

Behaviours of International Students studying at Thongsook College

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Abstract: The author of this study is the appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of International Programs Thongsook College. The author has over fourteen years of experience in psychological behaviours and implementation of systems and mechanisms to support individuals suffering from diagnosed behavioural disorders.

Behaviours are displayed in many different ways as we are all unique with our individualised personalities, values, beliefs, understandings, motivations, attitudes and determination. This study attempts to investigate the profound behaviours of international students studying at Thongsook College which is situated in Bangkok, Thailand and whom are from different cultural backgrounds and countries. A union of native English speakers and non-native English speakers. These students are all studying towards an undergraduate degree offered at Thongsook College. This study also aims and attempts to provide a basic outline of the importance of cross-cultural integration and understandings of the behaviours of International Students, their personalities, attitudes and motivation, which is vital for the Thai administration and hierarchy to understand and acknowledge the complexity of International Students behaviours.

The hypothesis of this study is to underline that different cultural backgrounds impact on the behaviours of International Students studying at Thongsook College. Therefore, understanding the different cross-cultural backgrounds will allow the prognosis of displayed behaviours.

Keywords: Chief Executive Officer (CEO), International Programs Thongsook College.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are various explanations and reasons as to why individuals decide to go overseas to obtain further education. One in particular is that developing countries do not have an adequate higher education infrastructure to support their growing educational population and they also inspire and promote students with the means to seek further education elsewhere (Trice, 2001; Sumer, 2009).

Furthermore, individuals also choose to relocate due to personal reasons which also includes the desires to develop and improve their professional and academic lifestyles. Financial strain and the increased tuition fees within their home countries is also a contributing factor as to why individuals choose to study overseas.

A high volume of international students are faced with language barriers when studying overseas, and at the same time are faced with challenges academically, culturally and emotionally (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Apart from differences in language and cultural backgrounds, additional problems that international students can encounter as they adjust to new environments, include academic demands, homesickness, loss of social support and status, decreased self-esteem, lack of study skills and lack of assertiveness (Pederson, 1991; Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, & Pisecco, 2002).

International students also experience unique adjustment issues and a sense of isolation as a result of studying overseas (Singaravelu, 2007). Hence, it is expected that some international students will experience psychological distress (Berry, 1997). Furthermore, international students undergo unique and diverse psychological problems with special concerns

(Mori, 2000). Campus counsellors should be aware that international students come from a myriad of cultural backgrounds and “make a mosaic of unique cultural experiences” (Sandhu, 1994, p. 237).

However, a lot of counselling services provided on campus do not include enough cultural sensitivity (Mori, 2000). Additionally, research findings suggest that once international students adapt to the new demands and roles of the new culture and environment, international students are likely to have better academic performance and better psychological stability (Pedersen, 1995).

Cross-cultural transition presents challenges for sojourners in multiple ways. One aspect of stress experienced in connection with crossing cultures is *uprooting*: defined as the spatial and temporal separation from significant others after the transition from a familiar to a foreign environment (Zwing-mann & Gunn, 1983).

Uprooting is a comprehensive construct that incorporates a wide range of cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements and is linked to post transition symptoms of distress, including loneliness, homesickness, powerlessness, alienation, feelings of isolation, and depression (Hamboyan & Bryan, 1995). The primary reason why uprooting often leads to psychological symptoms and distress lies in its relative uncontrollability. Research with both domestic and international students suggests that the process and outcome of uprooting involves separation and low levels of perceived control, leading to a range of negative feelings, including, but not limited to, homesickness (Cooper, 1990; Thurber & Weisz, 1997b; VanTilburg, Vingerhoets, & VanHeck, 1996; Wang, Wei, Zhao, Chuang, & Li, 2015).

Furthermore, despite the fact that a large body of empirical research provides evidence on the negative impact of cross-cultural transition stress on psychological adjustment, it remains unclear by what means and how effectively students cope with this stress, especially with respect to uprooting.

2. THE STRESS AND COPING FRAMEWORK

Stress and coping theory provides one of the major conceptual frameworks for understanding the processes involved in cross-cultural transition and adaptation (Berry, 1997; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). According to the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), stressful experiences (i.e., demands of the internal and/or external environment) upset the balance in psychological functioning, thus exerting a negative impact on a person’s general wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). To restore balance, it is necessary to evaluate the potential threat posed by the situation and mobilize available coping strategies.

Thongsook College continues to provide a student-centred approach, which not only involves the focus and support on academia but also focuses on social support. Thongsook College has qualified professors who are available and continue to support international students through their chosen academic pathways. Thongsook College has also adapted systems to incorporate social advisors as a means to support and guide international students both physically and mentally through the coping framework.

3. CHALLENGES STUDENTS ARE FACED WITH AT THONGSOOK COLLEGE

This study was authorised by Thongsook College officials, who are intrigued and keen to develop their knowledge and understanding of the different cultural backgrounds and behaviours of international students, studying at Thongsook College.

