

ANXIETY AND SOCIOCULTURAL ADJUSTMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose for this study is to investigate whether anxiety will inversely influence international students' sociocultural adjustment in the context of pursuing education in higher learning institutions in Malaysia; specifically in Universiti Utara Malaysia. The data used for this study derived from the questionnaire survey conducted randomly among the international students in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) who came from 27 different nationalities. A total number of 397 valid responses were successfully obtained. The descriptive analysis, reliability analysis and correlation analysis were undertaken in this study. For the relationship between anxiety and sociocultural adjustment, although a significant relationship is found, the direction of the postulated relationship is positive instead of negative. Discussions and conclusion of research are put forth.

Keywords: *Sociocultural Adjustment, Anxiety, International Students.*

1. Introduction

Globalisation is a buzz word that everybody is using nowadays. Nations, multinational corporations (MNCs), small and medium enterprises and other institutions are directly or indirectly basing their strategic decisions on some aspects of globalisation. The education field is not spared from the phenomena and universities, both public and private are jumping on the bandwagon to secure a piece of the globalisation pie. International students, often thought as a lucrative source of income for many countries (Bird and Owen, 2004) are taking advantage of this opportunity to not only experience the diverse culture but most importantly to be able to learn alongside students from various backgrounds and gaining first-hand experience of being taught by renowned members of the academic staff.

Inevitably, globalisation brings about interactions and relationships between people who are culturally different. Brislin (2000) and Hofstede (2001) indicate that people exposed to overseas experiences as a result of working or studying often encounter stressful situations that challenged their coping processes. For international students, in addition to language issues and academic concerns, they are also being plagued by problems acclimatising to the social and cultural aspects of the host country, with previous scholars highlighting social integration, financial crisis, family stress and isolation as common problems faced by international students (Mallinckrodt and Leong, 1992; Parr, Bradley and Bingi, 1992; Zhai, 2004). Study by Rajapaksa and Dundes (2002) found that

international students felt more lonely and homesick than their local counterparts and felt that social support from the local community is significant in helping them adjust to the host country's environment. Thus, judging based on the earlier findings, the crux of the challenges faced by international students when studying overseas is the challenge to socially integrate with the host country's environment.

