ABSTRACT

There is a scarcity of studies wherein a critical review or synthesis exists on the adjustment of international students with a few exceptional works. Therefore, through critical analyses of recent studies from various disciplines, the authors examine conceptual applications of existing models or typologies incorporated in previous studies, and redefine the nature of problems encountered by international students with a synthesis of study results on their adjustment issues: psychological, socio-cultural, and academic adjustment. Furthermore, suggestions for both practitioners and researchers are elaborated in the chapter. These suggestions include creating a new conceptual/theoretical model, emphasizing a critical role played by the host university, and tailoring support services to satisfy specific needs of diverse groups of international students within the specific campus context.

INTRODUCTION

As a consequence of the increased global mobility of international students in higher education, the adjustment issues of international college students have been investigated in many studies worldwide (e.g., Brown & Holloway, 2008; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Coles & Swami, 2012; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Hechanova-Alampay, Christiansen, & Horn, 2002; Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9746-1.ch012
A Review of Literature on Adjustment Issues of International Students

Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012; Terry, Pelly, Lalonde, & Smith, 2006). Additionally, models, typologies, or theories have been constructed to elucidate the process of acculturation or adaptation during international students’ transition. Although there are numerous studies based on the existing models that have been utilized in various disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, health education, higher education, counseling), there is a dearth of articles reviewing study results and incorporated frameworks or typologies that acknowledge the gap in the literature, and make practical or methodological suggestions for future practitioners and researchers.

As a few, there are some exceptional authors including Church (1982) who critically reviewed previous studies related to the psychological adjustment of relatively short-term residents. Church (1982) examined existing models and methodologies, revealing his criticism on the limited but global methodologies with non-longitudinal nature of research design utilized in most of the cross-cultural studies. Although Church (1982) critically and synthetically reviewed previous articles for future research and practice, this quality article was published three decades ago, and now an updated review of more recent cross-cultural studies is warranted.

Therefore, in this book chapter, we identified common theories and models to review conceptual or methodological applications of current models or theories to cross-cultural studies, in particular, on academic sojourners in higher education. Additionally, we synthesized study results on common adjustment issues encountered by international students in higher education and variables influencing their adjustment. Furthermore, as an ultimate purpose of our study, we concluded our chapter with methodological and practical suggestions.

BACKGROUND

In this section, the historical perspectives on the cross-cultural adjustment will be examined with the focus of Oberg (1960)’s culture shock, which is regarded as a seminal work in the cross-cultural studies. To see how the perspective has evolved over time, the contemporary models on the cross-cultural adjustment will be discussed. Additionally, various acculturation models including Berry (2006)’s acculturation models will be elaborated.

Historical Perspectives on Intercultural Transition

The long established typology in the cross-cultural studies is culture shock, conceptualized by Oberg (1960). According to Oberg (1960), culture shock is personal, emotional reactions to unfamiliar culture. The traditional perspective of culture shock has been applied by many researchers and similar relevant concepts include language shock (Smalley, 1963), role shock (Byrnes, 1966), transitional shock (Bennett, 1977), and self-shock (Zaharna, 1989). Commonly, negative psychological outcomes as a result of culture shock are associated with a loss of pre-established cultural and social relations, and personal status, relating with the individual’s inability to interact with a new socio-cultural and linguistic environment effectively (Bennett, 1977). Accordingly, in describing and analyzing the adjustment problems of academic sojourners from the traditional perspective, their cross-cultural experiences have been considered as a cause of negative outcomes that needed medical treatments (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kim, 2001; Pedersen, 1991; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008).
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