Tailoring Acculturation Scale for Malaysian Students in Japan Universities

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Abstract: Adjustment to a new culture is crucial psychological and behavioural process among international students. Adaptation supports the performance and functioning of these students. Failure to adapt to the changes in the new environment would tax on the psychological wellbeing, exhaust the students and strain the academic performance. Acculturation is one the important moderating factor for adaptation and studies have shown that it may affect the academic performance amongst the international students. Acculturation can be assessed by measuring the assimilation into the host culture and retention of the origin culture. The western acculturation models have developed to a comprehensive description. From these models, acculturation scales have been created. This paper looks into the relevant construct from the existing acculturation scales such as Indonesian Acculturating Scale (IARS) proposed by Hondojo (2000) and Acculturative scale for Asian (ASA) by Kim (2001). The items derived from these acculturation scales are pooled and then tested on 30 Asian International students in Islamic International University (IIU), Malaysia. Findings show that some of the items for the scale are significant. Further interview brings on a possible extension on the theory of acculturation strategy; which is a possibility of an Alternative culture in addition to the two suggested by the western research. It is hoped that this study would support effective counselling by suggesting evidence in avoiding generalization and stereotyping of western cases in the counselling, orientation and intervention programs for Malaysian students in Japan Universities.

Introduction

The bottom line for most students is to do well academically and the perseverance in performing well academically is moderated by many factors. These moderating factors are more complex in the case of the students abroad as they need to face inevitable changes in life. As Handojo (2000) summoned up from Berry and Kim (1988).The many dimension of changes that need to be faced are namely: physical (new weather and climatic conditions), biological(different foods, diets and diseases), social (cutting off from previous friendship and making new friends), cultural (being uprooted from indigenous political, social and religious context), and psychological (the need to change attitudes and values)." For the international students, the adaptation extends to other changes in dimensions of academic, language, financial and homesickness.

Failure to adapt to these changes would collapse the students' daily performance and functioning and they could lead to negative outcomes on the students' health, psychological wellbeing and academic performance in the long run (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh & Baker (2004). Being uprooted from the common ground, support, intervention and counselling is crucial especially when studies have shown the acute effects on psychological health when acculturation problem was not addressed (Maruyama 1998, Takebayashi 2004, Kim 2001). The person with high acculturative stress is susceptible to various psychiatric symptoms (Takebayashi 2004). Imperatively the students must be capable to dole out the stress and recognize activities that can help them make progress I in their adaptation.

Acculturation Theory

Acculturation which is an important moderating factor for adaptation is also defined as a process of cultural change that results from repeated direct contact between two distinct cultural groups (Hall, 2003). Poyrazli, Kavanaugh & Baker (2004) further elaborated that acculturation is inevitable for the students in order to function normally and it demands students to learn a wide range of culturally defined and unfamiliar roles under pressure of time and expectations poses stress.

Berry (1980) has proposed 4 modes of acculturation based on the attitudes towards the culture of origin and host. He suggested that acculturation can be assessed by measuring the degree of assimilation to the host culture and the degree of retention of the origin Culture.
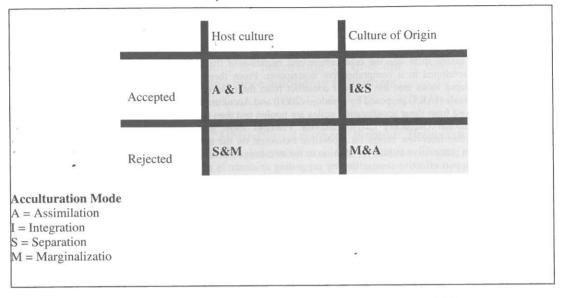

	Host culture	Culture of Origin
Accepted	A & I	I&S
Rejected	S&M	M&A

Acculturation Mode
A = Assimilation
I = Integration
S = Separation
M = Marginalizatio

Figure 1   Acculturation Mode by Berry (1992)

Hall (2002) explained that assimilation involves absorption of minorities into the dominant or more desirable culture. He continued against the dangers of assimilation which involves loss of one's original cultural identity and rejection of one's culture origin. Studies (Takebayashi,2004; Swodosky,1991; Handojo,2001) have shown that Integration approach is considered as the most preferable method as it promotes the balance between retaining one's origin culture and accommodating the new culture. Integration mode promotes biculturalism (Hall 2002).

