Relationship between Students Adjustment Factors and Cross Cultural Adjustment: A Survey at the Northern University of Malaysia

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Abstract: Internationalization in higher learning education has become an increasingly important issue in most countries around the world, of which Malaysia is no exception. Over the past two decades, the international activities of most universities have expanded in volume, scope and complexity. Besides, the increasing numbers of international students from different countries in University Utara Malaysia have inspired the researcher to explore their cultural adjustment in this university. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate a range of variables that seem to affect the process of adjustment of international students in University Utara Malaysia. The populations for this research were the international students in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). A total of 186 students have been selected as respondents. It was found that there are no significant differences in terms of cross cultural adjustment between genders. Whereas, travel experience, level of education, and language proficiency contributed significantly to the differences in cross-cultural adjustment among respondents. Research also found that there is significant relationship between academic factor, personal-emotion as well as environmental factor and cross cultural adjustment. Based on the findings, a few suggestions were made for improvement in university support to facilitate international students' cultural adjustment.

Keywords: Host country, international students, cultural adjustment, sojourners, support

1. Introduction

People who live in a foreign country may face problems of adjustment. International students are not exempted from this process. Understanding the process of adjustment is very important to the success of this sojourner population. From the arrival of international students in the host country, they will encounter many different and unexpected problems. Students may need to adjust to a new educational system, which differs considerably from the methods of study in their own country (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005). There can be some difficulties in adjustment for the foreigner in obtaining suitable accommodation and desired food, whether for religious or personal reasons. There could be the probability that the host country may not provide sufficient support for the overseas students.

Recent research suggested that foreign students' adjustment is influenced by various cross-cultural variables, such as the amount of contact with host nationals, length of residence, finance, and accommodation. Furthermore, previous studies have suggested that the adjustment

of international students differs according to the country of origin and country of study. In addition, a range of economic and psycho-social factors that affected adjustment has also been identified in the previous research ((Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005; Misra & Castillo, 2004). According to Misra and Castillo (2004), all international students go through the process of adjusting to a new educational system and social environment. Adjustment to these new environments can be a stressful process (Li & Gasser, 2005) since they have to adapt to new cultural values, foods, weather, etc.

Although previous studies have explored adjustment through the measurement of one or a limited number of variables, this study tries to investigate a range of variables that seem to affect the process of adjustment of international students in Malaysia. Thus, the present study examines the relationship between academic style, socio-cultural factors, personal emotion, environment and intercultural communication apprehension with cross-cultural adjustment among foreign students at The Northern University of Malaysia (University Utara Malaysia, UUM).

2. Problem Statement

Over the past two decades, the international activities of most universities have expanded in volume, scope and complexity. More signs of internationalization are visible today as more students study abroad. More universities from developed countries establish offshore centers in developing countries and more for-profit providers begin to provide education programs on a global scale. International students are defined as "… individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their country of citizenship in order to participate in international educational exchange as students" (Paige, 1990, cited in Lin & Yi, 1997).

The influx of international students in universities has various benefits. For instance, in economic aspects, it not only profits the economy of students' countries of origin and the host countries' economy but also the international students and local students themselves (Pandian, 2008). In addition, international students also contribute to the diversity of higher educational institutions by creating a cultural learning environment for domestic students.

However, this scenario also triggers challenges as well as opportunities in addressing the issues of diversity in educational institutions. While international students provide good opportunities for cross cultural learning and communication, they also may face many barriers that hinder their learning experiences (Pandian, 2008). As noted by Tepeci and Barlett (2002), this culturally heterogeneous group of international students has a tendency to experience various dilemmas in their educational ventures, new environment, and psychological and social context. Due to their differences in cross-cultural educational background, international students pursuing their studies in a foreign country found that interacting with local students and host environments are potentially challenging (Pandian, 2002).

This statement was supported by Furham (2004), who found that American students who travelled to another country faced difficulties over academic issues, language, housing, economic issues, their inability to become socially accepted, health and recreation issues, and racial prejudice. Most of the foreign students feel that they stand as a 'minority' and inferior to the new community at universities. Hence, it is important for them to adjust to the new

culture accordingly, which will help them to operate effectively in whatever condition. There are many factors that need to be adjusted by them in the new country such as academic style, environment, social-cultural factors, emotions, communication apprehension and also sense of belonging to their universities.

As internationalization in higher learning education is becoming a new trend nowadays, the issues of adjustment among the international students should be highlighted as well. How far have these students adjusted themselves to the new environment? And what are the possible factors that may help or hinder them from effectively adjusting in the new place? The issue of cross-cultural adjustment among the international students has become a subject for debate. Much of the literature and exploration of global student mobility is centred on documenting and observing the big five providers of the US, the UK, France, Germany and Australia. As mentioned earlier, there are also other entrants in what is seen as global competition. Malaysia has directly benefitted from the shift in preference away from the US and UK in the aftermath of the September 11th, 2001, attacks on New York. The combined effect of visa restrictions and increased scrutiny of applicants as well as anxieties about the spread of "Islamophobia" and the harassment of Muslims has enabled alternative destination to emerge. As a nation with a large Muslim population and a reputation as a safe destination, Malaysia has become active in attracting international students.

