

An Analysis on How Personality Traits Influence Acculturation and Cross-Cultural Adaptation for International Students

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Abstract. Studying abroad become popular nowadays. However, having a new life in a different place and learning diverse cultures are difficult for most international students. It is important to pay attention to the mental health and level of acculturation of overseas students. This paper aims to survey how personality traits in the domain of Big Five Personality Traits (openness agreeableness neuroticism extraversion and self-esteem) affect the acculturation of international students and the relationship between acculturation and cross-cultural adjustment. In this paper, the authors suggested that these 5 characteristics of personality do influence the students who study abroad in many aspects of their life such as academic performance, mental health, etc. In addition, the investigation carried out by the authors has revealed that the level of acculturation and personality traits can predict the level of cross-cultural adjustment. How to facilitate the acculturation of overseas students become a future task that needs to be explored in the future. The findings of this paper suggest that it is necessary for colleges to arrange some classes to strengthen students' ability to use appropriate coping strategies and recommend social networking tools to students.

Keywords: Acculturation; Cross-Cultural Adaptation, International Students, Mental Health.

1. Introduction

Studying abroad become popular nowadays. However, having a new life in a different place and learning diverse cultures are difficult for most international students. It is important to pay attention to the mental health and level of acculturation of overseas students. When adjusting to a new culture, international students frequently face acculturative stress [1,2]. Thus, the mental health of international students who study abroad is linked to their level of adaptability. Nonetheless, whether the mental health of all international students is affected by acculturation remains arguable. Different personalities of people may play an significant role in cross-cultural adjustment since they affect the way in which people interact with others and the environment [3]. Therefore, the acculturation of overseas students is related to their personality traits. Although there is a growing interest in understanding of nature and causes of adjustment, still little research has been done on the relationship between personality and adaptability, especially on international students who study abroad. It is necessary to conduct some research on this gap. Four of the Big Five personality factors are greatly linked to cross-cultural adaptation [4]. In the following essay, the authors aim to explore how extraversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and self-esteem influence international students. This study also proposes to give suggestions to support better sociocultural adaptation for the international student population.

2. Acculturation and cross-cultural Adjustment

Acculturation is defined as the process of individual-level changes in cultural characteristics that occur when people from different cultural backgrounds interact [5]. Acculturation shows a strong connection with cross-cultural adjustment. Individuals who have low levels of acculturation can predict the bad cross-cultural adjustment that people have. Because the personality trait is related to cross-cultural adjustment, it is important to know that the acculturation level of international students

can be detected through knowing the ability of cross-cultural adjustment and personality. Cross-cultural adjustment can be constructed into two sections which are psychological adjustment and sociocultural adjustment respectively. Psychological adjustment, which is commonly measured by depression or mood disturbance scales, focuses on emotional responses during cross-cultural transitions. Sociocultural adjustment, which is typically measured by the difficulties people face on a daily basis in a foreign culture, concentrates on an individual's knowledge and ability to function effectively in the new cultural context [3].

3. Agreeableness and Openness

The personality traits of openness to experience and agreeableness are two predictors of sociocultural adjustment and both personality traits show positive connections with sociocultural adjustment. Openness involves motivation, needs for variety, cognition, and understanding [6]. People who are open to experiences are defined as having a high level of curiosity for new and various experiences [7]. Therefore, the people who score high on openness tend to show greater interest in learning and investigating new environments and cultures [8]. To be more specific, social learning and adaptive coping style can facilitate sociocultural adjustment [3]. Thus, Individuals who are open to experience can adapt better to the new culture base on the trait that is related to actively seeking new things. In addition, the ability to get along with people, stressing collaboration, trustfulness, generosity, compassion, empathy, and management of one's negative emotions during encounters, has been defined as the quality of agreeableness [7]. People who score high on agreeableness can adapt to new cultures and places by making relationships with others. The research determined that people who score higher on the agreeableness scale are more likely to establish relationships with locals, which can improve overall cultural adjustment [9]. In order to facilitate social adjustment, building social networks is important. To summarize, students who demonstrate better agreeableness personality traits can use their own ability which is related to easily getting along with people to build connections with others and achieve the aim of adaptation. Moreover, international students with high agreeableness can show strong self-regulate to avoid negative emotions while encountering new challenges and obstacles. Agreeableness leads to better mental health outcomes in college students. A 25-year longitudinal study indicated that children who were high on agreeableness at age 8 had fewer behavioral issues, lower levels of depression, and less substance usage [10,11]. Thus, individuals who are high in agreeableness can better adapt to the new society without feeling acculturative stress or having mental illness leading from acculturation.

4. Neuroticism

The trait of Neuroticism is directly linked to psychological adjustment. Neuroticism also known as emotional instability, is the propensity to feel unfavorable emotions such as unhappiness or worry, as well as mood swings and irrational thinking [12]. Low and high neuroticism scores may be associated with immigrant acculturation levels as well as favorable and unfavorable aspects of subjective well-being [13]. Among immigrants, neuroticism was linked to greater levels of acculturative stress [14]. Moreover, neuroticism shows a significant relationship with mental illness [3]. People who are more neurotic experience more psychological issues, especially depression [15]. This link would become more apparent after a stressful abroad experience because the traditional social network is no longer there [3]. The absence of a traditional social network can lead to depression and anxiety. The high tendency of neuroticism will aggravate anxiety and depression levels, making the establishment of new social networks difficult and further affecting the adaptation of international students to new environments and receive new information. Therefore, people who score high on neuroticism often have bad cross-cultural adjustments and hard to fit into the new culture.