Berry (1980) further describe in separation mode, cultural heritage is retained while the new culture is rejected. Lieber (2001) suggested that identification with one's origin may serve as a buffer for negative acculturation effect but difficulty in interpreting social demands from the dominant culture and it may also increase the level of stress. Berry (1980) noted that in marginalization, an individual does not identify with either culture of origin or the new culture. He further warns that the person is suspended between the two cultures and becomes isolated with tendency for personal and social conflict. This mode has also demonstrated the highest level of stress, confusion, anxiety and depression (Takebayashi 2004)

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Methodology and Instrumentation

The existence of tested acculturation scales by previous researchers especially the scales concerning Asians (Handojo, 2000; Slodzinski, 1994; Kim, 2001; Suinn et all.,1987)provides a starting ground for tailoring an acculturation scale for Malaysian students in Japan. Unlike some psychological scales, it is not possible to use any of the scale as a whole due to the multifaceted nature of acculturation and the lack of specific study on Malaysian students in Japan which has been identified. Most of the researchers defined Asian as Chinese, Koreans and Taiwanese (Maruyama, 1998; Tanaka, 1994; Takebayashi, 2004). These nationals share the same writing system with the Japanese in "Kanji". It is important not to generalize the findings to the Malaysian ethnics who have more dissimilarity with the Japanese host as compared to the Asian defined in previous studies.

The items for these studies are derived from a few similar instruments used in the United State which are Indonesian Acculturation Scale(IARS) by Handojo (2000), Acculturative Scales for Asian (ASA) by Kim (2001), Suinn-Lew Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (SL-ASIA) by Suinn et.al(1987) and The Asian Inventory of Acculturation(ASIA) by Slodzinski (1994).

IARS was used on a study on Chinese Indonesian immigrants to the United States (U.S) focusing on association between adult attachment style, acculturation attitude and behaviours and levels of stress (Handojo, 2000). As the researcher puts it, the IARS is actually a modification of The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican American ARSMA-II developed by Cuellar, Arnold and Maldonado (1995). Handojo has changed some of the wordings in the items to suit the Indonesian immigrants. Acculturation Scale for Asians (ASA) was developed based on the Berry's acculturation model (Kim, 2001) Kim (2001) intended ASA to measure the construct of acculturation for Asian populations in general. The scale consisted of 21 items that primarily focus on one's preferences and attitudes toward Asian and American cultures. Her study focused on the relation of acculturation, social support, alienation, and psychological distress among Asian American college students.

Findings

In this study, there were 15 items involved. Each of the four items each was modified from IARS and ASA. Two more items were taken from ASIA and three more were added to suit the Japanese University context. It is not possible to use any of the scale or other scale as a whole due to differences in study objectives and the host context. Some of the items in the scale were taken out due to the significant cultural differences and to suit the students' condition as temporary residents in Japan. These 15 items outlined the acculturation scale intended for the study.

The scale made up a part of a questionnaire that was tested in Islamic International University. Thirty international students participated in the pilot test. After the test 10 students were interviewed for feedback on clarity and other comments. The standard deviations for all items were less then one. Based on the interview, some of the items were deleted or reworded for consistency and clarity. Altogether the final scale consisted of 12 selected items. Rating scale of 1 to five was used; with rating preference 1 for strongly disagree and 5 for Strongly Agree. The twelve items were then put into statements which were inclined the Origin culture, the Host culture or the Alternative culture, generating 36 statements.

An important issue was identified in the interview session with the students and it suggested the possibility of a third culture on top of the two cultures as proposed in most acculturation scales.

The third culture which is an alternative culture refers to the preferred culture adopted by the students and this culture is none other then the host' or the origin culture.

The pilot test was conducted on a different ground than the intended study topography. The pilot test findings are only appropriate to determine the clarity and the simplicity of the questions. Further reliability and validity test are needed are to be conducted to determine the significance of the items. Nevertheless, the pilot test brings on a question whether the western culture which is being said to be an alternative culture by the international students in Malaysia; is also an alternative culture for the Malaysian students in Japan. Socially, it has been witnessed that western culture does have a significant impact on the Japanese youths, and thus putting the two together, further studies should explore the possibility of the western culture emerging as alternative culture for the Malaysian students in Japan. Alternative culture is like having preference for English language usage in communication and academic purpose, western food and other international students as friends. The Alternative culture is most likely to exist in Japan due to the homogeneity of the host culture and the smaller number of the Malaysian community in the area compared to other academic centres in the UK or US or Australia and it could also reduce the strength to adhere to the culture of origin.

Conclusion

Orientation and intervention programs are suitable means for dispensing information on promoting healthy acculturation. Generalization and stereotyping in dealing with acculturation problems would reduce the accomplishment of the programs and the counselling (Slodzinski 1994). Cuellar, Haris &Jasso (1980) has shown that the effectiveness of counselling can be affected by the client's level or degree of acculturation into the dominant society. They further suggested that the programs and counselling should be addressed with consideration given to different cultural sensitivity and needs. The study of acculturation is absolutely necessary in upholding the relevance of counselling for the case of Malaysian students in Japan. The availability of reliable and valid measurement tools would open more doors for further research in this area. It is hoped that this paper would help in minimising generalization and stereotyping of western cases in the counselling, orientation and intervention programs for Malaysian students in Japan.

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