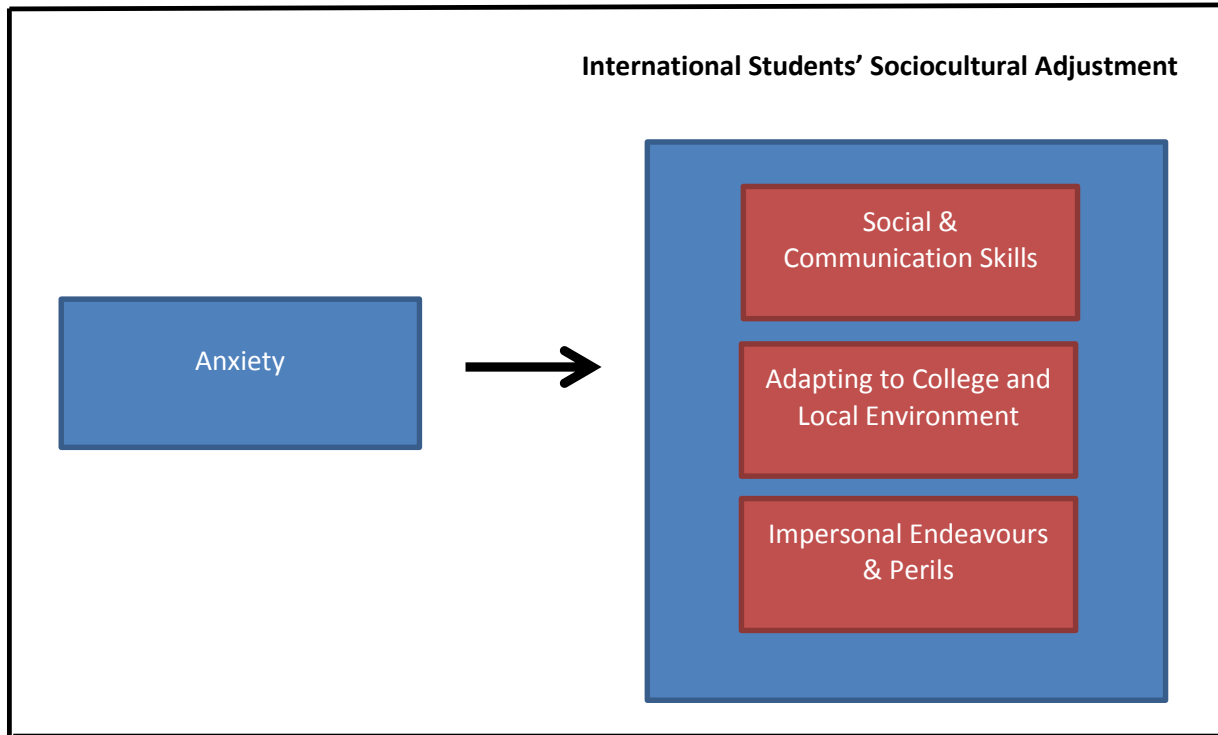
2. Problem Statement

Exporting higher education services emerged in Malaysia in the late 1980s and early 1990s and is now becoming global phenomena. Malaysian international education sector has grown tremendously during the past decade and Malaysia is fast becoming a centre of educational excellence in the region. Flow of international students in Malaysia has increased steadily since 1996, when various higher education reforms were introduced to facilitate the entry of international students into higher education institutions. Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) reported the total number of international student enrolled in private and public institutions of higher education in Malaysia for year 2011 was 93,000 which represent 2 per cent of international student population around the world. The increase of international students in Malaysian universities requires the management of the universities to be more responsive to the cultural sensitivity and adjustment of these students. Anxiety is a common psychological problems face by international students. Anxiety cause difficulties across social, occupational, and everyday functioning (Castle, Kulkarni, and Abel, 2006) and it has also been shown to adversely influence academic performance and contribute to learning difficulties (Dyrbye, Thomas, and Shanafelt, 2006). In this research, we will examine further whether anxiety will inversely influence international students' sociocultural adjustment.

3. Research Objective and Significance of Study

This research is primarily to investigate on the influence of anxiety on the international students' sociocultural adjustment. Figure 1 depicts a framework that illustrates how individual's anxiety will inversely influence the international students' sociocultural adjustment. International students' sociocultural adjustment is divided into three dimensions: 1) social and communication skills, 2) adapting to college and local environment 3) impersonal endeavours and perils.

Figure 1: Operational Framework of Individual Cultural Intelligence, Anxiety and International Students' Sociocultural Adjustment



Malaysia is currently the 11th largest exporter of education globally and has become the best option for pursuing tertiary education for many international students. Malaysian government recognises the importance of education as a critical asset of the nation and it has been identified as one of the services sub-sectors for further growth and development. Total number of international students was only 5,635 in 1996 and the number rose to 11,733 in year 1998-99. Malaysia shows a positive outlook and favourable increase of 86,919 students in 2010 to 93,000 international students for the year 2011. Furthermore, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has projected that the number of international students' enrolment will rise to 200,000 by the year 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education Annual Report 2011). Malaysia has emerged as an important destination for students from more than 100 countries and majority of the students come from Southeast Asia, Middle Asia, Middle East and Africa. Universities in Malaysia are generally categorized as public and private universities and currently there are 20 public and 35 private universities all over Malaysia.

Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) is one of the 20 public universities which have managed to attract foreign students. Universiti Utara Malaysia is a specialized management university which offer courses, both for undergraduate and postgraduate, mainly in the business-related areas. In year 2013, UUM has a total of 1,648 international students coming from 42 countries. Central and East Asian which include Bangladesh, Brunei, China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. The intake from the Middle East ranges from Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Libya, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. African contingent hails from Algeria, Chad, Nigeria and Somalia. Universiti Utara Malaysia also managed to attract students from Canada and the United States of America. 784 students are enrolled in 20 undergraduate

programmes; 551 students enrolled in master programmes, while 551 students are Ph.D. and 27 students are DBA candidates at UUM's three colleges: College of Business (COB), College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and College of Law, Government and International Studies (COLGIS) (UUM Academic Affairs, 2013).