The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education has made a recent move to transform the landscape of tertiary education, where one main thrust aims to intensify internationalization and ensure 10%-30% enrollment of international students. This is proved by the vision of the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education when it had announced its ambition to increase the intake of international students to 60,000 by 2008. In order to highlight Malaysia as a top-notch global educational system in line with its Internationalization Program, the place for international students must increase annually.

The paper by Morshidi Sirat *September 11 and International Student Flows to Malaysia: Lesson Learned*, explores these changes and the way in which Malaysia, once a sending country, has now shifted to becoming a country receiving students to the extent that it can now be considered a "medium level" competitor. The author argues that while the growth has been rapid, its sustainability is dependent on a range of factors that include growing competition from new competitors in the Middle Eastern nations such as Bahrain, United Emirates, Oman and Qatar as well as incentives to students in such countries as Japan. Morshidi Sirat (2008) also argues that the success of Malaysia is related to streamlining bureaucracy and providing autonomy that can enable providers to respond to rapidly changing market conditions more effectively.

Given this large number of international students, greater attention has been directed toward the adjustment of students from abroad to Malaysia (Ambigapathy, 2008; Morshidi, 2008; Yusliza, 2010; Yusliza & Shakar, 2010; Yusliza, 2011).   Although the number of international students on campuses continues to increase, only a limited number of recently published studies have examined this topic in Malaysia (Yusliza, 2011).

Taking this into consideration, this study is trying to explore the factors that may affect the cross cultural adjustment among international students at UUM. In addition, this study also tries to clarify whether demographic factors also affected their adjustment in the new

country. This study was designed to address the following **research questions:** (1) Is there any difference in terms of cross-cultural adjustment among students of different demographic background? And, (2) Is there any relationship between students' adjustment factors and the cross-cultural adjustment among the international students in UUM?

3. Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to investigate a range of variables that seem to affect the process of cross-cultural adjustment among the international students in UUM. The specific objectives of this research are:
1) To identify the differences in terms of demographic factors such as gender, level of education, language proficiency and travelling experience and the cross-cultural adjustment among international students at UUM.
2) To examine the relationship between students' adjustment factors such as academic factor, cultural-social factor, personal-emotional factor, environmental factor and intercultural communication apprehension factor with the cross-cultural adjustment of international students at UUM.

4. Literature Review

Adjustment is a complex and multi-faceted concept. It refers to the dynamic processes that can ultimately lead to achievement of an appropriate fit between the person and the environment (Ramsay, Jones & Barker 2007). For students, the period of transition to university represents a separation from patterns and norms associated with experiences, which in the behavioral pattern of the university context have not been established fully (Milem & Berger, 1997). There are a variety of ways in which to go about identifying students who are having trouble adjusting to college. For instance, adjustment may be measured by acquiring students' self-reports of their attachment to a university, participation in campus activities, psychological well-being, and academic standing. Most researchers who study adjustment would advocate that all such indicators be used simultaneously so that a more comprehensive picture of a student's adjustment can be obtained (Spady, 1971; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1996). In fact, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) is a self-report instrument created with the intention of capturing such a multifaceted view of adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

There have been various studies that stressed the cases that were faced by the international students who failed to adapt in their new country. For example, Sadhu and Asrabadi (1994) studied the case of 128 international students who were stressed because of perceived deprivation\alienation, loneliness\homesickness, hate, fear, stress due to change, and guilt because of not being able to adapt to the new environment in the host country.

Research by Neuliep and McCroskey (cited in McCroskey, 1977) found that sojourners who cannot communicate effectively in their new host country tend to be more passive and engage in communication with others less than the norms. Symptoms of communication apprehension were identified as feeling hopeless, frustrated, shameful, stupid, less assertive, having low self-esteem, and being overly sensitive to criticism. These traits can lead to depression if not treated

(McCroskey, 1977).

Cross-cultural adjustment was redefined as the process through which an individual acquires an increasing level of fitness and compatibility in the new culture, including adaptation to culture shock, psychological adaptation and interaction effectiveness (Kim, 1988; Chen, 1990). Furham and Bochner (1986) indicated that in order to acclimatize to a new culture, sojourners have to reduce the symptoms of culture shock that are caused by the feeling of anxiety, discomfort, embarrassment and uneasiness when they interact with the host nationals. Furham and Bochner further indicated that effective social and communication skills such as managing friendship, understanding others and being assertive are the key to reduction of these symptoms in the process of cross-cultural adjustment (Chen, 1990).

