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Chung, Mona and Nyland, Chris 2007, The impact of cultural differences on international students in Australia, *in Achieving competitive advantage through managing global resources*, Global Business and Technology Association, Huntington Station, N.Y.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

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THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

A growing and increasingly competitive international student market is forcing universities, especially those in the English speaking countries, into re-thinking how to remain competitive. One important bench mark is student satisfaction. This paper draws on interview data from nine Australian universities to look at how the cultural differences have impacted on their learning and living experience in Australia and in particular how the cultural differences impact on their stress levels and how they cope with the issue of integrating into the local community. We argue that a significant proportion of international students studying in Australia do experience difficulties such as discrimination and bad treatment; which causes high stress levels. The implication of this argument is that the government and the university sector should pay increased attention to this aspect of student need. Further relevant parties at the government level should also be alarmed by the funding of this research and policies to address the issue of international students' well-being should also be considered.

INTRODUCTION

The international tertiary student (or mobile students by UNESCO) market has surged by 41% from 1.75 million to 2.5 million between 1999 and 2004 in over 200 countries in the world (UNESCO, 2006). According to Hendrik van der Pol, UIS (UNESCO Institute of Statistics) director, the driving force behind the internationalisation of higher education internationalisation comes from African, Arab and Chinese students (UNESCO, 2006). This demand is predicted to grow to 7.6 million in 2025 (Bohm, 2003). It is predicted that 3.4 million will study in one of the five major English speaking countries: US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Bohm, 2003).

The international student market to Australia is a 6 billion dollar industry which has taken over wool export in 2004 (DFAT, 2004). Despite a slow down internationally, the Australian universities continue to attract overseas students successfully. There has been a nearly 7% growth in the 12 months to August 2006 (Maslen, 2006) and it is now an export industry of 9.8 billion (Maslen, 2006; Slattery, 2006). The total numbers of international students studying in Australia were 179,619 in 2005 (UIS, 2005). 119,737 (67%) were Asian students. An outlook on the global demand for Australian international higher education is predicted to reach 658,104 in 2025 or 19.3% share of the major English-speaking countries. The Asia region will represent 93% of the demand (Bohm, 2003). Australia, being the 3rd world largest higher education services exporter after the US and the UK (Harman, 2004), nevertheless has the highest proportion of international students who make up 12.6% of all higher education students. In comparison, in 2000 the percentage in the US was 3.2%, 3.8% in Canada and 10.8% in UK (OECD, 2000). This demonstrates the important position of international students in the Australian higher education system.

In this paper we will look at the impact of cultural difference on international students' experience of living and studying in Australia. It begins with discussion of overcoming the cross-cultural barriers. Using interviews of 200 international students from nine Australian universities we investigated the cross-cultural experience of

international students and how they integrated into the Australian community, how they formed friendship, issues of social activities, racial and religious issues and their education experience and how to overcome barriers while studying in Australia. Using the data collected from nine universities in Australia, we attempt to discover the situation they currently encounter. In doing so, we make recommendations for further improvements for institutions and government bodies in the attempt of assisting students to overcome cultural barriers. This in turn will improve their experience and academic performance.

OVERCOMING THE CROSS-CULTURAL BARRIERS

Students do face a major challenge while studying overseas – to adjust to very different roles and systems (Biggs, 1994; Hanassab, 2006; Varga-Atkins & Ashcroft, 2004; Yap, 1997). It is not surprised that cultural shock is a major problem for international students (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) because among many of the reasons that students seek to study overseas, the desire to gain better understanding of the “west” is one of the reasons that they come to Australia (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). As Luzio-Lockett (1998) suggested, the international student is “taken into a different education system, which brings with it its own inherent problems of adjustment”. Earley and Ang (2003) suggested such adjustment not only requires a cognitive understanding of the new culture but also a person’s motivation to engage the new culture. The feeling of culture shock and isolation carries with it the potential for alienation, loneliness and withdrawal (Tomich, Mcwhirter, & Al., 2003) which impact on their living and learning process while overseas. A constant motivation is not easy when they are consistently facing impediments. The effect of cultural shock cannot be underestimated, especially if we realise that it extends far beyond language, customs and legal systems. To identify the problem and then address the problems is an important task to ensure a positive experience of the international students overseas.

