

การปรับตัวข้ามวัฒนธรรม: ความสำเร็จทางวิชาการและทางสังคมของ นักศึกษาจีนในวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งของประเทศมาเลเซีย

THE CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION: THE FACTORS AFFECTING ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL ACHIVEMENTS OF CHINESE STUDENTS IN A COLLEGE OF MALAYSIA

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาการปรับตัวข้ามวัฒนธรรมความสำเร็จด้านวิชาการและสังคมของนักศึกษาจีนในวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งของประเทศมาเลเซีย วัตถุประสงค์ของการศึกษาคือ (1) เพื่ออธิบายว่าทำไมนักศึกษาจีนจึงเลือกศึกษาต่อในประเทศอิสลาม เช่นประเทศมาเลเซีย และ (2) เพื่อศึกษาการปรับตัวของนักศึกษาจีนและวิเคราะห์ปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อความสำเร็จทางวิชาการและสังคมผลการสัมภาษณ์แสดงให้เห็นว่า (1) เหตุผลที่นักศึกษาจีนเลือกเรียนในประเทศมาเลเซีย ได้แก่ นโยบายหนึ่งแถบหนึ่งเส้นทาง การเปรียบเทียบค่าใช้จ่ายในการเรียนและการใช้ชีวิตในมาเลเซีย มีค่าใช้จ่ายความต้องการพัฒนาภาษาอังกฤษและประสบการณ์ในวัฒนธรรมอิสลาม (2) จากผลการวิเคราะห์การถดถอยพบว่า การปรับตัวทางจิตวิทยาและสังคม มีความสัมพันธ์อย่างมีนัยสำคัญกับความสำเร็จทางสังคมและวิชาการในด้านการปรับตัว ทางจิตวิทยาความพึงพอใจในชีวิตมีผลในเชิงบวกอย่างมีนัยสำคัญต่อความสำเร็จทางสังคมและวิชาการ ส่วนด้านการปรับตัวทางสังคมเพื่อนความสามารถในการหาเพื่อนและเครือข่ายมีอิทธิพลในเชิงบวกอย่างมีนัยสำคัญต่อความสำเร็จทางสังคมและวิชาการ

คำสำคัญ: นโยบายหนึ่งแถบหนึ่งเส้นทาง นักศึกษาจีน การปรับตัวข้ามวัฒนธรรม ความสำเร็จทางวิชาการและทางสังคม

Abstract

This research studies the cross-cultural adaptation, the academic and social achievements of Chinese students in a college of Malaysia. The objectives of the study are (1) to explain why Chinese students choose to study abroad in Islamic country as Malaysia, and (2) to study Chinese students' adaptations and analyze factors affecting their academic and social achievements. The results of interviewing show that (1) the reasons why Chinese students choose to study in Malaysia are "One Belt One Road" Policy, comparatively low expenditure of studying and living in Malaysia, willing to improve English, and experiencing Islamic culture. (2) From regression analysis, the results show that psychological and social adaptations have significantly correlated with social and academic achievements. In psychological adaptation, life satisfaction has significantly positive effect on social and academic achievements; in social adaptation, friends, ability to make friends, and networking have a significantly positive influence on social and academic achievements.

Keywords: One Belt One Road Policy, Chinese Students, Cross-cultural Adaptation, Academic and Social Achievements

Introduction

At present, China has become the world's largest exporter of overseas students as well as Asia's major destination for overseas students. The implementation of the strategy "One Belt One Road" is providing a good opportunity to promote the opening, exchange and integration of regional education. "One Belt One Road" involves the areas and scopes of countries that are able to receive more opportunities of cooperation, and so far, they are the directions of the current priority. Malaysia, as an important partner of China in Southeast Asia, is taking advantage of "One Belt One Road" (Hong, 2014). Malaysian government has made it clear that they will make use of the advantage of education in Malaysia to export education to China. Under the profound influence of the policy "One Belt One Road", the number of Chinese students studying in Malaysia has further increased, which is currently 16,842, accounting for 33% of the total amount of foreign students in Malaysia, still ranking the highest number of foreign students in Malaysia (Xu, 2015).