Baker and Siryk (1999) identified four factors that influence the cross-cultural adjustment among foreign students in the host country. These are: academic factor, social-cultural factor, personal-emotion factor and environment factor.

A study conducted by Lin and Yi (1997) showed that academic difficulties are positively correlated with adjustment. Many students who go to the United States find it is very difficult to adjust to the English language and educational system. They have difficulty adjusting to the various accents of the instructors along with their different styles. Besides, they also have difficulty understanding class lectures, making them feel reluctant to participate in class discussion. Moreover, students find the text constructions difficult to comprehend. Those who have English as a second language often require extra time to read their text books. Further, they are often unable to articulate their knowledge on essay exams or research papers due to their limited vocabulary.

Research conducted by Sodjakusumah and Hans (1996) found that the major source of problems faced by Indonesian students in Canada and New Zealand was caused by interaction with members of the host society. Indonesian students in New Zealand admitted that it was not easy to make friends with the New Zealand students. Barriers to active interaction with host nationals, among others, were language (especially the use of slang) and the drinking habits. Different lifestyle, age differences from their classmates, and negative perceptions by New Zealand students of international students were some factors which discouraged Indonesian students from making friends with them.

Research by Burke (1990 cited in Daly and Brown (2004) found that only 15% of overseas students at an Australian University counted local students among their close friends, and this pattern continued a decade later with Smart, Volet and Ang (2000) noting that none of the eight international students interviewed in their study had Australian friends. Comparable findings were reported by Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) in their investigation of friendship pattern of overseas-born students at the University of Hawaii, and also by research studies in the United Kingdom (Bocher, Hutnik & Furham, 1985; Daly & Brown, 2004). Between 17 and 70% of participants in these two studies indicated that they did not have friends from the host-cultural group.

Lin and Yi (1997) noted that international students face their own problems. These are the same problems that confront anybody living in a foreign culture, such as discrimination, language problems and accommodation difficulties, financial stress, misunderstanding, and loneliness. Exposure to an unfamiliar environment can create anxiety, confusion and

depression. These conditions can lead to complaints of nervousness, loneliness, insomnia and physical illness. All of this appears to interfere with their studies, friendship, and so on.

Another important factor that leads to personal-emotion problems is homesickness. They often feel homesick for their ethnic cuisine. Also, due to the fear of failure to perform, many international students develop performance anxiety and depression, but their problems are often manifested as psychosomatic complaints such as sleep disturbances, eating problems, stomachache, etc.

Guridham (1999) stressed that the ability to deal with and/or manage emotional reactions in interactions with people from another culture is vital to successful adjustment. Anxiety and stress are natural reactions to interacting intensively with members of other cultures or living in another culture. Everyone experiences them to some degree. The degree to which someone adjusts depends upon how they cope with the stress and anxiety, not whether they experience them.

The previous research also stated that environment is an important conditioner of culture (Meggers, 1954; Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). This is because the environment also influences the process of adjustment among the international students who study abroad. In the mixed nature of environment in which many strangers find themselves, three environmental conditions are identified in the present theory as affecting the individual strangers' adjustment process: (a) host receptivity (b) host conformity pressure, and (c) ethnic group strength (Wiseman, Guttfreud & Itamar, 1995).

In terms of demographic factors, the previous research has shown that there are significant differences between the demographic factors and cross cultural adjustment. In this study, the researcher also focuses on some demographic factors such as gender, travelling experience, levels of education and language proficiency.

Some researchers noted that adjustment toward the culture is mainly dependent on gender; for example, females were found to be more favorable toward the Dutch culture than males (Ghaffarian, 1987; Ouarasse & Vijver, 2005). However, this is contrary to the findings by Ouarasse and Vijver (2005) which found no gender differences in the adjustment of Moroccan people in the Netherlands.

As for travelling experience, research showed that students who had previously spent between three and twelve months abroad felt they were better able to facilitate the communication and were more aware of themselves and culture (Abel, 2008). Others have linked prior experience with work adjustment (Black, 1988); interaction adjustment (Yavas & Bodur, 1999) and general adjustment (Parker & McEvoy, 1993). To some extent, prior research has indicated that previous travel experience was not a predictor of study abroad participation. Yet, in other studies, travel experience was found to be associated with study abroad as well as sojourners' greater perceived intercultural competence (Goldstein & Kim, 2006).