To assist international students in overcoming the cultural difficulties when studying in Australia has several significant important values for students, institutions, government bodies, Australian communities as well as the international communities where the international students come from. Inability to cope with cultural difficulties increases the students stress level and will impact on their academic performance as well as their well-being. These will further impact on the Australian institutions when delivering the most wanted Australian education. On one hand, poor performance may impact on the quality branding of Australian tertiary education as a whole; on the other hand, students’ well-being may increase the costs of students’ services which is currently under funding cuts by the government. From the government point of view, a large number of the students seek to remain in Australia after their education (Baas, 2006), poor academic performance will impact on government policies and the future of migration rules. Further, inability to deal with cultural difficulties impacts on their integration with local community and this raises concerns for their family and their local communities overseas. Since identified earlier the importance of economic contribution of tertiary education to Australia as a major export market, identifying the culturally related difficulties and addressing them will be critical for all parties involved especially the students.

METHOD

The research project owes much of its significance to the method utilised. Unlike previous studies, which have tended to be survey based, the data was collected by qualitative interviews obtained via structured, in-depth, face-to-face conversations with 200 international students (99 females and 101 males) from 9 universities (Melbourne, Ballarat, Sydney, New South Wales, Deakin, Victoria, Swinburne, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and Central Queensland). The interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis in quiet locations for typically 30-50 minutes and covered a range of areas touching on the social and economic security of international students, from finances, accommodation and work; to languages, networks and family; to relations with authority; to intercultural experiences and personal safety. Summative data from the study were released in April 2005 (Deumert et al, 2005a; 2005b). This paper focuses on cultural differences and their impacts on international students and other papers are being prepared on student loneliness, work, finances, language use, cross-cultural relations including experiences of racism and discrimination, and dealing with government and university authorities.

The universities named above cooperated in the selection and self-selection of student interviewees, and provided facilities (normally a room centrally located on the main campus site) in which the interviews took place.

Each vice-chancellor granted permission for the conduct of the research on the grounds that the interviewees would together constitute a single pool of data that would not be disaggregated by institution, or otherwise used for the purposes of comparing the performance of, and/or services of, each university to those of the others. In a highly sensitive market, in which comparative judgments have commercial implications, we would not have been able to gain access to student interviewees within the boundaries of the normal requirement for permission to research, unless we had given this condition. Consequently the researchers did not study closely the particular mix of services provided by each institution, or seek to relate the comments made in interviewees with the particular circumstances of the universities in question. No doubt this has led to some under-identification of the universities' services, including particular problems and weakness in those services.

The interactive nature of the qualitative method employed provides a meaningful picture of the international student experience in Australia. The interviews were designed to gain knowledge of basic demographic information and responses to 8 clusters of questions. The demographic information obtained included student name, university, degree, and gender. The clusters of questions sought information concerning particular topics. Specifically, Cluster 1: The interviewee and the interviewee's prior assumptions about studying abroad; Cluster 2: living arrangements; Cluster 3: financial arrangements; Cluster 4: language and language use; Cluster 5: networks, organizations and support systems; Cluster 6: financial problems and work issues; Cluster 7: dealing with authorities; and Cluster 8: Social risks and social protection. Students were asked each question and elaborated answers were encouraged. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed prior to analysis. For the purposes of this paper, data was drawn mainly from Clusters 1, 2, 3 and 5. However, as is the nature of qualitative interviews, relevant information was found in a number of other clusters. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were utilised to analyse the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Cross-cultural experience and barriers to integrate into the Australian community

In studying the cross-cultural barriers, language is one of the first obvious factors that international students have to deal with especially those who are from a non-English speaking background. All students who are admitted into universities must satisfy requirements of English language entry level scores. For all the students coming to Australia for tertiary studies, they must meet a minimum language requirement or institution requirement. In general, this is IELTS 5.5 or 6.0 for most of the foundation and undergraduate studies and 6.5 for most of the postgraduate studies (Chung, Kelliher, & Smith, 2006a). The limitation of these test scores is that the students' comprehension levels may vary despite that they reach the required entry scores. Some students have been using English at home however when they are in Australia, they sometimes struggle to understand everything properly.