An early study had shown that culture shock often results in feelings of confusion and anxiety, which are associated with cultural and social rule changes (Oberg, 1960). In addition, Furnham and Bochner (1982) indicated that, in order to acclimatise to a new culture, sojourners have to reduce the symptoms of culture shock that are caused by the feelings of anxiety, discomfort, embarrassment, and uneasiness when they interact with the host nationals. Furnham and Bochner further indicated that effective social or 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. Cross-cultural adjustment is a psychological outcome that is associated with adaptation which means the degree of comfort the individual feels in his or her new role and the degree to which he or she feels adjusted to the role requirements (Black, 1988). Thus, it is imperative that in order to successfully adjust to the new environment, the students have to feel comfortable with all aspects of the new environment and have to minimise any negative feelings like anxiety, confusion, culture shock and other related negative feelings towards the new environment. Another variable that can be significant in explaining how well a person's adjust to his new environment is anxiety. Anxiety here is defined as an emotional state of apprehension or of a vague fear indirectly associated with something (Bailey, 1983). As such, with anxiety, it is postulated that a person with anxiety will be having problems to adjust in the new surroundings. In this study, we will investigate on the impact of anxiety experienced by the international students on their sociocultural adjustment.

4. Anxiety

In her literature review, Bailey (1983) mentioned that anxiety is a factor of the learner that influences learning and consists of the type of psychological state that deals with the emotional reactions and motivations of learners. In addition, anxiety is a class name feeling, mood and temperament. It is a single feeling response to a particular object or idea; it is the general reaction toward something liked or disliked...the dynamic or essential quality of an emotion; the energy of an emotion (Snow, Corno, and Jackson, 1996). Cultural anxiety is regularly regarded as a problem that might occur when a person relocate into a foreign culture and has to acclimatise. Highly sensitive people do feel pressured to assimilate into the new environment which may lead to high anxiety; however, there is no built-in mechanism in their present culture in order to detect any shortcomings.

Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggested that social adjustment entails the abilities of "expressing attitude, feelings, and emotion, adopting the appropriate proxemics posture, understanding the gaze patterns of the people they are interacting with, carrying out ritualized routines such as greetings, leave taking, self-disclosure, making or refusing requests, and asserting themselves" (pp. 14–15). Hence, some of them might engage in cultural faux pas which might lead to them not being able to adjust better to the new environment. A study by Lueke and Svyantek (2000) found that most unsuccessful expatriates tend to be reluctant to interact with host nationals and to participate in local social life, which reduces their commitments to the host countries' culture.

Adjusting to a different environment is never easy, especially in a different cultural environment. Searle and Ward (1990) suggest that the process of adjusting to a new culture socially and culturally entails learning and applying new cultural knowledge; therefore, a comprehensive model of

sociocultural adjustment should be cast in a social learning-social cognition framework wherein variables that enhance cultural learning, promote behavioural and social competency, and facilitate a cross-cultural perspective should be included. Newcomers will experience anxiety regarding the inability to predict or anticipate what would be the repercussions from their actions when interacting with culturally different others or trying to 'blend' into a different environment in an unfamiliar new culture (Koltko-Rivera, 2004).

Anxiety emanates from unease, worry, and perceived threats. Individuals who are able to manage their anxieties and uncertainties by accurately understanding the hosts' behaviours and attitudes experience less stress in the acculturation process (Fritz, Chin and DeMarinis, 2008). With the focal intention of trying to ease uncertainty and anxiety, Gudykunst (1998) developed the anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory with the aim of making communication easier for strangers in a new host culture and helping them adjust to living in countries with different customs. This gist of this theory is that to be able to operate better in a different cultural environment, a person has to be able to manage his or her own feelings of anxiety and uncertainty in order to adapt to the new host culture (Gudykunst, 1998). This theory is then applied in this paper in trying to understand the international students' acculturation stressors whilst trying to adjust to the host country's culture.

The anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory by Gudykunst (1988, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1998a, 2005; Gudykunst and Hammer 1988; Gudykunst and Kim 1997) was first coined to improve the quality of communication and adjusting to living in new cultures. The basic premise of the AUM theory is that when strangers (e.g. sojourners, expatriates, international students) can manage their anxiety and uncertainty, they will feel comfortable with the host culture, which in turn will improve their intercultural adjustment with the hosts (host country nationals). Ideas for the AUM theory were formed based on the uncertainty reduction theory (URT) by Berger and Calabrese (1975) where the URT was extended to include intergroup communication (Gudykunst 1985). In addition, as Malaysia is high in collectivism as per Hofstede's findings in the cultural dimension survey (1980), the locals will be more threatened or feeling less than welcoming towards the international students. Collectivism represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We." (Hofstede, 1980).

Stephan and Stephan (1985) concurs that anxiety towards the 'out' groups can be the fundamental cause for negative coalition between two parties of differing backgrounds. Stephan et al. (1999) suggest that anxiety decreases as people come to know one another, and when anxiety is low sojourners' maladaptive behaviours are less likely to occur (Hullett and Witte, 2001). Thus, as international students establish ties with other international, co-national, and local students they are more likely to experience a pleasant adjustment (Kashima and Loh, 2006). Ye (2006) indicates that international students felt less discriminated against, perceived less hatred and less negative emotions when they were more satisfied with their social network of support. However, the experiencing of interpersonal support did not decrease their fear. Moreover, because of different culture background, international students cannot escape from cultural shock and are often face with great difficulties (Pruitt 1978). Understanding of and being able to predict the host's behaviour together with the reducing of perceived anxiety are of vital importance for the migrant's wellbeing. Thus, it is therefore important for a better mechanism to be put in place that supports and promotes intercultural interactions between the international and local students.

5. Sociocultural Adaptation

Cross-cultural adjustment can be extremely challenging. Apart from changes in job and academic responsibilities, the cross-cultural adjustment of foreign professionals or students includes their general adjustment to a different climate, a new culture, a variety of language barriers, local traffic, shopping, entertainment, local food, health care service, and other general living conditions—adjustment to interacting with host nationals outside of work and at work to increase their comfort level when they are assigned jobs or tasks (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, and Luk, 2005). The increasing number of international students place increased emphasis on colleges and universities to ensure the success of international students' adjustment to local cultures because lack of adjustment may cause dropout of overseas students. Students from overseas, similar to expatriates stepping into a foreign country differing from their original culture, may also confront those challenges and obstacles discussed above; both in academic work and social integration. Riedlinger (2008) explained that often problems surrounding transition and adjustment to life can be attributed to anxiety and sometimes associated with fear of failure. She added that perhaps the most trying aspect of the international students' experience is the fact that while most students undergo a similar adjustment process, they have to deal with their emotions in isolation.

Different cultures have different norms to guide behaviour. Thus, the cultural adjustment demands of international students can be substantial due to the differences between their cultural backgrounds and those of the host country. Surrounded by a new culture, international students may realize the differences between their own culture and the host country's culture. Compared to expatriates, international students tend to experience greater adjustment difficulties and thus more stress (McKenna and Richardson, 2007). The pressure of being independent in a foreign country makes them feel homesick, lonely, and, at times, isolated from host nationals. A research study conducted by Lin and Yi (1997) concluded that many overseas students showed symptoms of depression, which were a result of a lack of concentration, and low motivation with respect to academic study and social life. If an international student cannot handle these challenges and adjust according to the host culture, he or she may tend to feel less satisfied with their performance and even quit. Therefore, adjustments to cultures of host countries are equally important for international students.