Malaysia is a multiconfessional country where the most recognized religion is Islam. By 2016, there were approximately 19.5 million Muslim adherents, accounting for 61.3% of the total population. It is known that Islam is an integral part of the Malaysian culture, so that many Islamic rituals and practices are associated with the Malaysian culture (Chao, 2017). Under such circumstances, Chinese overseas students will live in a new environment and experience Islamic culture, which will cause cross-culture difficulties to them. Practically, this research study can provide a platform for all Chinese international students to share their common or different experiences of cross-cultural adaptation. On the one hand, these valuable experiences can help those who are studying abroad learn from others' strong points and offset ones' own weaknesses so as to finally achieve the uttermost outcome of cross-cultural adaptation. And these precedent experiences can help those who are studying at home but planning to go abroad make full and sound preparation for their future sojourning from both behavioral and psychological perspectives. On the other hand, this study helps organizations of university in Malaysia and China, especially, international office to improve cross-culture management ability to help Chinese students adapt to Malaysia. In this study, the factors that affect student's academic and social achievement are not only their psychological adaptation: emotion, mental health and life satisfaction; but also their social adaptation: friends, the ability to make friends and networking. The factors which affect the students' academic and social achievement will summarize strategies to help the students resolve culture shock and better adapt to local culture and environment in psychological, social and culture fields. And give cross-culture recommendations to international offices of university both in China and Malaysia to better help Chinese students to adapt to Malaysia.

Objectives:

- (1) To explain why Chinese students choose to study abroad in Islamic country as Malaysia;
- (2) To study Chinese students' adaptations and analyze factors affecting their academic and social achievements.

Review of Literature

The theoretical background will be well expounded concerning theories on the cross-cultural adaptation and its application to Chinese students' adjustment to new environment while studying in Malaysia.

Theoretically, this study emphasizes and manifests the importance of cross-cultural adaptation theories in modern academic fields by elaborately reviewing a lot of literature and illustrations. The U-Curve of Lysgaard (1955) shows that cross-cultural adaptation begins with an initial honeymoon period, that is, it starts with going through many new and fresh feelings brought about by new cultures, and as it is fresh to immerse into this new culture, it changes gradually from resentment, adaptability decline, and then to a higher level of cultural adaptation. In this study, the cultural adaptation model proposed by Ward (1996) is also mainly adopted. The model classifies cross-cultural adaptation into two aspects: social adaptability (behavioral level) and psychological adaptability (emotional level). The former refers to the ability to blend into a new culture, which enables international students to acquire cultural skills and behave properly in the environment of a host country. The latter refers to individuals' psychological well-being or satisfaction. Therefore, from the behavioral level of skills, social and cultural adaptation is more affected by factors affecting acquisition of social skills; the factors mentioned above are also the main focus of this paper.

Methodology

Objective 1:

The qualitative research method applied to understand the reasons why Chinese students want to study in Islamic country. Through in-depth-interview and focus group interview of 12 Chinese students who have been studied in university of Malaysia for over 3 months, we will find the main reasons why they want to go to study in Islamic country.

Objective 2:

The quantitative research method applied to study the factors which affect the students' academic and social achievements, this study proposed four hypotheses as follows:

- H₁: Psychological adaptation has a positive effect on social achievement;
- H₂: Psychological adaptation has a positive effect on academic achievement;
- H₃: Social adaptation has a positive impact on social achievement;
- H₄: Social adaptation has a positive impact on academic achievement.

Sampling Procedures

The participants of the study are selected from undergraduates involved in long-term programs that have registered or stayed for more than 3 months in a college in Malaysia. So far, there are 204 Chinese students who are studying in this college. Besides, the participants need to be proficient in oral speeches, which are determined by informal conversations, willingness to participate and what's more. The interview should be allowed to be recorded. The researcher used accidental sampling method.

To decide the actual sample size of the respondents, Taro Yamane's formula is utilized. Based on which the population size of the target respondents, the sample size will be 200 Chinese students.

Reliability and Validity

The results of the reliability analysis show that the reliability of each level or structure is greater than 0.7, indicating that the reliability of the level or the structure is high. The reliability of the overall influencing factor scale is 0.86, indicating the reliability is satisfying.

Validity analysis

The results of the validity analysis show that the KMO is 0.750 greater than 0.7, indicating that the scale is suitable for factor analysis. The corresponding P values of the Bartlett sphericity test are less than 0.01, Therefore, Bartlett sphericity detection is of great significance, and it is very suitable for factor analysis.

Regression

In this study, regression analysis aims to test whether there are relationships between psychological adaptation; social adaptation and social and academic achievements for Chinese students studying in Malaysia.

Analysis and Results

Objective 1: To find out the reasons why Chinese students want to study abroad in Islamic country.