"Quite... one would be, number one would be language. Although we speak English, but most of them would not understand us so we need to like, put on this pseudo-accent. I think it's very much Asian and Caucasian thing."
(S69, Female, 22, Mass Communication, Singapore)

One of the important elements to consider from the point of view of international students is English is not their first language. Some of the processes such as comprehension, reading speed and other academic skills are often different when they studied at their home countries. Often when problems occur, use language difficulty as their only explanation has been an effective method in stopping us in searching for further explanations. Students and staff use the phrase "it's a language problem" to explain all types of issues such as culture, value, customs and context. Using language as an excuse could be a deadly trap that no further investigation is conducted in finding out the exact cause of the problems. This could also lead to further disappointment that after it's identified as a language problem, the approach to a solution is generally been concluded. Although to most of the international students, especially the Asian students, English is not their first language, however for many, such as Indians and Singaporeans, English is used as their official language and often at home as well. This often resulted in students who were brought up in an English speaking environment but they could be speaking the language-English differently from Australians. The biggest gap however can be identified is context. Especially for those who just

arrived, speaking English in a totally different context is what was causing the problems. So far universities have mostly set up departments, programs and sections in supporting the students with language studies (Catterall, 2003; Chanock, 1994; Chung et al., 2006a; Cootes, 1994; Kokkinn & Stevenson, 2003). Language plays an important role in their pursuit of academic studies as well as social encounter (Hawkins & Bransgrove, 1998).

Friendship and Isolation

Language ability is essential for their academic studies. We were not able to collect enough numbers (27 out of 200) to establish a statistical stance from the students surveyed about the importance of language when making friends. However, when asked if they were feeling any difficulties in making friends here in Australia, a mutual age student from Brunei commented:

"sometimes I find that yes, sometimes I do find that true, because some people they just can't step out of culture like my in Brunei we always have different people because we have different kind of people coming to Brunei, but I find it here that some of them are not that way because they just can't accept other people." (S1, Female, 35, Ceramics, Brunei)

Cultural differences have been identified as major barriers when establishing friendship with Australians. A student of Pakistan origin but have lived and studied in Dubai commented:

"No, not many locals [friends] because they have the difference (sic). They don't – how should I put it? It's easier for you to – for me it wasn't tough to mix with the locals. I did mix with them but the thing is they tend to be....I would say they are materialistic. Not all of them, don't get me wrong on that, but when you tend to be you know studying with them, they would be in contact with you, but after that I've had some really bad experiences, but then once you get [to] used to everything, but now I am more into people from my country because the more you get into the atmosphere the more you get from it."(S10, Male, 19, Commerce, Accounting and Law, Pakistan)

The most common feedback about Australian students from the international students is that they are friendly to talk to. Although some international students felt that they always have to make the effort. The major difficulty is to establish a friendship beyond classroom relationships and required group work.

"Yeah, I do (have local friends), but not like very close to them, because I think they have different lifestyle. Our thinking is different as well but they are very nice to talk with. Mostly they are friends from my course. Yeah, sometimes, we met in school we talk together but we never like hang out together outside." (S119, Female, 21 Commerce, Indonesia)

The development of technology has made education internationally possible without having to be away from home. Students and their families choose to come to Australia to live is for the purpose of gaining knowledge and understanding of the West (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Establishing friendship with local students is an obvious vehicle in achieving this objective.

Difficulties in make friends with Australian students could impact on their academic performance (Bochner, 1986). This was obvious when they needed to form groups for group work. Australian students prefer working with other Australian students. Previous research has also confirmed that difficulties adjusting to a new culture can seriously impact on their performance (Bochner, 1986). Even when international students were successful in forming groups with local students, and work with them, it was noted that friendship did not develop from that. As soon as the work finished, contacts were finished. On rare occasions when international students finally form friendship with someone, it was usually not long lasting. In the process of desperately seeking for friendship, international students revert back to forming relationships with their country people and for the some they opt for other international students. The inability of making friends with local students led to students seeking friendship from other international students and students of the same culture.

"I feel that I think there's a common – I notice that if it's Asian to Asian it's easier. This is what I notice, but even in my course I feel there's like this little gap between like these local Australian students and the Asian ones. Of course they still mix but you see there's quite a – like in this group includes local assignments they usually stick together. Probably it's easier to communicate probably more communication and we Asians tend to stick together."

Students found their lives in Australia are often boring, isolated and lonely since they are away from their network, family members and more importantly the populated neighbourhood and community. This is somewhat understandable at the beginning of their studies when they first arrive.

