Towards an integrated conceptual model of international student adjustment and adaptation

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Overview

1. Background – ‘internationalising’ universities and the international student experience
2. Conceptualising the experience – a need for integration
3. Initial empirical investigation
4. Towards an integrated model of international student adjustment and adaptation
5. A proposed model (Schartner & Young, 2015)
6. Implications and a research agenda
7. Your questions and comments
Background

Internationalising universities among the most conceptually interesting intercultural arenas

International students now probably the most-researched group of cross-cultural sojourners (Zhou et al., 2008)

BUT:

Conceptual models of adjustment and adaptation more specific to the experiences of longer-term immigrants (e.g. Bourhis et al., 1997; Ward et al., 2001; Piontkowski et al., 2002; Safdar et al., 2003; Navas et al. 2005; Berry 2006)

Going beyond a ‘one size fits all’ model
Background cont’d

International students are a unique sub-group of cross-cultural sojourners

Specific and tested performance outcomes (Ward et al., 2001)

‘Triple transition’ (Jindal-Snape and Ingram, 2013)

- New sociocultural milieu
- New institutional and academic culture(s)
- New level of study, ‘vertical mobility’ (OECD, 2009)

Growing rapidly

- 71 percent of all full-time UK taught postgraduates
- 49 percent of all full-time UK research postgraduates (UKCISA, 2014)
Our model

Integrated conceptual model of ‘the international student experience’

Full temporal range of the experience
• Pre-sojourn
• In-sojourn

The experience of change (adjustment) and its outcomes (adaptation) (cf. Young and Schartner, 2014)

Incorporates academic, psychological and sociocultural aspects (Young et al, 2013)
Why (now)?

Critical point in time:

◦ Increased attention to the ‘student experience’ (Ertl and Wright, 2008)
◦ ‘Student-centred ethos’ (Quinlan, 2014)

Frame of reference for those working in the ‘internationalising’ university
Organising framework for the synthesis of a burgeoning body of research
Specific to the international student context
Integrating ‘educational’ and ‘intercultural’ literatures
Initial investigation

Factors contributing to a successful ‘international student experience’ (Young et al, 2013)

Mixed methods
- Interviews throughout the programme (volunteers)
- Snapshot questionnaire in semester one (pre assessment, most of the cohort in ECLS)
- Academic achievement (at end, cohort)

‘Success’ – defined by and related to students’ priorities, needs....
- Academic achievement
- Psychological wellbeing
- Satisfaction with life in the new sociocultural environment(s)

Contributory factors might include proficiency in host language, intercultural effectiveness, social contacts and social support...
Initial findings

Indications of associations between

Academic achievement *and*
  Language proficiency
  Aspects of intercultural effectiveness
  Contact with non-conational international students

Psychological wellbeing *and*
  Language proficiency
  Personality/intercultural effectiveness factors - emotional stability and open-mindedness
  Social contact with hosts
  Quality of social support in new environment

Satisfaction with life in the new environment *and*
  Language proficiency
  Emotional stability
  Social contact with hosts
Some initial conclusions

Clear patterns of contact and support for ISs in UK
- Little with hosts
- Where IS-host contact does happen, it correlates strongly with IS wellbeing and satisfaction. How to help hosts ‘buy in’?
- Interaction with non-conational ISs may help academically

Some things we already knew?
- Language contributes to all aspects of ‘success’
- Quality of social support is associated with wellbeing
- ‘Systems’ at host institution, and in UK as a whole, are well-received by ISs
- More emotionally stable people seem better able to cope

Aspects of intercultural effectiveness seem important
- Approach IC as predispositional? Malleable? Trainable?
- More in this field to integrate and incorporate into modelling the experience...
Questions arising…

Conceptually, what else can we learn from cross- intercultural research around adjustment and adaptation?

◦ How can we adapt this to investigate the circumstances of ‘international’ students?

◦ How to integrate this with other conceptual frameworks related to ‘culture learning’ and ‘sociocultural coping’

◦ How can we acknowledge that ‘the international student experience’ extends beyond the actual period of study?

◦ Methodologically, how to more fully capture adjustment trajectories, experiences…
Moving on – towards and integrated model

Longitudinal mixed-method study investigating the academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation of international postgraduate students in the UK (Schartner, 2014)

Multinational sample of international postgraduate students undertaking one-year taught MA degrees in the humanities and social sciences at a single British university

Self-report survey (N = 223) – predictive element
T1: October
T2: June

Semi-structured interviews (N = 20) – monitoring element
T1: October
T2: February
T3: June
Theoretical underpinning

Drawing more from the literature on inter/cross cultural sojourners...

**Stress and coping approaches**

Cognitive appraisal and coping strategies (Berry, 2006)

**Culture-learning and social skills approaches**

Learning salient characteristics of the new environment (Furnham and Bochner, 1982, 1986)
Theoretical underpinning cont’d
Adjustment domains

**Academic:** adjustment to the specific demands of academic study including styles of teaching and learning at the host university (Ryan, 2005)

**Psychological:** affective responses to the new environment, including psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life (Sam, 2000)

**Sociocultural:** cognitive and behavioural factors associated with effective performance in the host country (e.g. the ability to ‘fit in’)
Contributory factors to adjustment and adaptation

**Pre-sojourn:**
- Host language ability
- Knowledge about the host country
- Prior overseas experience
- Autonomy in the decision to study abroad
- Intercultural competence

**In-sojourn:**
- Social contact
- Social support
An Integrated Model of International Student Adjustment and Adaptation (Schartner and Young, 2015)

**ARRIVAL**

PRE-SOJOURN CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS
- Host language ability
- Intercultural competence
- Intrinsic motivation
- Host country knowledge

**ADJUSTMENT**

Academic adjustment
Psychological adjustment
Sociocultural adjustment

**ADAPTATION**

Academic adaptation
Psychological adaptation
Sociocultural adaptation

IN-SOJOURN CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS
- Social contact
- Social support
Conceptual, empirical and methodological contributions

1. Conceptual distinction between ‘adjustment’ and ‘adaptation’
2. Capture adjustment beyond the purely psycho-social (i.e. academic adjustment)
3. ‘Pre-sojourn’ vs. ‘in-sojourn’ contributory factors (cf. Berry, 2006)
4. Integration of culture-learning/social skills lens and stress and coping lens
5. Empirical research framework:
   ◦ Combination of predictive (i.e. quantitative) and monitoring (i.e. qualitative) elements
   ◦ Processes (i.e. adjustment) and outcomes (i.e. adaptation)
Implications for practice and possible applications

Heuristic:

◦ Reflective tool for students
◦ Institutional tool for HE institutions

Implications:

◦ Intercultural education and training
◦ Language support
◦ Knowledge (in-action) training
◦ Motivation
◦ Social ties and social support
Research agenda

1. Comparative studies
   ◦ Levels of study
   ◦ Across disciplines
   ◦ Host-country specific macro-level factors
   ◦ Institutional factors (e.g. internationalisation agendas)
   ◦ Demographics (e.g. gender, age etc.)

2. Acculturation strategies (of individuals and institutions) and support

3. Outcome measures at different points in time (i.e. time-of-year effect)

4. Temporal perspective – ‘pre- and post-sojourn’ and re-entry experiences (investigation of retrospectives on ex-international students’ experiences underway...)
References


References cont’d


Schartner, A. (2014). *Cross-cultural transition in higher education. The academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation of international postgraduate students at a British university* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), Newcastle University, UK.


Towards an integrated conceptual model of international student adjustment and adaptation

Thank you!

Your questions, comments...

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