Sociocultural adaptation is defined in terms of behavioural skills, as an ability to "fit in" or effectively interact with members of the host culture (Ward and Kennedy, 1996). As studied in social learning model, socio-cultural adjustment is impacted by prior cross-cultural practices, cross-cultural distance, cross-cultural contact, cross-cultural training and the period of time in the new culture (Befus, 1988; Furnham and Bochner, 1982). The construction of predictive models of socio-cultural adjustment, assessed in terms of social difficulty, is theoretically embedded in a social learning-social cognition framework. Research has indicated that general cultural knowledge, length of residence in the host culture, and amount of contact with host nationals, affect socio-cultural adaptation (Ward and Kennedy, 1992; Ward and Searle, 1991). Ward and Kennedy (1992) found that a greater amount of interaction with host nationals was associated with fewer social difficulties, improved communicative competence and facilitated general adaptation to life overseas. Moreover, other research studies have found that social integration and having local friends is linked with lower levels of stress (Redmond and Bunyi, 1993), fewer psychological adjustment problems (Pruitt, 1978), and that satisfaction with host national relations predicts better psychological adjustment among international students (Searle and Ward, 1990). Due to this view, international students can face

challenges such as culture shock, lack of support, homesickness, limited social skills and stereotyping and prejudice; and many more.

6. Research Methodology

This research employs a cross sectional survey on international students who are studying in Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). Based on earlier research (see Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Jacob and Greggo, 2001; Lewthwaite, 1996; Rajapaksa and Dundes, 2002), the majority of researchers used surveys to gain a response concerning various students' adjustment issues and this research is no exception. Researchers have long recognised the obvious advantages of surveys, which are low in cost, geographically flexible and can reach a widely dispersed sample simultaneously without the possible distortions of time lag (Kanuk and Berenson 1975; Saunders et al. 2009). Anxiety is measured using the The Symptom Checklist (SCL)-90, a self-report inventory designed to screen for a broad range of psychological problems, was used as a part of the questionnaire (Derogatis, 1977). In the present study only the anxiety scale, consisting of 15 items was used (see *Appendix 4*). The anxiety SCL-90 measures anxiety by rating how often the participants have experienced the following within the past month: nervousness or shakiness inside, tension and trembling, feelings of fearfulness, spells of terror or panic, and, apprehension and dread. The previously mentioned symptoms are self-rated, ranging from 1 being 'not at all' to 5 being 'extremely'. The respondent was asked to give response on the following question 'How much have you been bothered by the following things in the past month? Sample item is 'feeling suddenly scared for no reason'.

In order to measure the level of sociocultural adjustment, Furnham and Bochner's (1982) Social Situations Questionnaire (SSQ) was used in the present study (see *Appendix 5*). The Social Situations Questionnaire (SSQ) consists of 40 items that focused on the skills that are required to manage everyday social situations in new cultural contexts. In this study, we have labelled the items into three factors. Factor one labelled as Social and Communication Skills, factor two as Adapting to College and Local Environment and factor three as Impersonal Endeavors and Perils.

Research by Furnham and Bochner (1982) has shown that the SSQ is reliable and valid. The SSQ requires respondents to indicate the amount of difficulty experienced in a number of areas by using a five-point scale (ranging from no difficulty/slight difficulty/moderate difficulty/ great difficulty/extreme difficulty). Sample items for each factor follows. For Social and Communication Skills, the sample item is 'Making yourself understood'. For Impersonal Endeavours and Perils factor, sample item is 'Adapting to local etiquette'. Sample item for the Adapting to College and Local Environment is 'Coping with academic work'. All of the scales used in this research were adopted or adapted from established scales and care was taken to ensure that the scales used for addressing the research hypotheses in this particular research maintained the original scales' intended purpose within the limits of the gathered responses. Nevertheless, all of the scales were subjected to rigorous analysis, where the items were subjected to refinement and various aspects of reliability were evaluated prior to data analysis (Gerbing and Anderson 1988). In order to test and address the hypotheses, several relevant analyses are selected and conducted fitting for each hypotheses. Pearson correlation analyses are used to see the relationship between variables under investigation and to test the hypotheses. Scale reliability is tested using internal consistencies measures (cronbach

coefficients). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is used initially to establish the principal constructs. Data analysis is performed using SPSS and AMOS.

