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Conference Paper · December 2015

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The Effects of Cultural Intelligence on ASEAN Mobility Students' Sociocultural Adjustment

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ABSTRACT

Student mobility is one of the key strategic elements of cooperation which leads to development of a harmonized higher education environment among countries in Southeast Asia. The ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) program was initiated in 2009 purposely to encourage student mobility through multilateral collaborations among ASEAN member countries. In the context of globalization and challenging jobs market, the demand for highly qualified graduates who are able to cope in diverse cultural settings is in a serious need. As most universities view international students as a source of lucrative income and a critical success factor for international education marketing, it is imperative that the challenges that could reduce the learning effectiveness for international students should be minimised. As such, Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which is defined as a person's capability to function effectively in situations characterised by culture diversity (Ang et al., 2007) may provide one of the solutions to minimise adjustment difficulties, specifically in integrating with the host country's environment. Hence, this paper will introduce the concept of CQ and enlighten the role of CQ in promoting mobility students' cross-cultural competence development. We propose a conceptual model, discussing the impacts of CQ on mobility students' sociocultural adjustment. This paper also provides some insight on how CQ training could help mobility students in the ASEAN region to be well prepared to undertake study across the globe.

Keywords: _Cultural Intelligence, ASEAN, Student Mobility, Sociocultural Adjustment_

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the world has seen a tremendous increase in the number of students that choose to study overseas. Traditionally, the flow of students has been directed toward English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, but this pattern is changing. As a result of economic globalization and heightening of governments' awareness of the perceived links between education and economic competitiveness, many

governments across the Asian regions have invested huge sums of money to setup more higher education institutions and boosting more international student enrolments. With the expansion of higher education institutions in the Asia-Pacific region in recent years, more students have chosen to stay at home country or joining universities in the particular region for pursuing their studies in higher education (Kingston, 2008).

Student mobility program has always been one of the key strategic elements of cooperation leading to the development of a harmonized higher education environment among countries in Southeast Asia. The ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) program was initiated in 2009 to encourage student mobility through the multilateral collaborations among three countries: Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. AIMS program now has more than 60 member universities in seven member countries, which involve Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Philipines, Japan and Brunei. The number of students participating in AIMS grew from a total of 260 students in 2011 to more than 500 students in 2013.

Malaysia has become a popular destination for the pursuit of higher education among international students. In 2010, Malaysia was ranked 11th most preferred study destination in the world by United Nation Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in terms of the number of international students studying in the country (Talebloo and Baki, 2013). 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. Total number of international students was only 5,635 in 1996 and the number rose to 11,733 in year 1998-99. In 2014, a total of 135,502 international students were enrolled in Malaysia public and private higher education

institutions (Economic Transformation Programme Annual Report, 2014). Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has targeted that the number of international students' enrolment will rise to 200,000 by the year 2020 (Ministry of Higher Education Annual Report, 2011). Now 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. 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.

Problem Statement

Adjusting to a new culture can be a challenging and stressful experience. Adjustment issues concern the degree to which a students' native culture is similar or different in comparison with the local Malaysian culture. International students need to adapt and adjust to the new cultural setting which include difference cultural values, norms, and customs between their home country and host country (Ang and Liamputtong, 2007). Ramsay, Barker and Jones (1999) found that international students had to expand greater effort to overcome challenges they faced in a foreign academic institution as opposed to domestic student.

Sociocultural adaptation, or the ability to fit-in, involves social skills and cultural learning (Ward and Kennedy, 1999). Lack of sociocultural adaptation can lead to physical and psychological problems (Shupe, 2007). A person can be said to have adapted socioculturally when he or she knows how to behave according to the norms of the foreign culture in which they are living. Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which is defined as a person's capability to function effectively in situations characterised by culture diversity (Ang et al., 2007) may provide one

of the solutions to minimize adjustment difficulties, specifically in integrating with the host country's environment. CQ is a specific form of intelligence focused on capabilities to grasp reason and behave effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity. In spite of its importance, attempts to empirically examine the effect of CQ on international students sociocultural adjustment in Malaysia have been very limited.

Prior studies on the determinants of sociocultural adjustment have studied on social skills, interpersonal behaviours, social psychology of intercultural interactions, learning culture-specific skills, psychological adaptation (Argyle, 1969; Bochner, 1986; Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Masgoret and Ward, 2006). The findings from these studies have shed light on the issues related to sociocultural adjustment and had enhanced our understanding of the relationship between sociocultural adjustment and adaptation factors. However, the significant rise of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) factor has been largely overlooked in existing studies on sociocultural adjustment. Thus, in this research, we will examine further whether Cultural intelligence will positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment.