In general, previous research indicates that foreign students tend to experience a magnification of common student problems, e.g., personal doubts about academic ability, difficulties with academic work, social isolation, homesickness and support needs (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Mullins, Quintrell & Hancock, 1995). Furthermore, while international students may have friendships and academic supports within their cultural groups, many do not appear to make viable links with local students, which can limit their access to support

within and beyond the university and impede the acquisition of important culturally specific information, with a negative impact on adjustment outcomes (Volet & Ang, 1998; Furnham, 2004). Additionally, a study conducted at Universiti Putra Malaysia on Indonesian students revealed that students who are unable to adapt to the new culture suffered higher stress level and tended to adjourn their studies to go back to their hometown for a while (Hayani, 2004). Therefore, understanding cross-cultural adjustment is an important key for the international students to ensure that they can get the best experience and enjoy their learning in the new different environment.

Based on the literature reviewed, we can also conclude that the field of international students' adjustment has done tremendous work examining various factors, antecedents, determinants, and outcomes and has led the way in the area of multiculturalism on university campuses. However, based on the literature reviewed, relatively little is known about students' learning experiences at university in a Malaysian context. Recently, the need to examine factors that facilitate or impede foreign students in Malaysian contexts has also been highlighted (Yusliza, 2011), while strong arguments have been made for a more detailed analysis of the needs of international students, along with more proactive strategies to assist them (Furham 2004). This study is an attempt to fill in a gap in international students' adjustment literature, especially in Malaysian contexts.

5. Research Hypotheses

Several hypotheses were formulated for this study:
H1: There is a significant difference between genders in terms of cross-cultural adjustment.
H2: There is a significant difference between levels of adjustment among respondents who have different travelling experiences.

H3: There is a significant difference between level of education and cross-cultural adjustment.
H4: There is a significant difference between level of language proficiency and cross-cultural adjustment.
H5: There is a relationship between academic adjustment, social-cultural factor, personal-emotional factor, environmental factor, and intercultural communication apprehension and cross-cultural adjustment.

6. Method

The method employed in this study was quantitative design. According to Ipsos (2008), quantitative research is a method of study that aims to quantify attitudes or behavioral patterns, measure their underlying variables, compare responses and highlight correlation. This type of survey often involves questioning sample populations that are representative, so that the results can be extrapolated to the entire population studies. Therefore, this study was conducted by distributing questionnaires to the sample of population. The quantitative survey method is appropriate to obtain exact information from respondents in time. Questionnaires reduce bias given that the researcher's opinions will not influence respondents' answer to questions

in a certain manner, since there are no verbal or visual clues to influence them. Besides, the questionnaires are easy to analyze. Data entry and tabulation for nearly all surveys can be easily done with many computer software packages. When the respondents receive the questionnaire, they are free to complete the questionnaire on their own timetable.

6.1. Population and Sampling

The population for this research was international students at the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), The Northern University of Malaysia (Universiti Utara Malaysia, UUM). The total population was 368 and 186 students were selected as a sample. The sample size was chosen based on sample size determination introduced by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

From the 186 sets of questionnaires distributed by the researcher, 135 sets (constituting a sample of 36% of the total international student population at CAS) were returned. The participants in this research consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Besides, participants represented students from different countries such as the Middle East, Indonesia, China, Thailand, Somalia, etc.

The sampling technique used in this research was purposive sampling. This method required the researcher to select the sample that is known to possess a particular characteristic under investigation (Reinard, 2006).

6.2. Measures

The demographic variables measured were gender, level of education, and travelling experience. To assess the cross-cultural adjustment, this study employed an instrument proposed by Baker and Siryk (1999), Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)*. The questionnaires were administrated in English language. SACQ measured adjustment based on four factors:

1) Academic adjustment factor (11 items) which is designed to measure student success in coping with educational demand inherent in the college's experience (e.g., motivation to study, academic performance). Academic adjustment factor referred to various facets of the educational demands characteristic of the university experience. In this study, respondents are asked to evaluate their attitudes towards academic goals and academic work they are required to do (e.g., *I am bothered because I don't understand [what is going on] in my classes*); the effectiveness or sufficiency of their academic efforts (e.g., *I have lost confidence in my capability to continue my research and my studies at this university*); and the acceptability to them of their academic environment and what it is offering them (e.g., *The courses I am taking at this university are not useful for my research and study*). To answer these questions, respondents have to state their choice from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The alpha value for this dimension is 0.91.

2) Socio-cultural adjustment factor (9 items) measures a student's success in coping with interpersonal, social demands and the cultural values (social activities, relationship with others). In this study socio-cultural adjustment refers to the extent to which an individual

can fit in different aspects of the new culture. It is often measured in relation to the amount of difficulties or concerns experienced in the performance of daily tasks. Based on this research, respondents state their perception about their adjustment with the host culture and the way they socialize with the community in the host culture. It includes how they cope with social demand, interpersonal relationship and the cultural values in the host country. The alpha value for this dimension is 0.65.

