



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***MODERATING ROLE OF SELF-CONSTRUAL ON RELATIONSHIP OF
INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY WITH INFORMAL AND FORMAL
CROSS-NATIONALITY DIVERSITY ENGAGEMENTS***

NORZITA BINTI YUNUS

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By

NORZITA BINTI YUNUS

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

August 2017

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

MODERATING ROLE OF SELF-CONSTRUAL ON RELATIONSHIP OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY WITH INFORMAL AND FORMAL CROSS-NATIONALITY DIVERSITY ENGAGEMENTS

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NORZITA BINTI YUNUS

August 2017

Chairman : Professor Ezhar Tamam, PhD
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Intercultural sensitivity, the affective dimension of intercultural communication competence, is paramount in enabling people to effectively participate in an increasingly pluralistic society. Past studies have shown that positive interaction with culturally different others contribute to a number of positive outcomes. Despite the importance of intercultural sensitivity, very limited studies have examined its relationship with engagement in informal and formal cross-nationality diversity within institution of higher learning settings particularly in the non-Western and non-American contexts. Framed upon Allport's Contact Theory, the present study examined the relationship of informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement with intercultural sensitivity among local undergraduate students in selected universities in Malaysia. It also examined the role of self-construal, an assumed moderator, in the relationship of engagement in informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement with intercultural sensitivity.

Using self-administered questionnaires, 1000 local undergraduate students from three universities participated in a cross-sectional survey. Since many Malaysian universities are heterogeneous in terms of student racial composition, stratified sampling was used to ensure representativeness of sample. Informal cross-nationality diversity engagement is defined as voluntary engagement in interaction with people who are culturally distinct within informal, unstructured settings. Formal cross-nationality diversity engagement is defined as engagement in diverse activities that provide knowledge on cultural others within formal, structured settings. All variables were measured using Likert's 5-point item scale, except for self-construal which was measured using Likert's 7-point item scale. All variables were tested for validity and reliability in a pilot test prior to the field data collection.

At bivariate level, Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to test the hypothesized relationships of informal and formal diversity engagement with intercultural sensitivity. The findings revealed that both informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement are significantly and positively related with intercultural sensitivity. However, the strength of the relationship for both was weak.

To determine the contribution of informal cross-nationality diversity engagement and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement towards intercultural sensitivity, a multiple regression was applied. Gender, ethnicity and experience going for vacation abroad were included as control variables. Interestingly and surprisingly, it was found that the formal cross-nationality diversity engagement had a significant positive correlation with intercultural sensitivity while the informal cross-nationality diversity engagement had a negative significant correlation with intercultural sensitivity. Further, the findings revealed that formal cross-nationality diversity engagement was the strongest predictor variable. The five variables, which are informal cross-nationality diversity engagement, formal cross-nationality diversity engagement, gender, ethnicity and experience going for vacation abroad, accounted for a small variance of intercultural sensitivity.

A hierarchical regression analysis was performed to test the hypothesized moderating role of self-construal on the relationship of informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement with intercultural sensitivity. When self-construal was added in the regression analysis, the analysis revealed different pattern of findings. Self-construal was found significantly positively correlated with intercultural sensitivity, and there was an interaction effect of self-construal on the positive relationship of formal and informal diversity engagement with intercultural sensitivity. The findings suggest that the contribution of formal and informal cross-nationality diversity engagement on intercultural sensitivity is more pronounced among students with low interdependence than among students with high interdependent self-construal.

All in all, both informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagements are significant but not strong predictors of intercultural sensitivity. The theoretical contribution of the study lies in advancing understanding by clarifying the role of self-construal within the aforementioned relationship, which has not been examined before. Informal and formal diversity engagement has differential influence on intercultural sensitivity development depending on one's degree of interdependent self-construal. In terms of practical implication, drawing on the findings on positive role of formal and informal diversity engagement on students' intercultural sensitivity development, it is suggested that Malaysia higher education institutions should systematically and actively promote and enhance students' engagement in culture-related diversity, particularly among students with low interdependent self-construal.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PERANAN KONSTRUAL DIRI SEBAGAI MODERATOR DALAM HUBUNGAN ANTARA KEPEKAAN ANTARABUDAYA DAN DIVERSITI SILANG KEWARGANEGARAAN BERBENTUK TIDAK FORMAL DAN FORMAL

Oleh

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Sensitiviti antara budaya, iaitu dimensi afektif kecekapan komunikasi antara budaya, adalah amat penting dalam membolehkan individu berfungsi secara berkesan dalam masyarakat yang semakin majmuk. Kajian lepas telah menunjukkan kepentingan interaksi positif dengan orang berlainan budaya kerana ia menyumbang kepada beberapa hasil positif. Namun begitu, kajian yang melihat hubungan antara keterlibatan dalam diversiti silang kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal dengan sensitiviti antara budaya dalam konteks bukan-kebaratan dan bukan-Amerika adalah amat terhad. Oleh itu, dengan menggunakan Teori Kontak Allport, kajian ini bertujuan mengkaji hubungan antara keterlibatan dalam diversiti silang kewarganegaraan dalam bentuk tidak formal dan formal dengan sensitiviti antara budaya dalam kalangan pelajar prasiswazah tempatan di universiti terpilih di Lembah Kelang, Malaysia. Ia juga mengkaji peranan konstrual diri sebagai moderator yang diandaikan memainkan peranan dalam hubungan yang dinyatakan.