"The first half year was quite lonely. I've got a friend. She's over from Hong Kong. She studies with me and came together so we share the feelings with each other." (S9, Female, 23, Nursing, Hong Kong)

Table 4 Difficulties in making friends from different cultures

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 49 | 24.5 | 24.5 | 24.5 |
| Yes | 86 | 43.0 | 43.0 | 67.5 |
| No | 65 | 32.5 | 32.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 200 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

86 (43% out of total) students stated that cultural differences are barriers in relationship building. This number represents 60% of the students who provided information for this question. As indicated in the literature, one of the main drivers for international students to pursue overseas experience is to learn the culture especially something "western" (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). It appears that it is this "culture" - what they came to learn, is the act of a barrier to their learning.

"[language is] not really a problem but I don't know how to say it – the culture is quite important too because people from different culture have different topics you know and when they're talking sometimes it's quite hard to really make close friends with other people from other culture." (S9, Female, 23, Nursing, Hong Kong)

Our finding of the difficulties that international students have been experienced in establishing friendship with local students at such a high level (table1) should be a concern for institutions, community and government bodies. The fact that students also communicate frequently with their families and friends back at home, it is obvious that their problems such as unable to make friends with locals would be communicated. This will have two levels of concerns: 1. Their parents will be worrying about their children especially those who are of younger age; 2. Asian consumers in general are more susceptible to normative interpersonal influence (D'rozario & Choudhury, 2000) therefore the concern of not been able to learn enough about the West may impact on their future decision-making process.

Overcoming cultural barriers does not only help with making new friends, it also helps with living and studying in Australia. It helps with understanding the community and its people involved. In turn it will help with the integration within the community. Below is a typical situation where students were not explained all the policies and rules in advance, when they breach the policies they were still not made understood the reason and policies behind the actions.

"I stay in the accommodation for a few days when I first come here. [then] I found a house and I wanted to move over there and I don't want to stay in the university anymore.[the officer] the lady just said 'oh, how come, why, and if you don't stay there we don't have any people stay in the room and you have to pay the fees for the empty room even though you don't stay there. And I said 'how long?' she said 'I don't know, probably three weeks or three days or three months until someone stay in the room otherwise you have to pay for a year maybe'. I was quite upset because I'm the one who go into the office waiting for her for 45 minutes to see her and let her know.... and I would like to pay the money for the ten days when I live there.....I'm the one who is doing this and she just

say 'no you can't leave, yes, you can leave but you have to pay the money.....' I was really upset about it....." (S9, Female, 23, Nursing, Hong Kong)

Despite the difficult illustrated how the international students found it was difficulty to integrate in to the community. The desire from students to be included and "fit in" is no doubt evidenced this research and research shows the benefit of social ties with locals (Kashima & Loh, 2006) however our research clearly identified needs for the strengthening of this connection.

Social activities

The social and culture issues are important to international students especially for their age groups (table 1). We set to find out how students make up the lack of social interaction while studying in Australia.

Table 5 Age distribution (n=200)

| | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Valid | 3 | 1.5 | 1.5 |
| 18-20 | 17 | 8.5 | 10.0 |
| 21-30 | 131 | 65.5 | 75.5 |
| 31-40 | 43 | 21.5 | 97.0 |
| 41-46 | 6 | 3 | 100.0 |
| Total | 200 | 100.0 | |

We found they are frequently in touch with their families, relative and friends back at home. Our survey showed that 97.5% of them have contact with parents, family members and siblings. Not even one student stated that he/she had no contact. 79% of them had frequent contact or frequent and regular contact.

Table 6 Frequency of contact with home (n=182)

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 18 | 9.0 | 9.0 | 9.0 |
| frequently | 138 | 69.0 | 69.0 | 78.0 |
| Frequently and regularly | 2 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 79.0 |
| sometimes | 18 | 9.0 | 9.0 | 88.0 |
| seldom | 2 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 89.0 |
| regularly | 22 | 11.0 | 11.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 200 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

We observed very close and frequent contacts between the students and their families and even friends back at home. By trying to explain the phenomenon with age is not a sound method because table 1 shows that only 8.5% of the students who are considered younger age students of 18-20. Contact with families is clearly used as a form of support which they need.

This need of support, cultural and social integration have previously found in research into immigrants (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Ward, 2002). In fact, Kashima and Loh (Kashima & Loh, 2006) argued that this social cultural adjustment need in international students is greater and this further impacted on their learning patterns.