3) Personal-emotional adjustment factor (9 items) measures a student's psychological and physical state during the adjustment process (e.g., tense, uncomfortable, homesick, etc.). Based on this study, personal-emotional adjustment factor is aimed at determining how the students feel both psychologically and physically, whether they are experiencing general psychological distress and its somatic accompaniments. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree of their emotion since the beginning of their stay in UUM. For instance, respondents were asked questions such as: "*I often feel homesick since I arrived here*" which referred to the psychological aspect and "*Lately, I can't sleep well because I am not feeling good here*," which referred to the physical aspect. From these questions, we know how the respondents perceive their personal emotion since they are in the new environment. The alpha value for this dimension is 0.91.

4) Environment adjustment factor focuses on a student's satisfaction with the host country experience in general and with the university he or she is attending in particular. In this research, the respondents were asked to indicate some degree of evaluation of specific aspects of the host country environment and the attachment to the university itself. University attachment refers to students' perception of the university environment and their expectations about the services provided (e.g., *I am satisfied with the services that are provided from the administration and staff in this university*) and facilities (e.g., *I am satisfied with the facilities that are provided in this university*). Whereas, in the aspects of the host country environment, the respondents need to state their perceptions about how they adjusted to the general environment in terms of food, financial circumstances and the assimilation with the host community in general. For instance, the respondents were asked questions such as, "*Sometimes, I feel bothered because I don't like Malaysian food*", "*I am in difficult financial circumstances because of the high rent and the high costs of living*" and "*I do not encounter problems with the community when using the public transport*". The alpha value for this dimension is 0.78.

5) Personal Reports of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) developed by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) was used to measure an individual's apprehension when interacting with a person from a different culture. Respondents were asked to answer the question about their ability and anxiety in communicating with people from different cultures. Examples of the questions asked are: "*I like to get involved in group discussion with others who are from different cultures*", " *I am tense and nervous while interacting with people from different cultures*", "*I have no fear of speaking up in a conversation with a person from a different culture*", etc. The alpha value for this dimension is 0.60.

6) Demographic questions are designed to get the information about the respondents' background such as gender, age, country of origin, levels of education, length of residence, language proficiency and the traveling experience.

6.3. Profile of Respondents

Demographic information of the respondents is summarized in Table 1. Out of 135 respondents who took part in the study, 70 respondents were male and 65 respondents were female, which demonstrate 51.9% and 48.1 % respectively. The findings also illustrated the distribution of age range among the respondents. Most of them fall into the age group of 20-25 years old contributing to 57% of the total sample population, followed by 50 (37%) in the range of 26-30 years old. Six of the respondents were in the age range of 31-35 years old (4.4%), while two of them were in the age range of 36 and above (1.5%). Looking at the country of origin of respondents, 36.3% of them were from Indonesia, 20% were from the Middle East, 14.1% from China, 8.1% from Thailand and 21.5% were from the other countries such as Somalia, Nigeria, and many more.

In terms of educational level, 48.1% were postgraduate (master's degree) students followed by the undergraduate students with 41.5%, and the rest were PhD students (10.4%). The results also illustrate the current year of study among respondents. Out of 135 respondents, 29.6% of them were in their first year, 55.6% of them were in their second year, and 14.8% of them were in their third year of study.

Approximately half of the respondents, 55.6% had stayed in Malaysia for 1 to 2 years. This was followed by 29.6% of them who had stayed for less than 1 year, and 14.8% who had stayed for 3 to 4 years. For the language proficiency, most of the respondents had a moderate proficiency in English (74.1%), followed by 22.2 % of them who were excellent in English, and 3.7% were poor in English language proficiency. However, 31.9% of them had moderate proficiency in the Malay language, 13.3% of the respondents had excellent proficiency in Malay and 54.8% were poor in Malay language. The traveling experience among the respondents was also assessed by the researcher. More than half of the respondents, which represents 62.2% of them, had traveling experiences before they came to study at UUM, while 37.8% of them did not have any traveling experience.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Respondents (n=135)

Variables Percentages (%)		No. of Respondents (n)	
Gender	Male	70	51.9
	Female	65	48.1
Age	20-25	77	57
	26-30	50	37
	31-35	6	4.4
	36- above	2	1.5

Country of Origin	Middle East	27	20
	Indonesia	49	36.3
	China	19	14.1
	Thailand	11	8.1
	Others	29	21.5
Levels of Education	Undergraduate	56	41.5
	Master	75	48.1
	PhD	14	10.4
Current Year at University	First Year	40	29.6
	Second Year	75	55.6
	Third Year	20	14.8
Length of Residence	Below 1 Year	40	29.6
	1-2 Year	75	55.6
	3-4 Year	20	14.8
Language Proficiency	English		
	Excellence	30	22.2
	Moderate	100	74.1
	Poor	5	3.7
	Malay		
	Excellence	18	13.3
	Moderate	43	31.9
	Poor	74	54.8
Traveling Experiences	Yes	84	62.2
	No	51	37.8

7. Findings

In terms of gender and traveling experiences, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the cross-cultural adjustment between gender and also traveling experiences. The result tabulated in Table 2 indicates that there was no significant difference in the score for males and females (t=1.004, p<3.71). This implies that there was no dissimilarity in terms of cross-cultural adjustment for both male and female respondents. Therefore H1 was rejected.