Borang soal selidik digunakan dalam kalangan 1000 pelajar prasiswazah dari tiga buah universiti. Memandangkan kebanyakan universiti di Malaysia bersifat heterogen dari aspek komposisi kaum, persampelan rawak berstrata telah digunakan bagi memastikan terdapat wakil dari setiap subkelompok. Diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan dalam bentuk tidak formal merujuk kepada keterlibatan pelajar dalam aktiviti-aktiviti tidak formal dalam konteks yang tidak formal. Diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan dalam bentuk formal pula ditakrifkan sebagai keterlibatan pelajar dalam aktiviti-aktiviti yang bertujuan memberi pendedahan dan pengetahuan tentang budaya yang berbeza. Semua pembolehubah diukur dengan menggunakan skala Likert lima pilihan, kecuali bagi konstrual diri yang diukur menggunakan skala

Likert tujuh pilihan. Semua pembolehubah telah diuji kesahan dan kebolehppercayaan dalam ujian rintis sebelum pengumpulan data lapangan.

Di peringkat bivariat, analisis korelasi Pearson telah digunakan untuk menguji hubungan antara keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal dengan sensitiviti antara budaya. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan terdapat wujud hubungan positif yang signifikan antara kedua-dua bentuk diversiti dengan sensitiviti antara budaya. Walau bagaimanapun, kekuatan hubungan bagi kedua-dua adalah lemah.

Bagi menentukan sumbangan keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal terhadap sensitiviti antara budaya, analisis regresi linear berganda telah digunakan. Jantina, etnik dan pengalaman bercuti di luar negara telah dimasukkan sebagai pembolehubah kawalan. Dapatan kajian didapati menarik dan agak mengejutkan apabila didapati keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk formal mempunyai korelasi positif yang signifikan dengan sensitiviti antara budaya, namun bagi keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal, hubungannya dengan sensitiviti antara budaya berubah kepada korelasi negatif yang signifikan. Di samping itu, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk formal adalah peramal utama kepada sensitiviti antara budaya. Lima pemboleh ubah iaitu keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal, jantina, etnik dan pengalaman bercuti di luar negara, menyumbang peratus varian yang kecil terhadap sensitiviti antara budaya.

Analisis regresi hierarki telah digunakan bagi menguji peranan konstrual diri sebagai moderator dalam hubungan antara sensitiviti antara budaya dengan keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal. Penambahan konstrual diri dalam analisis regresi hierarki memberi kejelasan dalam hubungan tersebut. Konstrual diri didapati mempunyai hubungan positif yang signifikan dengan sensitiviti antara budaya, dan terdapat kesan interaksi konstrual diri ke atas hubungan positif antara keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk formal dan tidak formal dengan sensitiviti antara budaya. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa sumbangan keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal terhadap perkembangan sensitiviti antara budaya adalah lebih tinggi dalam kalangan pelajar yang mempunyai tahap konstrual diri interdependen yang rendah berbanding pelajar yang mempunyai konstrual diri interdependen yang tinggi.

Secara keseluruhannya, keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal adalah peramal signifikan namun tidak kuat terhadap sensitiviti antara budaya. Sumbangan teoritikal kajian ini terletak dalam penjelasan peranan konstrual diri dalam hubungan yang dinyatakan di atas, yang