Research Objective and Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate whether Cultural Intelligence (CQ) will positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment in the context of pursuing education in higher learning institutions in Malaysia. Another important area of this study is to explore the differentials effects of the four CQ factors on individual work performance as well as to identify which factors of Cultural Intelligence (Strategy CQ, Knowledge CQ, Action CQ, or Drive CQ) is the strongest predictor of international students' sociocultural adaptation.

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Many international students face challenges when they pursue higher education outside their home countries (Hull, 1978; Ozturgut and Murphy, 2009). This is because they have to live in a new environment which is completely different from their home country. Smooth campus adjustment plays a vital role to ensure the success of these students in completing their studies in Malaysia and because of that, it is important to identify and evaluate factors contributing to students' adjustment success.

Many studies pertaining to international students' cross-cultural adjustment have been carried out in Western countries however, not many studies have been carried out in Malaysia. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out a research to study international student's adjustment in Malaysia. The focus of the current study is to propose Cultural Intelligence as an important skills that need to be possessed by international students so that they can adapt successfully to a new cultural setting.

Research Questions

1. To investigate whether Cultural Intelligence (CQ) would positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment.

2. To identify which sub-construct of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is the strongest predictor of international students' sociocultural adjustment.

Literature Review

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is claimed to be the theoretical extension of Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligence (Early and Ang, 2003). Gardner (1983) came up with the theory of

Multiple Intelligence that focused on the importance of non-cognitive aspect of intelligence. Gardner (1983) defines intelligence as "the ability to solve problems or to create products that are valued with one or more cultural settings" (p.11). He argues that there are various forms of intelligence essential for solving different kinds of problems (beyond the traditional focus on academic and cognitive problems). Considerable attention has been focused on Emotional Intelligence (Mayer and Salovey, 1993), Social Intelligence (Thorndike and Stein, 1937), and Practical Intelligence (Sternberg, 1997) but none of these intelligences focus on the ability to solve cross-cultural problems (Gardner, 1993).This gap has prompted Earley and Ang's (2003) work on Cultural Intelligence (CQ). Drawing upon Sternberg and Detterman's (1986) multi-loci theory of intelligence, Early and Ang (2003) conceptualized CQ as a four-factor construct that includes metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural dimensions.

Culture Intelligence is defined as a person's capability to adapt effectively to new cultural context (Early and Ang, 2003). To function effectively, individuals need to be socially apt in deciding on the most appropriate behaviour that is suitable in an intercultural interaction. Recently, Livermore (2008), introduced a new dimensional model of CQ that presented CQ as a four-step process that consists of: CQ Drive (Motivational Intelligence), CQ Knowledge (Cognitive Intelligence), CQ Strategy (Meta-cognitive Intelligence) and CQ Action (Behavioural Intelligence). Each dimension of CQ have special relevance to different outcomes. Ang et al., (2007) and Templer et al., (2006) claimed that it is critical to examine CQ as a multidimensional construct with differential relationships and specific intercultural effectiveness outcomes.

Strategy CQ (Meta-cognitive) reflects mental process that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge including knowledge and control over individual thought processes relating to culture (Flavell, 1979). People with high Strategy CQ are consciously aware of others cultural preferences before and after interactions (Ang et al., 2007).

Knowledge CQ (Cognitive) focuses on the knowledge of the norms, practices and conventions in different cultures acquired from education and professional experiences (Ang et al., 2007). This includes the knowledge of the economic, legal and social systems of different cultures and subcultures (Triandis, 1994) and knowledge of the basic frameworks of cultural values (e.g., Hofstede, 2001). Those with high Knowledge CQ are better able to interact with people from a culturally different society (Ang and Inkpen, 2008).

Drive CQ (Motivational) reflects the capability to direct attention and energy toward learning about and functioning in situations characterized by cultural differences (Ang et al., 2007). Those with high Drive CQ direct attention and energy toward cross cultural situations based on intrinsic interest (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and confidence in their cross cultural effectiveness (Bandura, 2002).

Action CQ (Behavioural) reflects the capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and non-verbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures (Ang et al., 2007). Those with high Action CQ exhibit situationally appropriate behaviours based on broad range of verbal and non-verbal capabilities such as exhibiting culturally appropriate.