The same analysis was conducted in order to look at the differences of the cross-cultural adjustment and traveling experiences. The result illustrated that there was a significant difference between respondents who have traveling experiences and respondents who have no traveling experiences (t=4.543, p<.000). Thus, H2 was accepted. The result signifies that those respondents who had traveling experiences, such as having studied abroad or lived in other

countries before they came to study at UUM, did quickly and well adjust to the new culture compared to those who were first timers.

Table 2. The Result of T-test in Gender and Traveling Experience

Variable		N	Mean	SD	t	p value
Gender	Male	70	37.3	7.09	-1.004	.317
	Female	65	38.6	7.59		
Traveling	Yes	84	40.0	6.45	4.543	.000*
Experience	No	51	34.4	7.48		

• Significance at p value <0.05

On the other hand, a one way ANOVA (Table 3) between group analysis of variance was conducted in order to explore the cross-cultural adjustment and the levels of education among the respondents. There is a statistically significant difference at p<.05 in the cross-cultural adjustment score for the three levels of education (f=3.195, p=0.044). Therefore H3 was accepted. This means that the processes of cross-cultural adjustment were varied across the different levels of education among the respondents.

The same analysis was done in order to look at the differences of language proficiency among the respondents. There were statistically significant differences at p<.05 in the cross-cultural adjustment scores for both English (f=8.968, p=0.000) and Malay language proficiency (f=12.636, p=0.000). Thus, H4 was supported. The result implies that those who have higher level of language proficiency can easily adapt to cross-cultural adjustment.

Table 3. The Result of ANOVA in Levels of Education and Language Proficiency

Dimensions	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Levels of Education				3.20	.044*
Between groups	333.52	2	166.76		
Within group	6889.41	132	52.19		
Language Proficiency					
English				8.97	.000*
Between groups	864.07	2	432.03		
Within groups	5358.87	132	48.17		
Malay Language					
Between groups	1164.43	2	580.72	12.65	.000*
Within groups	6061.50	132	45.92		

*Significance at p value <0.05

7.1. Relationship between Academic, Socio-cultural, Personal-emotion, Environmental Adjustment Factor and Intercultural Communication Apprehension Factor with CCA

Table 4 summarizes the correlations between the cross-cultural adjustments with Academic Factor, Socio-Cultural Factor, Personal-Emotion Factor, Environment Factor and Intercultural Communication Apprehension Factor. The process of cross–cultural adjustments is found to be positively strongly correlated with academic adjustment factor with (r=.480, p<0.01). Beside, strong positive correlations were also found between personal-emotion factor and environmental factor with (r=.344, p<0.01, r=.361, p<0.01) respectively. No correlation was noticed between the cross-cultural adjustment and socio-cultural factor and intercultural communication apprehension.

Table 4. The Result of Correlation among Students' Adjustment Factors

Variable		r	p value
Cross- Cultural Adjustment (CCA)	Academic Adjustment	480**	000
	Socio-Cultural	-.160	.064
	Personal-Emotion	.344**	.000
	Environmental	.361**	.000
	Intercultural Communication Apprehension	.123	.154

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

8. Discussion

In testing hypothesis one, it was found that there is no significant relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and gender. This showed that, there is no significant difference in the process of adjustment among the international students at UUM between males and females.

This finding supported some previous research which showed that gender is not a distinguishing factor for cross-cultural success. For instance, Parker and Mc Evoy (1993 cited in Gulick & Herman, 2007) showed that gender was not correlated with any of the three types of adjustment. Another study showed that male and female expatriates felt they were equally able to achieve their adjustment in the host country (Tung, 1998; Abbe, Gulick & Herman, 2007).

In terms of traveling and cross-cultural adjustment, it was found that there is a strong relationship between the cross-cultural adjustments with the traveling experience. This finding supports studies done by Hermbroff and Ruz (1993), who found previous travel experience within the United States to be inversely correlated with adjustment problems of U.S. students who had studied abroad (Goldstein & Kim, 2006). Besides, other studies found travel experience to be associated with adjustment as well as sojourners' greater perceived intercultural competence (Martin, 1987; Goldstein & Kim, 2006).

From this result we can see that traveling experiences are very important in order to help the international students adjust in their new environment. As Earley and Ang (2003) observe, a person adjusting to a foreign culture is very much like a student or learner trying to grapple with the new and unfamiliar situations or concepts (Gong & Fan, 2006).