Participants in this study were all volunteering students, no names are mentioned due to confidentiality purposes. The volunteering students are from thirteen (13) different countries. A combination of Native and Non-native English speakers, all studying towards the same undergraduate program. Quantitative research was used to quantify opinions, attitudes and behaviours through distributing a behavioural survey to generalise data from the large participating student population.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
male	19	.00	12.00	4.1053	4.28038
female	19	.00	7.00	1.4737	2.34209
age	19	26.00	61.00	36.6842	10.17651
Valid N (listwise)	19				

Providing an overview of the different educational systems from the volunteering international students, a brief outline of their comments from the quantitative survey has been presented to understand and acknowledge the cultural and educational differences, which not only relates to the different educational systems but also demonstrates the variety of the age group which have participated in this study.

*Being mature students, we have crossed many paths and as times have changed classrooms and teaching environments are not the same as they were in our time. However, there are some general differences that could be named. For example, lectures are fully **student-centred** at Thongsook College. Although there were some student-centred situations in the classroom that took some time to get used to, this is the way of learning in the classroom here. Obviously, technology in the classrooms was also the biggest change that I have encountered.*

At Thongsook College the students come from all over the world making the whole environment multinational and multicultural. Moreover, Thongsook College must adhere to the Ministry of Education Thailand, so the policies and procedures differ from the ones in my home country.

In general, I try to remain flexible, especially being here in Thailand, as procedures change often, and sometimes quite randomly. That's not to say that I won't question changes, if they seem detrimental. But in the main, I adopt the attitude of expecting the unexpected. I would also say the main difference is consistency, you wouldn't expect to experience many changes to a (UK) college program once you'd enrolled.

Every day in a Thongsook College classroom we interact with an extremely diverse crowd. As an entire class, we often discuss our cultural differences and it helps us to understand each other more than cause problems or arguments. I'm not familiar with any of the online, or weekend, or distant learning options that I know are available in Colleges in USA, but compared to traditional Colleges I do know about, here are some differences:

- *Diverse races and cultures, but segregated communities of friends. – in USA*
- *More internationally diverse races and cultures, much more mixed and interactive – Thongsook College*
- *Drawn out study over an entire year of many subjects at the same time - USA*
- *Intense study focused on each subject over short periods of time – Thongsook College*
- *More traditional lecture and reading homework format – USA*
- *More communicative lecture and discuss / read and discuss format – Thongsook College*

4. CROSS-CULTURAL BEHAVIOURS

Observations on the behaviours of international students studying at Thongsook College, has identified the need for this study to be conducted. International students at Thongsook College are faced with many dilemmas due to their personal reasons for studying in Thailand. It was also noticeable through observations that a handful of the international students at Thongsook College appeared to be under the impression and illusion that they were in control of matters directly under the control and management of Thongsook College.

Therefore, their requests such as demands regarding academic scheduling, resistance of providing necessary information for administration purposes, causing confusion and thus displaying unexpected behavioural tendencies when Thongsook College implemented firm structures and regimes to support international students throughout their academic career at Thongsook College.

It was only then identified that the vast amount of different cross-cultural backgrounds, played an important role in understanding the reasons for such unexpected behavioural tendencies. Therefore, understanding the cross-cultural backgrounds of the international students would allow Thongsook College to understand and acknowledge what systems and mechanisms are to be improved or implemented to provide a quality educational experience for international students.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF SYSTEMS AND MECHANISMS

Thongsook College recognised that the time to implement changes to the current systems and mechanisms in place, was at the time of deploying the administration team of the Faculty of International Programs. Thongsook College revised their policies and procedures, internal academic structuring which involved curriculum changes and structural guidance of the undergraduate program.

Due to these changes being implemented at the commencing time of the new academic semester, it caused confusion therefore, causing unexpected behavioural tendencies from international students.

It was then noticeable that being unaware of the cross-cultural backgrounds of the international students, thus causing Thongsook College and the administration team to be unfamiliar with the reasons why such behaviours were displayed.

6. DIFFERENT CROSS-CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

International students studying at Thongsook College come from twenty-two different countries. All with different cultural backgrounds, religions and most importantly all brought up in different environments, which contributes towards their attitude, character, personality and behaviours as now being in their adulthood.

Results from the quantitative survey provides us with the information going back to the roots and backgrounds of the international students studying at Thongsook College. Students coming from all walks of life. Some have been brought up in fortunate environments, well as others have been brought up through difficulties and struggling times. Some have the supporting network of family and friends, well as other have no supporting network. Some have received the guidance and have been nurtured throughout, and still receive encouragement. Whilst others have never had the opportunity of receiving guidance and have ever been nurtured.

Thought different situations and the experiences that international students at Thongsook College have encountered, all have contributed towards who they are today. Their attitudes, personalities, characters, critical thinking skills, ability to analyse within different situations and most importantly their behaviours, are all contributing factors of the person they are today.

7. CONCLUSION

It is important to provide all students whether local or international with academic and social support. It is also a crucial step at the time of application to find out as much information as possible about the student. Their background, likes, dislikes and most importantly their future goals.

This study has proven that the hypothesis of understanding the different cross-cultural backgrounds, will allow the prognosis of displayed behaviours of international student studying at Thongsook College. A crucial and most important part of delivering a student-centred approach is understanding the needs of the students.

In particular international students, as their walk of life changes regardless of the reasons why they chose to study abroad. It is the responsibility of the educational institution to provide as much support, guidance and nurture their students, as this would deliver and provide the global educational community with quality graduates.

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