Sociocultural Adaptation

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). Sociocultural adaptation concerns on people's sense as to how well they can 'fit in' to the new environment. It has been associated with variables that influence culture learning and acquisition of social skills in the host culture, like language fluency, acculturation strategies, length of residence in a host culture and cultural distance (Searle and Ward, 1990: Ward and Kennedy, 1999). Ward argues that there are two adaptation domains that are relevant for all acculturating persons: psychological and socio-cultural. Socio-cultural adaptation is linked to behaviours and skills. Sociocultural adaptation is best explained within a social skills or cultural learning paradigm. Several authors have identified different domains of sociocultural adaptation; for example, Black and Stephens (1989), who have researched intercultural adjustment in the management field, specify the following three domains: general adjustment (managing daily life), interaction adjustment (relating effectively to host nationals), and work adjustment (accomplishment of work-related objectives).

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.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework
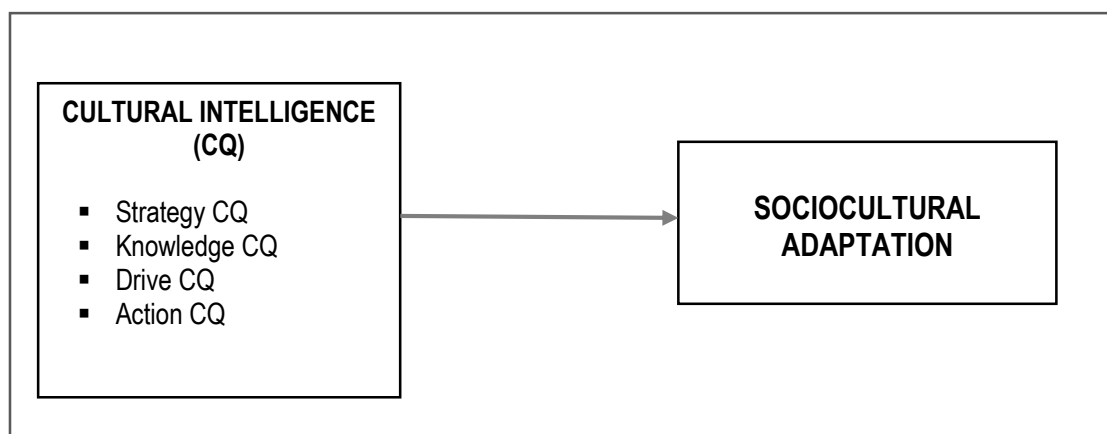
Research Methodology

Data will be collected quantitatively using survey method. The respondents will be international mobility students under AIMS program enrolled in six public universities in Malaysia – Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Malaya, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi MARA. A total of 150 students will be taken as study sample. Once date collection stage is completed, the data then will be analyzed using SPSS 21 and Smart-PLS SEM. To measure the research

constructs, Cultural Intelligence will be measured using Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) developed by Ang et al. (2007). The CQ scale (CQS), consisted of 20 items with four sub-scales which consisted of Strategy CQ (4 items), Knowledge CQ (6 items), CQ Drive (5items) and CQ Action (5 items). In order to measure the level of sociocultural adjustment, Ward and Kennedy's (1999) Socio-cultural Adjustment Scale (SCAS) will be used in the present study. The Socio-cultural Adjustment Scale (SCAS) consists of 29 items that measure the degree to which international students perceived difficulties in understanding the local values and cultures, interacting with the hosts, meeting the demands of daily life, and behaving in a culturally appropriate manner.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are developed to determine the influence of Cultural Intelligence on international students' sociocultural adjustment.

Main hypothesis 1

H1 - Culture Intelligence (CQ) will positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment.

Sub-hypotheses:

H1a – Strategy CQ will positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment .

H1b – Knowledge CQ will positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment.

H1c – Drive CQ will positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment.

H1d – Action CQ will positively influence international students' sociocultural adjustment.

CONCLUSION

Student mobility offers great experience in different study environment, which will form new cultural, social and academic values to students, which finally creates opportunities for their personal growth. In addition, gaining experience of studying at overseas in certain period time might enhance the employability of the students as in international job market, especially in ASEAN countries. Following global trends of increased workforce immigration and mobility, many private-and public sector organizations and, especially, multinational corporations (MNCs) have responded to the growing need for a cross-culturally competent workforce by seeking to train their expatriate or sojourner personnel through specially designed training programs. At the same time, business schools around the world responded to these needs by preparing their students with enhanced cross-cultural skills and competencies. This led to a proliferation of teaching and educational activities designed to equip students with the necessary cross-cultural competencies. Finally, in the modern world where global business restrictions are being reduced, applying

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