Racial and Religious issues

Alarming, close to 50% of the students have had bad experience or treatment which they consider are race related. The student identified above could have been the worst case scenario the large numbers should draw the attention of authorities and institutions. 4% (8) weren't sure if their experiences would be considered racial based. Only 40% were definite that they did not have any bad treatment or discrimination experience.

Table 7 Discrimination or Bad Treatment Experience (n=185)

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 15 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 |
| Yes | 97 | 48.5 | 48.5 | 56.0 |
| No | 80 | 40.0 | 40.0 | 96.0 |
| Hard to say | 8 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 200 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Although some incidents were questionable because they were based on individual's interpretation. A number of students stated incidents where they considered racist. The following incident perhaps can be clearly defined as racist situations.

"it's one of my classmates but I don't know whether she meant it or not but it's just that I get offended sometimes like when she called me a stupid Muslim or something and used to be Asian, and when we talk about families. I know that in Islam men are allowed to have four wives right, so and then because I do believe that as a woman in Islam we do respect the husband. I'm not saying the other cultures don't do that okay, but we started to talk about this and that, and you know we don't just simply cross with your husband or something and then this classmate of mine she just like – 'I don't like that and you and your stupid brothers' – and that is really offensive you know." (S1, Female, 35, Ceramics, Brunei)

For the same person, her religion was clearly an issue that was causing her grieve.

"I wear my headscarf back in Brunei but now when I first came here last year I was paying.... I walk with my headscarf to school and everybody was staring at this me and I wore that headscarf for three days and then I started telling myself that it's not safe because I don't feel safe with people staring at me. Instead of them admiring you wearing your headscarf or it's just another they don't like it, so I decided not to wear that and then when I came here this year I decided I want to wear my headscarf again, so until there was this ... well we were in the club somebody threw some stones, you know to the window and the next week they pointing a red pointer light on to me. I thought it was me but I just kept quiet because I thought probably I'm just imagining thing. Then that happed for three times so I told my teacher that I don't feel safe. Is it because I'm wearing my scarf and my teacher said 'yes'. Well actually the first time when they threw the stone my teacher realised that and he was trying to catch kids but they run off. It's some of the students." S1, Female, 35, Ceramics, Brunei)

A Japanese student believed that Australian Caucasians are racist against Asians.

"There is always this discrimination going on in Australia between Caucasian and Asian. Like in high school there is this Asian group, and Caucasian group but I was in the boarding house and I was talking to everyone, still there was a bit of discrimination, but in uni, they are totally separated and I have no chance to talk to Yeah you don't call it discrimination... just segregation."(S118, Male, Medicine, Japan)

Also the students themselves opted out to suggest there is such division based on conscious discrimination; the following incident is no doubt a clear case of bad treatment.

"Discrimination I would say. it's may be isolated when I walked around people shouting at me there was once people throw an egg at me"(S138, Male, 20 Architecture, Malaysia)

As a result, symptoms which might not have a racial intension were often interpreted by international students as racist events which could have been a harsh judgement. But when they have little prior knowledge and little experience and/or new knowledge about the country and its people, it is not usual to be judgemental. Overall the general negative feeling about Australia and Australian students should be a serious concern for the universities and the government. Because the negative flow on effect from this will affect on the future of Australian education export. While discrimination and bad treatment to international students is observed in other parts of the world (Nieto, 2004), it is recognised that unfavourable experiences and relations with host nationals do cause serious psychological affect of the well-being of international students (Paige, 1990). Only 40% of the students surveyed were definite that they did not have any bad experience at all. Nearly half (48.5%) of them had discriminatory or bad treatment experience. This high level of bad experience should draw the attention of relevant authorities should that be government bodies, institutions and even the community. On one level, this will give Australia a reputation of a racist country; on the other level, students come to Australia for cultural experience and understanding. Bad experience will eliminate them from achieving this goal. Further for Asian students, personal influence will have stronger impact on the future students. Morally, institutions should be concerned of their well-being while studying in Australia.

Education experience

As shown in the literature, quality of education is one of the factors that attract international students to Australia (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Since the students are away from home, quality of teaching is not the only element students are looking for. Support and guidance is what determines their level of satisfaction.

"I found that the staff, I mean the teaching staff here is quite helpful. They will just ask you 'Stephanie if you've got any problem just come to see me, talk to me any time. They're quite helpful.'" (S9, Female, 23, Nursing, Hong Kong)

Students not only required the support for staff academically, they are also looking for cultural understanding, empathy and fair treatment.