belum dikaji sebelum ini. Keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal mempunyai pengaruh yang berbeza terhadap pembangunan sensitiviti antara budaya bergantung kepada tahap konstrual diri seseorang. Dapatan kajian dari segi implikasi praktikal menunjukkan peranan positif keterlibatan dalam diversiti rentas kewarganegaraan berbentuk tidak formal dan formal terhadap perkembangan sensitiviti antara budaya pelajar. Justeru itu, kajian ini mencadangkan supaya institusi pengajian tinggi di Malaysia membuat perancangan secara sistematik dan aktif dalam menggalak dan meningkatkan tahap keterlibatan pelajar dalam aktiviti berkaitan dengan budaya terutamanya dalam kalangan pelajar yang mempunyai tahap konstrual diri interdependen yang rendah.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 17 August 2017 to conduct the final examination of Norzita binti Yunus on her thesis entitled "Moderating Role of Self-Constual on Relationship of Intercultural Sensitivity with Informal and Formal Cross-Nationality Diversity Engagements" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICC	Intercultural Communication Competence
IS	Intercultural Sensitivity
InformalDE	Informal Cross-Nationality Diversity Engagement
FormalDE	Formal Cross-Nationality Diversity Engagement
IndeSC	Independent Self-Construal
InterSC	Interdependent Self-Construal
DMIS	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
ISS	Intercultural Sensitivity Scale
LUCT	Lim Kok Wing University of Creative Technology
IUKL	Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Within the globalised world, people are required to be interculturally competent to enable them to compete and participate in an increasingly pluralistic society. Undeniably, the need for the ability to communicate effectively across cultures has become more pertinent than ever. This has been demonstrated by a plethora of studies (Chen, 2010; Chen & Starosta, 1997; Chocce, 2014; Cotton et al., 2013; Deardorff, 2006; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003; Jon, 2013; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Matkin & Barbuto, 2012; Olson & Kroeger, 2001; Tran & Pham, 2015). Chen and Starosta (1997) discussed a few factors that have given impetus to “global village” thus accentuating the significance of intercultural sensitivity as a requisite in communicating with people who are culturally different. Among the factors cited were mobility and interconnectivity of people due to advancement in technology and transportation, interdependence of world economy, and migration.

Background of Study

In the context of higher education, mobility and advancement of technology and transportation have contributed to the increasing number of students involved in cross-border education (CBE) thus making intercultural sensitivity more pertinent than ever. Globally, university campuses are growing culturally diverse due to cross-border education (CBE). CBE has enabled students to pursue higher education outside of their home countries. According to UNESCO (2009), there has been a tremendous increase in the number of students involved in CBE. With less than 200,000 students studying abroad in early 1950s, the number is projected to expand to more than seven million by the year 2020. According to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), in the past fifteen years, international student mobility and migration have become an increasingly important part of the global higher education landscape. Statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009) showed that the number of students studying abroad has increased tremendously. In early 1950s, there were less than 200,000 students studying abroad, however, by 2020, the number is projected to reach more than seven million.

Malaysia is no exception. Malaysia has seen a tremendous growth of international students in its higher education institutions (HEIs) in the past ten years. The total enrollment of foreign students at all Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) increased 173%, from 31,674 in year 2004 to 86,623 in year 2011 (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia [MoHE], 2012) thus implying that the student composition in Malaysian HEIs are growing more diverse. By the end of 2015, the number had increased to 110,000 and is expected to double by the year 2020. This is in realisation of the National Higher Education Strategic Plan for 2007-2020 (MOHE, 2012) which aims to recruit 200, 000 international students by the year

2020. This figure is expected to generate an income of RM19 billion to Malaysian economy (The Sun Daily, 2015).

The influx of international students in Malaysian HEIs implies that campuses are growing more culturally diverse. An increase in diverse population with respect to nationality increases the probability of students engaging in cross-national contact and interaction. This implies that local students are not limited to intra-national contact and interaction with fellow Malaysian students but they are also open to cross-national interaction, which refers to engagement in interaction with students from other nationalities. Within cross-national contact and interaction, intercultural sensitivity plays a vital role in ensuring that the contact yields benefits for both local and international students.

In addition, within the era of globalisation and K-economy, the role of intercultural sensitivity is prevalent for graduates who are competing for employment in a global market (Guruz, 2010). Western economies, for example, are opening their door for employment opportunities for graduates irrespective of their nationality. This move is important to the Western economies in order for them to substitute their ageing population (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007). Hence, this creates an open market for graduates from all parts of the world, competing to secure employment outside of their home country and familiar culture.

Khan et al., (2010, p. 290), for example, states that an important skill for future global workforce to possess in today's competitive global employment market is cultural sensitivity, dubbed as "one of the most powerful tools in increasing a group's competitive edge". Khan et al., (2010) emphasised on the importance of increasing cultural sensitivity as the skill to effectively communicate across cultures among students to prepare them to enter a more complex and interdependent world.

Further, the importance of intercultural sensitivity is established with the changing composition of workforce. According to Lloyd and Hartel (2009), today, organisations have become very diverse in many aspects which include cultural diversity in their workforce as well as organisational policies. Organisations recruit members from diverse cultural backgrounds to bring in various perspectives in optimising organisational outcomes. This further emphasises that graduates should not only possess technical competency in their respective area but also intercultural sensitivity that can enable them to work in multicultural work settings.