7. Findings and Analysis

A total of 403 questionnaires were distributed of which 6 questionnaires were found to be incomplete, giving a total of 397 usable questionnaires. The student respondents were from 27 different nationalities; with respondents from Somalia representing the biggest sub-group (20.9%), followed by Indonesia (20.4%), China (13.6%) and Thailand (12.3%). Collectively, 35.3% of the respondents were from the African region, 34.2% were from the South East Asian region, and 13% were from the Western Asian region. While China represents the sole country of East Asia (13.6%); Uzbekistan (2.3%) and Pakistan (0.3%) represent Central Asia and South Asian regions, respectively. Non-Asian countries include Canada (1.3%) and Russia (0.3%). In total, 70.3% of the respondents were male. 92.1% of the respondents were aged between 20 to 40 years old, with 76.8% representing the 20 to 25 years old age group. Majority of the respondents were single (88.2%) and only 10.1% were married. 20.4% of the respondents have their families together whilst their stay in Malaysia, while majority of the respondents (74.6%) were on their own.

75.3% of the respondents indicated that they are experiencing being overseas for the first time as students. From the total respondents, majority (67.5%) have been in Malaysia for more than 1 year but less than 4 years, while 20.9% have been in Malaysia for less than 1 year. Whereas, 11.6% indicated that they have been in Malaysia for more than 5 years. Perhaps, due to constant exposure and interaction with Malaysian students, 48.9% of the respondents indicated that they can partly understand or speak Bahasa Malaysia, and 12.3% claimed that they can fluently speak Bahasa Malaysia. Table 1 summarizes the demographics details of the samples.

Table 1: Summary of Selected Demographic Details

	Frequency	Proportion of Sample (%)
Gender		
Male	279	70.3
Female	118	29.7
Age		
Below 20	27	6.8
20-25	305	76.8
25-30	39	9.8
30-35	10	2.5
35-40	12	3.0

Above 40	4	1.0
Education Level		
Undergraduate	309	77.8
Masters	63	15.9
Doctorate / DBA	25	6.3
Marital Status		
Single	350	88.2
Married	40	10.1
Others	7	1.8

The factor analysis conducted for Anxiety was based on 15 items, and the results produced Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .955, also exceeding the recommended value of .50. As the Barlett's test of sphericity was also highly significant ($p = .000$), this indicates the assumptions of factor analysis were met and suitable for further analysis. From the output, measures of Anxiety produced one block component with eigenvalue of more than 1. This component captured 56.229 percent of the total variance of the items. The factor loadings of the items were between .646 and .801. These loadings are considered practical significance. Table 2 summarizes the analysis and its loadings.

Factor analysis for Sociocultural Adjustment was conducted based on 40 items. The factor analysis conducted on Sociocultural Adjustment produced Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of .935 also exceeding the recommended value of .50, while Barlett's test of sphericity was also found to be highly significant ($p = .000$). Hence, the assumptions of factor analysis were met and further analysis is appropriate. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method produced three components. All three components obtained scored eigenvalues exceeding one. These three factors captured 58.552 percent of the total variance, with Component 1 contributing 43.355 percent, Component 2 contributing 9.115 percent, and Component 3 contributing 6.172 percent. Using Varimax rotation, a total of 23 items had cross-loadings between the factors. Similarly, these items were deleted to improve scale reliability and reduce inconsistencies (Hair, et al., 2009). These components were then labeled as Social and Communication Skills (Component 1), Adapting to College and Local Environment (Component 2) and Impersonal Endeavours and Perils (Component 3) similarly to previous studies (Wilson, 2011; Ward and Kennedy, 1999). As shown in Table 3, the factor loadings are between .656 and .853.