Normally, the sojourners take time to adapt in their new place because there are many things that they need to learn. The students who had had the traveling experience more easily adjust and adapt in the host country. Kitsantas and Meyer (2001) noted that students who had studied abroad had increased levels of cross-cultural skills compared to students who had never studied abroad. From the findings of this present study, about 62.2% of respondents had traveling experience and most of them adjusted well with the environments at UUM. However, contrary to the present hypothesis, Kim and Goldstein (2005) found that students' previous international travel experience was unrelated to their adjustment in study abroad.

As for level of education and cross-cultural adjustment, the results found that there was a significant relationship between cross-cultural adjustment and level of education. Based on the analyses, the researcher found that most of Master's and PhD students easily adjust compared to the undergraduate students. This might be because these students already had prior experiences traveling abroad before they came to UUM.

The prior international experiences are very important in preparing individuals to work or study overseas (Abbe et al., 2007). Prior experience may facilitate an individual's ability to adjust and to cope in different situations. Empirical research has supported this rationale.

Studies have shown that students who had previously spent between three and twelve months abroad felt they were better able to use facilities of communication and were more aware of themselves and culture (Abbe et al., 2007; Martin, 1987). Others have linked prior experience with work adjustment (Black, 1988; Yavas & Bodur, 1999), interaction adjustment (Yavas & Bodur, 1999), and general adjustment (Parker & McEvoy, 1993). In addition, prior international experience may also improve training outcomes.

This study also found that strong significant relationship exists between the language proficiency and cross-cultural adjustment. In this study, researchers highlighted two languages, English and Malay. The result shows that the two languages had strong correlation values, which means that language proficiency influences the adjustment process among the international students at UUM. This finding was consistent with the research that has been done by Jou and Fukada (1996), which indicated that the proficiency in Japanese language played an important role in cross-cultural adjustment among Chinese students who studied in Japan. The greater the students' proficiency in the Japanese language, the better they adjusted to their environment. Elsewhere, Noels and Richard (1996) found that Chinese students registered at Canadian universities who had higher levels of contact with the Canadian society experienced better psychological adjustment, but this relation was partially mediated by their level of English self-confidence (Yang, Noels & Saumure, 2006).

Similar findings were reported in a study of French-Canadian high school and junior high school students vis-à-vis their adaptation to English–Canadian Society (Yang et al., 2006; Gaudet & Clément, 2004). Hence, it appears that communication variables, particularly proficiency in the host cultural language, are important mediating variables in determining the effect of contact with the host culture on adjustment.

The result from hypothesis five found that there is significant relationship between the cross-cultural adjustment and academic factor. The result from the analysis shows that cultural adjustment has a positive strong correlation with academic adjustment factor. This showed that the majority of the respondents are well adjusted with their academic system, academic environment and academic teaching style that are applied at UUM. The more they adjusted with the academic adjustment factor, the easier for them to adjust with the whole of the environment at UUM.

This finding supported the findings of the research done by Lin and Yi (1997) which stressed that academic difficulties are negatively correlated with adjustment. Meaning that, the foreign students who cannot adjust their academic system or learning style in their new environment tend to face difficulties in their adjustment. Another study conducted by Gong and Fan (2006) also supported this finding. They stated that academic adjustment is a part of the process that allows sojourners to focus and carry-through on academic activities.

An unexpected finding emerged in this present study. There was no significant correlation between the cross-cultural adjustment and social-cultural factor. This contradicts the findings by Jou and Fukada (1996) who report that there is a significant relationship between socio-cultural factor among the Chinese students in Japan with their adjustment there. Their finding showed that international students who have a strong relationship with the host country people tend to adjust their lives in the new country. However, from the present study we can see that socio-cultural factor did not affect the adjustment of international students at UUM.

In testing the hypothesis regarding personal-emotion factor and cross-cultural adjustment, it is found that there is a strong relationship between the cross-cultural adjustment and personal emotion. This result showed that the higher the value of personal-emotion factor tends to be, the greater the adjustment.

This result is consistent with the earlier research studies which have found that there is significant relationship between the emotional scale and the adjustment among the Chinese students in Japan (Jou & Fukada, 1996). Besides, other studies stated that Indonesian students who study in Canada tend to feel homesickness, loneliness and stress with new life in Canada. This situation makes them feel uncomfortable and they tend to withdraw from their studies (Evert & Sodjasukumah, 1996). From this evidence, we can see that the students who cannot cope with their personal emotion cannot adapt in their host culture. While the students who can cope positively with their personal emotion, would be better in their adjustment.