Gurin, Dey, Gurin and Hurtado (2002) conceptualised educational outcomes as having two dimensions, which are learning and democracy outcomes. The learning outcomes focus mainly on academic-related outcomes such as active thinking skills whereas democracy outcomes focus on the characteristics required of students as members of the pluralistic world. Gurin et al. emphasised that educational outcomes should not merely focus on learning ability but also the soft skills required to enable students to live and participate in a multicultural society. Soft skills, also known as

'non-cognitive skills' (McCarthy & Wilson, 2012), among others include interpersonal, verbal and non-verbal communication skills. According to Robbles (2012), success at workplace is determined mainly by soft skills (85 per cent) and technical competency accounts for only 15 per cent of accomplishment at workplace. As argued earlier, intercultural sensitivity is one of the pertinent soft skills in the context of the globalised twenty-first century.

Intercultural Sensitivity

Intercultural sensitivity is an integration of three dimensions which are knowledge, motivations and actions (Bennett & Bennett, 2001) thus equating intercultural sensitivity (IS) to intercultural communication competence (ICC). Intercultural sensitivity is viewed as developmental thus making each dimension equally important. This developmental model, known as the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), consists of two orientations towards cultural difference which are the ethnocentric and ethnorelative orientations. The ethnocentric orientation consists of three stages which are denial, defense and minimisation whereas the ethnorelative orientation is made up of three stages namely acceptance, adaptation and integration. The orientations exist on a continuum starting with denial (ethnocentric) moving towards integration (ethnorelative). The stage that one occupies indicates his/ her level of intercultural sensitivity. As people move further towards ethnorelativism, they are more open and ready to accept cultural differences thus making them interculturally sensitive. DMIS is measured using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) in determining one's orientation towards cultural differences. This paper-and-pencil instrument is available at a specific cost. IDI also requires qualifying training before one is qualified to administer it.

Chen and Starosta (1997, 2000), however, found this conceptualisation lacks clarity. They contended that intercultural communication competence (ICC) and intercultural sensitivity (IS) are interdependent, which means they are related yet separate concepts. Therefore the conceptualisation of both concepts should demonstrate distinct characteristics. A study by Sarwari and Wahab (2017) supported Chen and Starosta's (1997, 2000) conceptualisation that intercultural communication competence (ICC) and intercultural sensitivity (IS) are closely linked but are two separate concepts. Equating ICC to and intercultural sensitivity can result in further confusion in the conceptualisation and subsequently the validity and reliability of studies in this area. A long term effect may include the impact on evaluation of the effectiveness of intercultural training.

Chen and Starosta (1997) argued that intercultural sensitivity is the affective dimension of intercultural communication competence. It refers to "an individual's ability to develop emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication" (Chen & Starosta, 1997, p. 5). Awareness or knowledge about other cultures is imperative as it forms a basis of understanding on the different

aspects of other cultures. However, Chen and Starosta (1997, 2000) argued that it is the affective dimension that motivates people to engage in intercultural interactions. People may have the knowledge about others but without the affective dimension that creates the motivation for intercultural interactions, intercultural adroitness (actions) may not occur at all.

In Chen and Starosta's (2000) model, intercultural sensitivity is measured using Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), a 24-item instrument tapping into one's level of intercultural sensitivity. Since intercultural sensitivity is not viewed as developmental, as opposed to IDI, ISS does not specify the stage one occupies on the developmental intercultural sensitivity model instead it only indicates one's level of intercultural sensitivity. A higher score on ISS indicates that one is highly sensitive in intercultural interaction; likewise, a low score on the scale indicates that one has a low level of intercultural sensitivity. Since ISS is affective-based, all the five factors within this model are affective-related. In short, ISS indicates one's level of intercultural sensitivity in terms of being high or low; and if one possesses the set of affective-related skills to qualify them as interculturally sensitive in intercultural interactions.

For the purpose of the present study, Chen and Starosta's ISS was an appropriate instrument to measure intercultural sensitivity due to four reasons. First, this study intended to gauge the general level of intercultural sensitivity among the respondents and not the specific intercultural sensitivity developmental stage. Second, ISS was appropriate because intercultural sensitivity was conceptualised as an affective dimension. According to Pettigrew (1998), emotion or the affective aspect is critical in interaction among people of different cultural backgrounds. Third, ISS can be used to measure intercultural sensitivity in both face-to-face intra-nationality and cross-nationality interactions and is appropriate for a student sample. Finally, the total number of items in the scale, which is 24, was also appropriate to maintain a reasonable time taken by the respondents to answer the questionnaire.

Engagement in Informal and Formal Cross-Nationality Diversity

With campuses growing more diverse, it is imperative that the outcomes of contact among local and international students are studied. The change in student composition in terms of nationality is seen as a "valuable resource" (Leask, 2009; Marginson & Sawir, 2011) in enriching educational experiences. Leask (2009, p.219) referred to diverse campus as a "valuable resource" which can contribute positively towards students' educational outcomes. Further, a study by Kim, Park and Koo (2015) indicated that diverse student bodies contributed to the growth of interracial friendships thus contributing positively towards students' educational outcomes.