Table 2: Items and Factor Loadings for Anxiety

Item	Component 1
ANX 8	.801
ANX 12	.794
ANX 3	.791

Item	Component 1
ANX 7	.785
ANX 2	.777
ANX 11	.771
ANX 6	.770
ANX 5	.764
ANX 9	.758
ANX 15	.742
ANX 10	.741
ANX 4	.735
ANX 14	.696
ANX 1	.652
ANX 13	.646
% of variance	56.229
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.955
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square	3762.272
Df	105
Sig	.000

Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix and Factor Loadings for Sociocultural Adjustment

Item	Social and Communications Skills	Adapting to College and Local environment	Impersonal Endeavours and Perils
SAC0005	.795		
SAC0007	.732		
SAC0006	.723		
SAC0004	.677		
SAC0008	.668		
SAC0003	.635		
SAC0009	.606		
SAC0035		.799	
SAC0037		.777	
SAC0036		.762	
SAC0038		.761	
SAC0031		.617	
SAC0030		.595	
SAC0033		.477	
SAC0025			.754
SAC0021			.662
SAC0022			.656
% of variance			58.642

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.935
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Approx. Chi-Square		3058.119
	Df	136
	Sig	.000

Table 4 below summarizes the reliability test of all measures after factor analysis has been done (all items of Compatibility factor were eliminated). As shown, the Cronbach alphas of the measures were all comfortably above the lower limit of acceptability that is $\alpha \geq .7$. Hence, all the measures used in the subsequent analysis were highly reliable. Descriptive statistics for the final list of variables of the study are shown in Table 5.

Table 4: Reliability Coefficients for All the Variables in the Study

Variables	Number of items	Reliability
Anxiety	15	.944
Sociocultural Adjustment	27	.915

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Anxiety	1.9332	.77115
Sociocultural Adjustment	2.0003	.56301

Table 6 provides a summary of the results from correlational analysis. The computation of the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients was performed to obtain an understanding of the relationship between all the variables in the study. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity (Hair, et al., 2009; Pallant, 2007). The values of the correlation coefficients (*r*) given in Table 6 indicates the strength of the relationship between variables. As shown in Table 6, overall correlation values of the variables showed positive significant correlations coefficients. Strong positive correlation was found between Sociocultural Adjustment and Anxiety ($r=.674$).

Table 6: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Variables

	SCA	ANX
SCA	1	
ANX	.642**	1

Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis. In this analysis, *Anxiety* is treated as the independent variable, whereas *Sociocultural Adjustment* as the dependent variable. Through regression analysis procedure, the model explains 44.1 percent ($R^2 = .441$) of the variance in *Sociocultural Adjustment*. Moreover, the model reaches statistical significance (Sig. = .000, this really means $p < .0005$). Table 7 shows the level of influence of *Anxiety* on *Sociocultural Adjustment* ($\beta = .600$ and $\beta = -.190$, respectively). Therefore, the hypothesis is supported.

Table 7: The Influence of Anxiety on Sociocultural Adjustment

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	sig.
	B	Std. Error	β		
(Constant)	1.451	.134		10.809	.000
Anxiety	.492	.035	.600	13.953	.000

F = 55.840; Sig. F = .000; N = 347; Dependent Variable: Sociocultural Adjustment

Given the findings presented in the above paragraphs, there is sufficient evidence to accept that *Anxiety* influences international students' ability to adjust socioculturally.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

In addressing the influence of the international students' anxiety on their sociocultural adjustment, it was found that although there is a significant relationship between anxiety and sociocultural adjustment, we found that the relationship is positive instead of negative. This comes rather as a surprise because previous studies (Hullett and Whitte, 2001; Stephan et al., 1999) show that anxiety is inversely related to adjustment. One possible explanation to support this finding is that when the level of anxiety is higher, the international students tend to be more cautious in their behaviours and tend to make extra effort to be more culturally compliant. Feeling anxious would help them to keep them on their toes and in turn they will put in more efforts to get to know the host country's culture. For example, in Universiti Utara Malaysia, the international students are given ample opportunities to immerse themselves in the local culture by being invited and included in any cultural events such as the festive celebrations, cultural performance during special commemorative events and being invited to temporarily live with local hosts on weekends. When not feeling anxious, the newcomers

may feel complacent and happy with their own culture without making any serious efforts to learn the local language, get to know the local's customs and values and generally try to adapt to the local culture.