The qualitative research method will be applied in the first part of the research, especially, focus-group interview and in-depth interview conducted several questions for the research question. The results show that the important reasons are:

(1) "One Belt One Road" Policy

Many students said that they chose Malaysia because they saw the opportunity of China's Belt and Road initiative, which greatly increased the cultural and economic cooperation between China and Malaysia. Many Chinese students apply for majors including management, marketing and Malay language. The initiative allows more Chinese to become familiar with Belt and Road countries and makes it possible for not just the rich to access overseas studies, ASEAN states are the core of the Belt and Road countries, and Chinese students studying in these countries can boost educational cooperation, cultural communication, tourism and economic ties between China and these countries, compared with the mainstream destinations for overseas studies such as the US and UK. Chinese enjoy a higher political status in ASEAN countries. Many Chinese can easily find jobs after finishing their further studies in those countries, and some may even enter the political arena.

(2) Improving English

Most of interviewed Chinese students told that their English have been improved a lot since they studied in Malaysia and can communicate with others fluently. But before that, they can hardly understand what teachers were talking about. English is a major course in elementary and middle schools in China, but much attention has been paid to the cultivation of exam-oriented ability rather than the more important listening and speaking. The language training and exams such as IELTS and TOEFL for students before going abroad mainly focus on listening and writing, leaving the testing of oral communication skills aside.

(3) Comparatively low expenditure of studying and living in Malaysia

The responds also indicated that the expenditure of studying and living in Malaysia is comparatively low to countries like Australia, US, UK, France, Canada, etc. as the Malaysian currency conversion is advantageous. The cheapness of tuition and living expenses has always

been Malaysia's competitive weapon in the international currency market. International students can live comfortably with just RM1100 a month, inclusive of food, accommodation and other daily expenses. It is also an attraction to many other students from non-English-speaking countries. In addition, with the development of the Chinese economy, more and more middle-class families have a certain foundation to go abroad.

(4) Experience new Culture

The participants valued the opportunity that allowed them to experience a different culture and lifestyle, as well as pursue advanced knowledge. Malaysia can say is typically a very pluralistic society, to some extent, can be said that Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural world which is a complex consisting of miniature.

Objective 2: To study Chinese students' adaptations and analyze factors affected their academic and social achievements.

Demographic characteristics of sample population

A demographic variable questionnaire prepared by the researcher is used in order to determine certain independent variables, namely: gender, religion, English level before arriving in Malaysia. A total of 200 valid questionnaires are collected for this research. The results show that 83 men (41.50%) and 117 women (58.50%) have no religious beliefs. When it comes to religions, the vast majority of Chinese students do not have religious beliefs. According to the survey on the English level of Chinese students before studying abroad, it is found that most of the Chinese students are of medium English proficiency, accounting for 58.5% of the total, while the number of Chinese students of poor English proficiency accounts for 35%.

Hypothesis:

H1: Psychological adaptation has a positive effect on Social Achievement.

H1a: Emotion has a positive effect on Social Achievement;

H1b: Mental Health has a positive effect on Social Achievement;

H1c: Life Satisfaction has a positive effect on Social Achievement;

Analysis of the Influence of Different Dimensions of Psychological Adaptation on Social Achievement

Take "Emotion", "Mental Health" and "Life Satisfaction" as independent variables and "Social Achievement" as dependent variable, and the results of regression analysis are shown in the following table (Table 1).

The corresponding significance level value of "Emotion" is 0.109, larger than 0.05, which does not reach the significant level. It shows that "emotion" has no significant effect on "Social Achievement", assuming that H1a is rejected; The non-standardized regression coefficients of "Mental Health" and "Life Satisfaction" are 0.182 ~ 0.183 and 0.207 ~ 0.183 respectively. The significant level P value of the two predictive variables is 0.006 and 0.015 ($p < 0.05$), which has reached the significant level of 0.05, indicating "Mental Health" and "Life Satisfaction" has a significantly positive effect on "Social Achievement".

Table 1 The Relationship between Social Achievement and Each Dimension of Psychological Adaptation

	Calibration variable: social achievements			t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.322	.493		4.708	.000		
Emotion	.167	.104	.108	1.610	.109	.997	1.003
Mental Health	.182	.065	.207	2.779	.006	.811	1.232
Life Satisfaction	.183	.074	.183	2.466	.015	.813	1.229
R2				0.119			
F				8.803**			

Hypothesis:

H2: Psychological adaptation has a positive effect on Academic Achievement;

H2a: Emotion has a positive effect on Academic Achievement;

H2b: Mental health has a positive effect on Academic Achievement;

H2c: Life Satisfaction had a positive effect on Academic Achievement;

Analysis of the Influence of Different Dimensions of Psychological Adaptation on Academic Achievement

Take "Emotion", "Mental Health" and "Life Satisfaction" as independent variables and "Academic Achievement" as dependent variable, and the results of regression analysis are shown in the following table (Table 2).