In the context of higher education and within campus diversity literature, contact takes the form of cross-racial interaction among local and international students. The basis of this conceptualisation of contact is consistent with the proposition of Allport's Contact Theory (1954) which posits that contact and interaction with people who are culturally different is associated with reduced prejudice. However, as outlined by Allport's Contact Theory for the intercultural interaction to yield positive outcomes, four optimal conditions must be present. The conditions are equal group status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and authority support.

In many campus diversity studies, cross-racial contact refers to students' engagement in informal interactions which can take the form of friendship, shared experiences in dining, socialising and studying (Bowman & Denson, 2011; Denson & Bowman, 2011; Denson & Chang, 2009; Gurin et al., 2002; Muthuswamy, Levine & Gazel, 2006; Tamam & Abdullah, 2012). These activities are not constituted or planned by HEIs instead students' involvement in the activities is voluntary. This form of contact is known as frequency of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) in this study.

Another element of campus diversity is known as classroom diversity, which is termed as frequency of formal diversity engagement (FormalDE) in this study. As opposed to the frequency of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE), this form of diversity is more formal and structured; the activities are planned by the HEI. Formal diversity engagement refers to the acquirement of knowledge about other cultures through enrolment into ethnic-related training, workshop or peer-support intervention programmes. The content of the programmes is designed to expose students to knowledge of other cultures. According to Denson (2009), the basis of formal diversity engagement is derived from Integrated Threat Theory by Stephan and Stephan (2000) which purports that the lack of knowledge about the cultural others causes people to see them as threatening. Therefore, an increase in the knowledge about cultural others will result in a reduced sense of threats and prejudice towards them.

In campus diversity research, both informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagements have been widely studied as independent variables which contribute to a number of learning outcomes. Empirical research has shown that engagement in both forms of diversity with people from different backgrounds significantly influence educational outcomes (Bowman, 2011; Denson & Chang, 2009; Gurin et al., 2002; Leask, 2009; Muthuswamy, Levine & Gazel, 2006; Tamam & Abdullah, 2012).

Many past studies conceptualised informal cross-national diversity engagement (InformalDE) as having two dimensions which are the frequency and quality of interactions. However, a study by Bowman and Denson (2011) has established the importance of quality over frequency in producing desired positive educational

outcomes. This is because quality seems to meet the requirements of the optimal conditions as outlined by Allport's Contact Theory more than frequency does. Further, Denson and Bowman (2011) found that quality matters because the type of interactions, either positive or negative, will have different impacts on the desired outcomes. Denson and Bowman (2011) found positive interaction is associated with a number of intergroup attitude attributes and civic engagement outcomes. Conversely, negative interaction is associated with negative outcomes. Therefore, in the absence of quality, having a high frequency of engagement in informal interaction does not necessarily contribute to desired outcomes.

This finding accentuates the importance of quality in the form of positive interactions within engagement in informal cross-nationality interactions as a variable in contributing positively towards intended outcomes. However, studies specifically examining engagement in positive informal cross-nationality interactions as an independent variable in predicting outcome variables such as intercultural sensitivity are still lacking, particularly within non-American contexts (Denson & Bowman, 2011).

Past studies have shown that contact with people of diverse backgrounds yields numerous benefits. This is consistent with Allport's Contact Theory which posits that contact and interaction with people who are culturally different is associated with reduced prejudice, and reduced prejudice can be an indicator of a high level of intercultural sensitivity. A number of studies (Dong, Day, & Collaço, 2014; Mustafa, Hamid, Ahmad, & Siarap, 2012) found that a higher level of intercultural sensitivity is associated with a lower level of ethnocentrism. Chen (2010), on the other hand, found that a high level of ethnocentrism is associated with a high level of prejudice. Hence, it is proposed that interaction with cultural others is positively associated with intercultural sensitivity. In other words, besides a reduction in level of prejudice, engagement in intercultural interaction is associated with a higher level of intercultural sensitivity.

Allport's Contact Theory has been widely used to frame studies on contact among people of diverse backgrounds. In the context of higher education, many studies have examined the outcomes of contact among people of different backgrounds with different types of educational outcomes such as active thinking skills and citizenship after college. In many studies conducted within higher education contexts (Denson & Chang, 2009; Denson & Zhang, 2010; Gurin et al., 2002; Park & Denson, 2013), the mechanism of this theory is supported by relevant aspects of psychological theories such as the concept of "cognitive disequilibrium" introduced by psychologist Piaget (1985). The concept of "cognitive disequilibrium" purports that contact with people who are culturally different causes individuals to engage in critical thinking. This is because unfamiliar elements will challenge one's standard schema on events, things and people. This process contributes positively towards students' learning growth and democracy skills (Gurin et al., 2002).