It is also important to note that people who come from collectivist countries like those coming from the Asian region, some parts of Africa, Latin America and some parts of the Middle-East are generally high in social anxiety as they feel pressured to conform to the norms and value of the society to maintain social harmony (Schreier et al., 2010). This clearly shows that when a person is from a collectivist society, they are bound to feel that they have to abide by the social norms and values as not to offend the locals. From the findings, the majority of respondents come from mainly collectivist countries with the bulk coming from Somalia (20.9%), Indonesia (20.4%), China (13.6%) and Thailand (12.3%). From the segregation of demographics, it can be safely assume that the majority of respondents are from collectivist countries, based on Hofstede's cultural dimension of collectivism / individualism (Hofstede, 1980). Kitayama et al. (1997) also stressed that countries that are high in collectivist culture will expend more efforts to maintain group harmony. Hence, in this present study, despite being high in anxiety, the sociocultural adjustment was also high due the respondents wanting to put in more effort to maintain group harmony and try to conform to the social norm and values of the host country.

Schreier et al. (2010) also suggest that within collectivist countries, strict social norms designed to ensure group harmony may evoke social anxiety due to feared negative consequences if those norms are violated. Schreier and colleagues (2010) also found that in most Asian countries, maintaining group harmony may be by being submissive and being quiet which in turn may raise anxiety to conform to the norm. In short, it is expected that the collectivists would be prepared to put in more effort to assimilate into the host country's culture. However, the same study; Schreier et al. (2010) also found that collectivists also have a high tolerance of socially reticent and withdrawn behaviours in a society. This can be a little baffling because on one hand, you have to conform to the society's culture but at the same time, if you are collectivist you are more receptive of people not partaking in assimilation effort because fear of creating social disharmony.

With that said, for the respondents in this particular study, anxiety although expected should be better managed or even reduced as it had a direct relationship on the international students' sociocultural adjustment. This unexpected relationship may solely be because the majority of the respondents are from collectivist countries and the host country; Malaysia also belongs to a society where most are collectivists. With this kind cultural dimension, a high social anxiety is expected and the onus is for everybody to maintain group harmony through conforming to the norms and values of the society.

This study has certain limitations that provide venues for future research. First, only one method of collecting data was used; which is self-report questionnaire. We acknowledge that some concerns might exist in that self-reported measures have social desirability and common method bias problem. It is possible that some participants paid little attention or even provided inaccurate information when completing the self-report questionnaire. Therefore, future research should include other methods such as interview or observations to ensure more stable data. There are several limitations of the current study that need to be acknowledged. Another direction for future studies would be to examine the interaction between gender, culture, and social anxiety. Investigation of demographic variables on the chosen constructs may offer a better explanation of cultural related factors.

Second, this study did not consider the possible moderating effects on adaptation-outcome. Potential moderators such as cultural distance (i.e. home vs. host country) may help to further enhance our understanding about the phenomenon under investigation. Third, the findings in the present study do not generalize to all international students in Malaysia as the samples of international students were selected randomly from only one university, Universiti Utara Malaysia and the majority of the participants were Asian and African international students. Therefore, for future studies, international students from different continents or regions especially from a Western background who are pursuing tertiary education in various universities throughout Malaysia should be included, which we believe may help to further verify the findings of this study. Future research might also examine the influence of Hofstede's other cultural dimensions on social anxiety like power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/ femininity traits. Lastly, this study is cross-sectional in design. Future researchers should consider longitudinal study since the level of individual CQ and cultural adjustment varies over time. Therefore, longitudinal study would provide better knowledge on these changes that took place over the time.

As for the relationship between anxiety and sociocultural adjustment, although a significant relationship is found, the direction of the postulated relationship is positive instead of negative. One possible explanation regarding anxiety's relationship with sociocultural adjustment can be pin down to the majority of the respondents are coming from a collectivist background. As such it is normal for the social anxiety to be high and the pressure to conform to the society led to them making the effort to socially integrate into the host country's environment. Future studies should consider some of the points raised in the previous section to improve on the investigation of similar variables in the future. In a nutshell, this study has managed to discover the importance and influence of being in a certain generation and type of society to better explain the relationship anxiety and the sociocultural adjustment of the international students.

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