The corresponding significance level value of "Emotion" and "Mental Health" is 0.691 and 0.124, ($p > 0.05$) respectively, which does not reach the significant level. It shows that "Emotion" and "Mental Health" have no significant effect on "Academic Achievement". The non-standardized regression coefficients of "life satisfaction" is 0.204, whose significant level was 0.006 ($p < 0.01$), reaching the significant level at 0.01, indicating "Life Satisfaction" had a significantly positive effect on "Academic Achievement".

Table 2 The Relationship between Academic Achievement and Each Dimension of Psychological Adaptation

	Calibration variable: Academic achievements			t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.680	.490		5.467	.000		
Emotion	.041	.103	.027	.397	.691	.997	1.003
Mental Health	-.100	.065	-.118	-1.545	.124	.811	1.232
Life Satisfaction	.204	.074	.210	2.757	.006	.813	1.229
R2				0.079			
F				5.638**			

Hypothesis:

H3: Social adaptation has a positive impact on Social Achievement;

H3a: Friends have a positive impact on Social Achievement;

H3b: Ability to make friends has a positive impact on Social Achievement;

H3c: Networking has a positive impact on Social Achievement;

Analysis of the Influence of Social Adaptation Dimensions on Social Achievement

Take "Friends", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" as independent variables and "Social Achievement" as dependent variable, and the results of regression analysis are shown in the following table (Table 3).

The significant level of the corresponding values of "Friends", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" is 0.010, 0.008, 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) respectively, which has reached a significant level of 0.05. The results showed that "Friends", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" have significant positive influence on "Social Achievement".

Table 3 The Relationship between Social Achievement and Social Adaptation

	Calibration variable: social achievements			t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.775	.256		3.021	.003		
Friends	.133	.051	.166	2.588	.010	.855	1.170
Ability to make friends	.183	.069	.183	2.669	.008	.743	1.345
Networking	.349	.069	.358	5.033	.000	.689	1.451
R ²				0.315			
F				30.015**			

Hypothesis:

H4: Social adaptation has a positive impact on Academic Achievement;

H4a: Friends have a positive impact on Academic Achievement;

H4b: Ability to make friends has a positive effect on Academic Achievement;

H4c: Networking has a positive effect on Academic Achievement;

Analysis of the Influence of social adaptation dimensions on academic achievement

Take "Friend", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" as independent variables, and "Academic Achievement" as dependent variable, and the results of regression analysis are shown in the following table (Table 4).

The corresponding significant level of "Friends", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" was 0.006, 0.000, 0.005 ($p < 0.01$) respectively. At the level of 0.01, it shows that "Friends", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" have significantly positive effect on "Academic Achievement".

Table 4 The Relationship between Academic Achievement and Social Adaptation

	Calibration variable: academic achievements			t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	1.666	.259		6.424	.000		
Friends	.144	.052	.184	2.772	.006	.855	1.170
Ability to make friends	.395	.069	.406	5.697	.000	.743	1.345
Networking	.197	.070	.209	2.819	.005	.689	1.451
R2				0.259			
F				22.870**			

Conclusion

(1) To explain why Chinese students choose to study abroad in Islamic country as Malaysia.

Qualitative research method including focus group interviews and in-depth interviews were applied to discover the reasons that respondents indicated that the “One Belt One Road” policy initiated by China is main reason they choose to study in Malaysia as a sample of Islamic country. Many students said that they chose Malaysia because they saw the opportunity of China’s Belt and Road initiative, which greatly increased the cultural and economic cooperation between China and Malaysia. Many Chinese students saw potential opportunities and apply for majors including management, marketing and Malay language. Secondly, Comparatively low expenditure of studying and living :The cheapness of tuition and living expenses has always been Malaysia’s competitive weapon in the international currency market. Students responded that they can live comfortably with just RM1100 a month, Inclusive of food, accommodation and other daily expenses. It is also an attraction to many other students from developing countries. Last but not least, improve English: Most of interviewed Chinese students told author, their English have been improved a lot since they studied in Malaysia and can communicate with others fluently. But before that, they can hardly understand what teachers were talking about. Malaysia has been ranked 13th in English language proficiency among non-native speakers in the world, according to the latest EF English Proficiency Index. In addition, Some Chinese oversea students are Muslim religion (Hui Minority), and they will find conveniently to study in Malaysia, and students can easily adapt to Malaysia society culture, so many Chinese choose to study in Malaysia. Moreover, Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural world which is a complex consisting of miniature, and the participants valued the opportunity that allowed them to experience a different culture and lifestyle, as well as pursue advanced knowledge.

(2) To study Chinese students’ adaptations and analyze factors affected their academic and social achievements.