Gurin et al.,'s (2002) campus diversity framework has been widely used to frame studies on the outcomes of contact among students of diverse cultural backgrounds. Gurin et al.,'s (2002) campus diversity framework specified that a diverse campus consists of three elements which are structural diversity, informal interactional diversity and classroom diversity. In their studies, however, two of the variables which are informal interactional diversity and classroom diversity have received more attention since structural diversity on its own is found insufficient in contributing positively towards educational outcomes. Structural diversity, which refers to the composition of international students in the student body, is merely a numerical representation of diversity.

Therefore, having international students in the system is important; however, the number does not equate active participation. Studies have shown that local students in particular are more inclined to communicate among themselves and are reluctant to engage in cross-national interactions (Summers & Volet, 2008; Volet & Ang, 1996). Earlier studies examining the benefits of engagement in both informal interactional diversity and classroom diversity towards educational outcomes (Glass, 2011; Gurin et al., 2002) found that having a diverse student body alone did not guarantee positive educational outcomes. It is engagement in both the informal interactional diversity and formal classroom diversity that would yield positive educational outcomes.

These two variables, informal interactional diversity and classroom diversity, have been used as independent variables in studying contact among people who are culturally different. Contact has two forms, which are physical contact with people of diverse backgrounds and the acquirement of knowledge about other cultures. Physical contact may take the form of interactions with people who are culturally different. This type of contact is known as informal interactional diversity, which engagement is voluntary in nature. On the other hand, the other type of contact which is acquiring knowledge about other cultures may take the form of enrolment into ethnic courses or workshops in learning more about cultural others. This is known as classroom diversity. This type of diversity is formal and structured; students' enrolment into these programmes is institutionalised.

The Role of Moderating Variable: Self-Construal

Many studies (Bowman, 2011; Gurin et al., 2002; Park & Denson, 2013) have demonstrated fairly consistent, positive effects of diversity experiences on students' educational outcomes. However, few studies have examined the influence of moderating variables in understanding the effects of diversity experiences or student educational outcomes. According to Bowman (2011), a study that does not include moderating or mediating variables may overestimate the effects of engagement in diversity experiences on students' educational outcomes. Additionally, a meta-analytic test of more than 500 studies on intergroup relations carried out by Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) found that Allport's Contact Theory's basic contention that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice is actually not a straightforward

process. Instead, it is influenced by other factors which can be moderating or mediating the process.

Past studies (Denson & Chang, 2009; Gurin et al., 2002) included control variables in their conceptual framework to accurately measure the effects of engagement in informal cross-nationality interaction on educational outcomes. Examples of the control variables included were demographic details, college experiences, enrolment size and prior exposure to intercultural settings. Many studies have included control and mediating variables in accurately determining the effects of engagement in informal cross-nationality interaction on students' educational outcomes but very few have tested the role of moderating variables on the relationship of informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagements with intercultural sensitivity.

In further understanding the relationship of informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagements with intercultural sensitivity, the present study integrated self-construal as a moderating variable into the relationship. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991, p. 224), "divergent construals should have a set of specific consequences for cognition, emotion and motivation." Independent self-construal, for example, emphasises on attending to self, whereas interdependent self-construal seeks to fit in and maintain a harmonious environment. Therefore, it can be argued that one's construal of self is highly influential in his or her action and behaviour.

A number of studies have found that different levels of self-construal, independent or interdependent, influence outcomes differently. Empirical evidence has shown that people's level of self-construal would affect a number of outcomes such as their choice of conflict styles (Croucher, 2013), likelihood to engage in voluntary work (Seo & Scammon, 2014), moral judgments concerning counterfeit products (Kim & Johnson, 2014), and decision-making styles (Hahn & Kean, 2009).

The role of self-construal as a moderator has been tested in a number of studies. Nezlek, Schaafsma, Safron and Krejtz (2011), for example, highlighted self-construal as a potential moderating variable in the relationship of interaction-related variables with intended outcomes. In their study, Nezlek et al., (2011) found that people with a higher interdependent self-construal indicated more rewarding social interactions due to their desire to fit in. The construal of self has also been considered as one of the central constructs in explaining cultural differences in different forms such as thinking, feeling and action (Kamal & Maruyama, 1990; Kühnen & Hannover, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Despite the potential role of self-construal in affecting outcomes, to date, very limited empirical studies have attempted to integrate self-construal as a moderating variable within the relationship of engagement in informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagements with intercultural sensitivity.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of intercultural sensitivity as a possible educational outcome in the globalised world, very few studies have investigated the relationship of engagement in positive informal cross-nationality diversity and formal cross-nationality diversity with intercultural sensitivity, particularly within Malaysian context. According to Jon (2013), there are limited studies done on this in the non-Western countries thus creating a gap in the literature. A local study by Tamam and Abdullah (2012), for example, is one of the limited studies that have specifically examined the relationship between cross-ethnic interaction and intercultural sensitivity as an educational outcome among undergraduate students. The findings showed a significant positive association between engagement in cross-ethnic interactions and intercultural sensitivity. However, the study focused on intra-national interaction; it investigated the outcome of interaction among local Malaysian students, which were the Malays, Chinese and Indians. According to Kamal and Maruyama (1990), intra-national interactions may not be as complex as cross-national interactions because for intra-national contact, the members typically exist in the same cultural context. Therefore as people of the same country, they share, to a certain extent, common cultural symbols, language and citizenship. Cross-nationality interactions, on the other hand, may well prove to be more complex than intra-nationality interactions.

