilities and the increase in industrial productivity will hopefully offset any financial losses and in fact create a more economically prosperous future. Certainly, the current quality of life for those living in polluted regions is not positive. Short-term losses should perhaps be considered against the value of life and the basic human right to breathe clean air.

Word Count: 1,041

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Check your understanding

Problem-Solution essay

- a) A developing country is a country which is trying to become more advanced for example economically, socially, or perhaps environmentally as the article suggests. The article gives examples of India and Pakistan.
A developed country is a country which is considered to have a stronger or more stable economy than developing countries, and is more advanced. The article gives examples of continents such as North America and Europe

For more information on developed and developing countries, please see the United Nations' (2019) report:

https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2019_BOOK-ANNEX-en.pdf

- b) The problems in Essay 1 will be outlined in Task 6 of the Language Focus lesson on Problems and Solutions
- c) The solutions in Essay 1 will be outlined in Task 6 of the Language Focus lesson on Problems and Solutions

Cause-Effect essay

- a) A foundation-year programme is a one-year course before a degree to prepare students for their course regarding gaps in knowledge needed to do the course, or an opportunity for language development for non-native students specifically for their degree.
- b) The causes in Essay 2 will be given in Task 13 of the Language Focus lesson on Causes and Effects
- c) The effects in Essay 2 will be given in Task 14 of the Language Focus lesson on Causes and Effects