In terms of the psychological adaptation process, according to significant test results of regression equation parameters and regression coefficients, it shows that as for the social achievement, “Emotion” has no significant effect on “Social Achievement”, but “Mental Health” and “Life Satisfaction” have significantly positive effect on “social achievement”. As for academic

achievement, "Emotion" and "Mental Health" have no significant effect on "Academic Achievement", but "Life Satisfaction" has significantly positive effect on "Academic Achievement". In terms of social adaptation process, based on significant test results of regression equation parameters and regression coefficients, it shows that when it comes to social achievement, "Friends", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" have a significantly positive influence on "Social Achievements". As for academic achievement, "Friends", "Ability to make friends" and "Networking" have significantly positive effect on "academic achievement". Perceive social adaptation in Malaysia has a relevant relationship with achievements of students. The more adaptation they perceive from, the more achievements students will have.

Discussion

The reasons why Chinese students choose to study abroad in Islamic country as Malaysia can be explained by the result of Philip Atbach (1991) research. He attributes the study abroad of students from developing countries to the result of the combined action of pushing forces from the outgoing countries and seven pulling forces from the receiving countries. The pushing forces of the outgoing countries are: better foreign language learning; poor educational facilities and quality in China; failure of national college entrance examination; experiencing new culture, overseas degree has higher value in the job market etc.

Correlation between psychological adaptation and social and academic achievements. According to Ward's theory (1993), psychological adaptation refers to the mental health and life satisfaction in the process of exploring cross-cultural adaptation. It is mainly based on emotional response. For the first time, this paper links psychological adaptation with social and academic achievements. It is concluded that social and academic achievements are significantly correlated with psychological adaptation or life satisfaction. That is, the higher the psychological adaptation or life satisfaction of Chinese students in Malaysia, the better their achievements. Ward's theory further shows that improving students' psychological adaptation will help students develop more positive interpersonal relationships, avoid friction abroad, and help students become more confident.

Correlation between social adaptation and social and academic achievements. This corresponding with Kim's research (2003) that explains the more frequent Chinese students interact with local people, they will have more time and chances to learn and understand Islamic culture and society, then gain achievements.

After going abroad, Chinese students have to learn to adapt to the life of communication in English, so that they can better interact with the local people. However, the studying time in Malaysia to fully adapt to the local life time is very limited, and as a result, the communication with the local people does not go as smooth as they've imagined. After going abroad, Chinese students are forced to be away from their parents and friends. So naturally, they will feel lonely beyond their expectations. In face of a strange new environment without any experience, they have a hard time in adapting to the local life; in consequence, those students are likely to have a low degree of social and academic achievements in Malaysia for both social and psychological reasons. The factor of achievement was found to be strong predictor of Chinese overseas students' adaptation and the transcripts and position in class are effective measure of students' adaptation to the academic and social environment (Dunn, 2006).

In terms of the local social practice, Chinese students show a low level of participation than their degree of involvement before going abroad. On the one hand, because of the English barriers, students rarely participate in activities related to local social activities and communities. In addition, Chinese students rarely have opportunities to participate in some research projects held by Malaysian Professors. From the interviewees responses, English has played an important impact on the interaction both inside and extracurriculars (Benson, 1978). On the other hand, Malaysians believe in Islam, and Muslims have their own way of life under the influence and requirements of Islam. They have specific requirements for many life behaviors, such as frequent testimony, regular worship, and no food during Ramadan. The number of Chinese students having faith in Islam is very small, so in terms of both living habits and dietary customs, they are totally different from those of Islamic adherents, which makes it difficult for Chinese students to adapt to. Therefore, in social communication, these parts of students are more inclined to interact with those from the same or similar areas or countries. As a consequence, this invisibly widens the culture distance from Malaysian students. Naturally, it is not conducive to the development of their cross-cultural adaptation. Lysgaard's theory (1995) identifies the relationship between culture and learning. Culture, in turn, becomes an invisible compass that directs people's ways of thinking and their behavior.

Recommendation

(1) English ability

Foreign language ability plays an important role in cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese overseas students; so Chinese students must realize the importance of language skills and make adequate preparation before going abroad.

(2) Social interaction

It is necessary to conduct more in-depth research to help Chinese overseas students understand their social interactions and emotional tendencies, and promote interactions between Chinese overseas students and local students for the purpose of helping them overcome cross-cultural adaptation barriers.

(3) Islamic Culture

It is important to improve Chinese students' knowledge of Islamic cultures in order to adjust their own learning and living styles in a different cultural environment.

(4) Networking

Friendship networks with other students will play an important role in helping you to adjust to the new environment.

(5) Student Union

It will be a very good idea to join more general student societies and student union clubs and activities that will help you make friends with students from other countries.

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