Additionally, domestic or local students have been neglected in international studies. Despite having a greater number than international students, much attention has been accorded to international students (Brown & Daly, 2004; Colvin et al., 2014; Jon, 2013; Summers & Volet, 2008). Harrison and Peacock (2009) had also emphasised on the lack of the “third perspective” in the literature, referring to extensive focus given to international students thus the lack thereof on domestic students. Numerous benefits of engaging in cross-nationality interactions for the international students have been documented; however, little is known for the local students (Arkoudis & Baik, 2014). Further, Cotton, George and Joyner (2013) found that there was a difference in the level and nature of engagement in cross-nationality interactions between local and international students. Local students’ perspective in such engagement is pertinent because some studies (Arkoudis et al., 2013; Marginson & Sawir, 2011) have found that the key to successful cross-nationality interactions lies in the local students.

Therefore, the present study intended to fill this gap by examining the relationship of frequency of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) and frequency of formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE) with intercultural sensitivity. The sample used was Malaysian undergraduate students who engaged in interaction with international students, both in formal and informal settings, within their campus life experience. A number of earlier studies (Jon, 2013; Tamam & Abdullah, 2012) were single site; therefore, in improving the generalisability of the findings, the present study involved multiple sites for data collection. Three HEIs with distinct student composition characteristics were chosen as locations for data collection.

Consistent with Gurin et al.'s (2002), Denson and Chang's (2009), and Tamam and Abdullah's (2012) conceptual framework, the present study looked at engagement in informal and formal cross-nationality diversity as predictors to intercultural sensitivity as an educational outcome. However, the present study made some amendments to the terms used to accurately reflect the content of the study. Since the study examined engagement in informal and formal diversity experiences within cross-nationality contexts, the first independent variable was termed as frequency of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) and the second independent variable was termed as frequency of formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE). Cross-nationality diversity engagement refers to Malaysian undergraduate students' engagement in informal and formal activities with students of other nationalities known as international students.

The first independent variable, which is frequency of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) refers to local undergraduate students' engagement in interactions with international students within informal settings. First, this type of interaction is voluntary and is self-initiated thus is not prompted by HEIs. Second, in specific, the present study examined the quality or positive aspect of the informal cross-nationality diversity engagement in the forms of dining, socializing and studying together. Engagement in positive informal cross-national interaction delves into meaningful rather than superficial forms of interaction. The second independent variable, frequency of formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE), on the other hand, refers to students' enrolment into various courses and activities, which expose students to knowledge of other cultures. This can take the form of enrolment into ethnic courses as well as involvement in culturally diverse student associations. As opposed to positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE), FormalDE is formal and structured. It is strategically promoted to enhance cross-nationality diversity experiences among local and international students.

To further understand this relationship, an assumed moderating variable, which is self-construal, is integrated into the relationship. Past studies have indicated that the relationship of engagement in formal and informal cross-nationality diversity with a number of educational outcomes is not a straight forward process; that it can potentially be moderated by self-construal, yet not many studies have examined the role of self-construal as a moderating variable in the process. Findings from past studies have indicated the potential role of self-construal as a moderating variable in psychological processes; however, it has not particularly been tested in this relationship. Therefore, this study intended to empirically test self-construal as a moderating variable in the relationship of engagement in formal and informal cross-nationality diversity with intercultural sensitivity.

Drawing on the above mentioned literature and discussion, this study is addressing the following research questions:

- 1 To what extent does engagement in informal and formal cross-nationality diversity experiences contribute to intercultural sensitivity among local undergraduate students?
- 2 How much is the relationship of informal and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement with intercultural sensitivity is moderated by self-construal?

Research Objectives

General objective

The general objective of the study is to examine the contribution of engagement in informal and formal cross-nationality diversity experiences towards intercultural sensitivity, and to examine the role of self-construal as an assumed moderating variable in the aforementioned relationship.