The result also shows that there was no statistical difference between cross-cultural adjustment and intercultural communication apprehension. This finding was supported by the research done by Goldstein and Kim (2006), which shows that there was no relationship between the PRICA and the adjustment among the international students at a college in the southwestern United States. Many researchers (Neuliep, Chadouir & McCroskey (2003); Linda, Virginia & McCroskey (2002); Toale & McCroskey (2001); Nancy, Vicki & McCroskey (2003); Virginia, Alan, Ralph, Smith Jr. & McCroskey (1998) have stressed that PRICA was very important in order to measure the communication effectiveness among the sojourners. However, attaining 'effectiveness' depends on the individual's effort to increase participation with members of the host country and to expose themselves to adapt to the intercultural interactions.

8.1. Implications

Specific recommendations derived from this study to universies include the following:

1) Offer multicultural training workshops to those who come into contact with international students to be more aware of intercultural and intracultural diversity and adjustment process and for more effectiveness in working with them. This will help to facilitate new levels of consciousness regarding concepts like racial, class, and gender equity in intercultural context among university staff especially who works at the international student's office.

2) Awareness about dependent and independent learning methods should be encouraged. This will probably help the international students to overcome their academic adjustment problems.

3) Provide a friendly atmosphere at the university and encourage host country students to have more interaction with international students. This will probably help the international students to overcome their emotion problems and knowing the local host better.

4) Providing assistance to international students requires taking into account cultural and religious restrictions, particularly in providing social and official receptions and leisure activities at the university to suit the needs of all students needs with different backgrounds. This supportive environment will also contribute in term of helping international students to adjust themselves better to the local culture.

8.2. Limitations

In discussing the results of the present paper, interpretations should be made with great caution on several counts. The first is related to the sample of the study. The result of this research cannot be generalized due to the fact that the sample was taken from one location, namely The Northern University of Malaysia (UUM). A second limitation of this study is that although a relationship was found between independent and dependent variables, a cross-sectional study is not able to assign cause-and-effect relationship between the variables. The third limitation of this study is that, the results cannot be generalized because all of the respondents in the sample are adjusting to only one particular culture: Malaysian culture. Another limitation of this study is that only a single research methodological approach that is, survey, was conducted, which may not have elicited informed or accurate responses as compared to other studies.

8.3. Suggestions for Future Research

The present study took place within one university, which limits generalisability. Future research would benefit from the examination of a broader range of contexts because experiences can differ across campuses and between countries. The present study captured perceptions at a particular point in time. More longitudinal research on a variety of samples is needed to more accurately map adjustment and support experiences over time. For future research, the researcher must increase the sample size of respondents. The emergence of limited findings in

this study could be because, this research only focused on the international students under the College of Arts and Sciences. The future research also can make a comparison group among the international students at UUM and the international students in other public universities in Malaysia such as Islamic International University Malaysia (IIUM). This future research may generate new findings that can extend this current research.

9. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between students' adjustment factors and cross-cultural adjustment in Malaysia. In general, the results indicated that there was a positive relationship between academic adjustment, personal-emotion and environmental factors with foreign students' adjustment at UUM. Overall, foreign students at UUM perceived that the support they received will also influence their adjustment to UUM.

Thus, an important finding in the present study relates to cross cultural adjustment. Given the benefits of support for physical and psychological well-being and adjustment, it is of concern that the majority of foreign students perceived the difference in terms of adjustment between those who have travelling experiences and those who did not. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between gender in relation to adjustment. However, the relative importance that foreign students placed on host language proficiency is noteworthy.

Besides, the findings of this study also indicated that there are several factors which most affected the process of adjustment of international students which consist of academic factor, personal-emotion factor and also the environment factor. These three factors had a strong relationship with the cross-cultural adjustment.

However, the other two factors such as intercultural communication apprehension and socio-cultural factors do not really affect the process of adjustment of international students at UUM. This might be because the communication pattern in Malaysian culture is more flexible and makes it easier for them to cope with and adjust to.

From these findings, it is evidenced that the researcher has accomplished the second objective of this study, namely, to examine the relationship between students' adjustment factors such as academic factor, cultural-social factor, personal-emotional factor, environmental factor and intercultural communication apprehension factor with the cross-cultural adjustment of international students at UUM.

There are several limitations to the present study which should be addressed in the future research. The small sample size of the study limits the statistical power. This study took the respondents that consist of international students under the College of Arts and Sciences only. It included the undergraduate, Master's and PhD candidates from different countries. Thus, future study with a larger sample is needed in order to be able to generalize the result to the general populations.

Overall, this study has added to our knowledge about the factors that affect the adjustment process among the international students in Malaysia. From this perspective, the researcher concludes that the language proficiency, traveling experience, level of education, academic factor, personal-emotion factor and environmental factor play vital roles in international students' cross-cultural adjustment at Universiti Utara Malaysia.

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