"Oh, the teachers are so good. They're so cooperative and so understandable. They're really open-minded, they're not arrogant. They don't like argue with you. Whatever is logical and rational they will do it. If I'm good they will help me. If I'm not good it's not worth it. They won't waste their breath on me. It's like that. I think that's pretty fair. It's really, really fair." (S11, Female, 21, Commerce and Accounting, Bahrain)

Educating international students not only earn the export dollars for Australia, it is also an avenue of promoting Australian culture and awareness of Australia internationally. Evidence from before, parents who were educated in Australia have a strong tendency of sending their children back to Australia to be educated again. Since the Colombo plan, not only a large number of students who were educated here stayed and made their contribution to the Australian society, culture and economy, they continue to make further contributions in ways of improving culture exchange, and promoting Australian products, culture and experience internationally. The current Lord Mayor of Melbourne City John So is the best example of this education benefit to Australia. Poor experience is serious for the Australian education export industry. From all angles attention must be paid to improve international students' positive side of the experience in Australia.

"I never thought that it would turn out that way because I thought that part of the country you should help each other, but that was the most disappointing thing happening to me and from that experience and another experience in my class, like I tell my friend called me stupid Muslim, then I told my family when I went back last year for I'm not going to continue, never again, but then because I don't want to upset my eldest brother, because he has helped me a lot, I think maybe he can see the future so I just accept it. He says it won't be long then you'll be back with us." (S1, Female, 35, Ceramics, Brunei)

International students come to Australia for quality education. This does not only apply to the quality of teaching. It is a packaged experience consisted of many elements such as teaching and research qualities, the friendliness and the quality of staff. A positive cultural experience is a very important part of this package. Should this be seen as a single job for the tertiary institutions only? We'd like to argue for a whole community involved

effort to improve our studying and living environment for the international students. It's perhaps more of a moral pursuit for the large proportion of the community. We certainly like to argue for initiatives, contribution from the Australian government that organisations such as Austrade may be able to play an active role since they now have a portfolio in education.

Although universities have all set up services such as counselling to provide support to international students, students prefer to go to their lecturers and tutors first regardless of the nature of the problem. Several reasons are behind this: 1. for high context culture students, communication is based on context, background information and understanding of culture; 2. for CHC students (Chung, Kelliher, & Smith, 2006b) they require more personal contact. Their lecturers and tutors are people they have more frequent contact with therefore they are more comfortable with them. In comparison when they seek for help from student services, it often depends on whom they get at the counter. This could mean that for one problem, they had to deal with several different people and explain their problems several times. Especially if the problems or issues are sensitive issues, they will not like it; 3. culturally, the CHC students have more respect towards their lecturers and tutors especially if they are more mature age.

"There are a few different places. I know there is a support system to help you in academic work. I didn't go to see them I think because I'm too busy and I can ask help from I usually ask my lecturer who teach at the uni if I have any problems or classmates." (S2, Female, Management, Malaysia)

This creates several problems for academics. First of all, problems they are presented with may require professional assistance that academics themselves may not necessarily be trained in dealing with these issues. Secondly, the expectations from international students may not be able to be met by academics due to lack of resources and experience therefore problems remain. Thirdly, with Australian education system, academics are prescribed with workload and spending much time resolving students' personal problems may mean that they may not be able to perform their other duties. Hence, some will be reluctant to do.

Australian teaching staff are generally well qualified and experienced in teaching however it is questioned whether they indeed have the level of cross-cultural knowledge, experience and skills to deal with the international students. They often meant well but their communication with international students are totally out of the context that these students can understand. International students either don't understand the requirements from the teaching staff (Chung et al., 2006b) or mis-understand their intention totally. Especially if they were under pressure to perform.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In short, international students are not having a smooth sailing in Australia as their studying experience. Institutions such as hosting universities may take a more pro-active approach in addressing some of the issues. This may be carried out through student services. At the government policy level, it is suggested that policies may be put into place in helping international students to better their time spent in Australia. Pre-departure cross-cultural training should be made available upon receiving their visas to come to Australia. This should further be linked to student services as apart of the follow up services provided from these training courses. Not only students are better prepared this way, they will also be tracked via the follow up service that their progress will then be monitored to ensure the quality of the results.

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