Specific objectives

- 1 To determine the level of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) among local undergraduate students
- 2 To determine the level of formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE) among local undergraduate students
- 3 To determine the level of intercultural sensitivity among local undergraduate students
- 4 To determine the level of interdependent self-construal among local undergraduate students
- 5 To determine the relationship of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE) with intercultural sensitivity
- 6 To determine the contribution of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE) towards intercultural sensitivity
- 7 To determine the moderating effect of self-construal on the relationship of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE) with intercultural sensitivity

Significance of Study

This study is instrumental because in Malaysian context, there are limited studies examining this relationship within a cross-nationality context; a number of studies (Mustapha, Azman, Karim, Ahmad & Lubis, 2009; Tamam, 2012) focused on intra-nationality interactions in which the respondents were local multi-ethnic Malaysians. According to Greenland and Brown (1999, as cited in Imamura, Zhang & Harwood,

2011, p.116), many studies have examined cross-ethnic interactions whose members are typically sharing the same context; however, studies on cross-nationality interactions are relatively under-explored (Greenland & Brown, 1999 as cited in Imamura, Zhang, & Harwood, 2011; Barron & Dasli, 2010). In addition, Kamal and Maruyama (1990, p.125) states: “Interactions that cross national identities may well prove to be more complex than intergroup contacts between individuals from a single country.”

This study, therefore, contributes to the body of literature on engagement in diversity experiences and campus diversity in two ways. First, it examined engagement in informal and formal cross-nationality diversity, an under-explored area of campus diversity research, particularly in Malaysia. Second, it tested a specific dimension of informal cross-nationality diversity engagement, which is the quality or positive aspect of the engagement. Past studies have indicated the more influential role of quality over frequency; however, very limited studies have examined quality or positive engagement in informal cross-nationality diversity as an independent variable on its own. Third, the study explored the effects of engagement in cross-nationality diversity experiences on host students, whereas most previous studies focused on international students. A study by Denson and Zhang (2010) found that the effects of cross-nationality diversity engagement differ from local and international students in which local students would benefit more.

Next, the study attempted to examine the role of self-construal as a moderating variable in the relationship of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) and formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE) with intercultural sensitivity. Very few past studies have integrated moderating variables into the abovementioned relationship. Finally, the study contributed to redress the dominance of studies conducted in Western host countries by testing the strength of the abovementioned within a collectivistic context. Drawing upon Allport's Contact Theory, which was developed in an individualistic setting, the relationship is predicted to yield positive results which would extend the generalisation of the claim within collectivistic setting.

Scope of Study

First, the scope of the study is limited to local undergraduate students at three selected higher education institutions within Klang Valley, Malaysia. The student racial composition at the three HEIs met the criteria of the population required in the study. The characteristics of the population in terms of the student composition were: first, a population in which international students were the majority and the local students were the minority; second, a population with a balanced composition of international and local students; and third, a population in which the international students were the minority and the local students were the majority.

Second, the unit of analysis is at student-level, and is confined to local undergraduate students. Undergraduate students are appropriate due to the notion of “psychosocial moratorium” introduced by Erikson (1946, 1956). According to this notion, undergraduate students are at the developmental stage where they are more open to explore new ideas, social roles and relationships. This is particularly applicable in the process of interacting with people from different backgrounds, which may involve challenging their strong-held beliefs and stereotypes. However, analysis at student-level does not include environmental factors such as the role of the higher education institution itself.

Definition of Keywords

Frequency of positive informal cross-nationality diversity engagement (InformalDE) – This independent variable refers to the number of times or frequency of local undergraduate students’ engagement in positive interactions with international students within informal settings. This type of interaction is voluntary and not institutionalised by HEI. The activities that they engage in include socializing, dining and studying together.

Frequency of formal cross-nationality diversity engagement (FormalDE) - This independent variable refers to students’ engagement in formal, structured diversity activities planned by HEIs with the aim of bringing local and international students together. This can be in the form of students’ enrolment into ethnic courses and involvement in co-curricular activities that expose local students to international students.

Intercultural sensitivity (IS) – This dependent variable refers to the ability to communicate across culture. In particular, it refers to the affective ability that motivates people to engage in intercultural interactions. One’s level of intercultural sensitivity indicates his/ her ability to effectively engage in intercultural interactions.

Self-construal (SC) – This moderating variable refers to how people construe themselves in connection to others, either as connected to others or as autonomous individuals. The former is termed as interdependent self-construal (InterSC) and the latter refers to independent self-construal (IndSC). People with InterSC view themselves as connected to others whereas people who construe themselves as independent value being autonomous.

Undergraduate students – This refers to local (Malaysian) students undertaking their Bachelor’s degree programme, regardless of their field and year of study at the three locations of data collection.

Summary

This chapter has provided the essence of the study by presenting the fundamentals such as the background of the study, problem statement, research questions and objectives as well as the significance, scope and limitations of the study. This chapter has also defined the gap that study intended to fill. The following chapter will delve into the relevant literature that has informed the research framework.



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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Norzita Yunus, Ezhar Tamam, Jusang Bolong, Nor Azura Adzharuddin & Faridah Ibrahim (2017). Validation of intercultural sensitivity three-factor model in Malaysian context, *SHS Web of Conferences*, 33(00049) 2017. doi: 10.1051/shsconf/20173300049
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