5. Extroversion

This paragraph examines the influence of extraversion on adjustment. Extraversion has traditionally been considered an important characteristic of successful cross-cultural transitioners. Personality traits may be susceptible to cultural influences [16]. In fact, the acculturation of international students also depends on the host culture's acceptance of foreigners. Research shows that international students who interact regularly with locals will facilitate acculturation, and that extroverts are usually better able to do so [17].

According to the results of a study in which students were administered the MBTI personality test, specifically, there was a significant difference between introverted and extroverted personality types in their scores for cross-cultural competence. This implies that higher acculturation is associated with higher extroverted tendencies. Research has shown that extroverts are generally perceived to be more friendly and optimistic in interpersonal interactions [18]. Therefore, international students who are extroverted and enjoy seeking novelty and excitement are more likely to accept new cultures and better adapt to new sociocultural environments. People with extroverted tendencies tend to be equally confident, open-minded, imaginative and more willing to step out of their old comfort zone, and therefore better able to adapt to the social values of the host country.

6. Self-esteem

This subsection explores the relationship between international students' cultural and social adjustment and their self-esteem. Self-esteem is related to gaining the trust and respect of self and others. External validation in the form of praise and respect from others and internal validation in the form of self-esteem and self-respect constitute the two types of validation of self-esteem. External validation is motivated by getting students to do certain things that give a sense of contribution and value. Internal validation, on the other hand, is the student's need for self after the basic needs of survival have been met [19].

Using descriptive correlational and comparative studies, researchers found that international students with high self-esteem had a higher level of adjustment to college [20]. High self-esteem was defined as being largely satisfied with internal validation and external validation. International students with high self-esteem easily adapt emotionally and academically first, but need more time to adapt socially [20]. There are differences between different self-esteem factors that have different effects on real life, depending on the individual. Some of these factors may be more adaptive for international students than others. For example, students who are influenced by their family or educational environment and are supported in their personality development meet internal validation and therefore usually have higher self-esteem. Students who focus on various aspects of growth, such as volunteerism and volunteering to develop social responsibility, satisfy external validation and so are equally likely to have high self-esteem. And their common characteristic is a higher level of adjustment to college as international students. Therefore, the results of the study showed that the variables of self-esteem and adaptation were positively correlated, and international students' adaptation to new environments was significantly related to self-esteem [19].

7. Suggestions

To help international students adapt to their country of study, schools can set up social and cultural adaptation courses [21]. Social adaptation can be done using social networking sites. In fact, the use of social networking sites in educational settings is a relatively blanket area as of now, with very limited research. How social networking sites through autoethnography can help new students adapt to the curriculum and the new culture remains questionable. First a course-related online discussion group needs to be created with sensitivity to security and privacy issues. Then in each week of the new semester, a cultural prompt can be posted and students can post relevant discussions as well as ask questions based on this topic. At the end of the semester, international students can share their

thoughts on their participation in the social networking group through an autobiographical narrative that will be evaluated and adapted. Social networking sites facilitate the exchange of knowledge and promote socialization, while at the same time alleviating students' apprehension in a new environment. The data show that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter can provide a conceptual map for adaptation, and discussions can facilitate various types of knowledge exchange [22]. This is because these programs are already widely used among college students, are student-friendly, and are relatively student-centered. The social nature of such discussions invites participation, rather than forces it, and can motivate students. Because of its widespread use and applicability in social constructivist and connectionist teaching, it is relevant and timely to use such a social networking tool to aid cultural adaptation in an educational context [21].

In addition to using social networking sites, creating an orientation program to help international students in their new environment is a good suggestion. However, culture shock, the challenge of adjusting to a different culture, can be encountered in a cultural adjustment program. This is the anxiety that arises from the loss of familiarity and can lead to feelings of isolation and confusion about identity [23]. The extent to which international students are able to cope with the effects of culture shock depends on their individual personality traits, so it is said that students need a course to develop their ability to cope with appropriate coping strategies. It is not necessary for international students to integrate immediately into a new environment, but rather to be exposed to the culture and things that are familiar to them. For example, the course may allow everyone to share the foods of their hometown and even agree to go together after class to find a restaurant that can make those foods. When students have personal ownership in the development of the course, they can be said to function as individuals in their new community environment without having to fully assimilate [23].

8. Conclusion

This study examines how personality traits affect international students' cultural adjustment. Due to frequent international exchanges, more and more people are choosing to study abroad for academic or other purposes. The challenges faced by international students are often due to their different sociocultural and environmental backgrounds, which contribute to their different personality psychology. These make their cross-cultural adaptation including language barriers, psychological and socio-cultural adaptation cause difficulties. Among these, communication difficulties caused by cultural differences and academic studies are probably the most important problems that international students encounter in the host country environment.

This paper provides an in-depth discussion of four personal characteristics of international students: openness and agreeableness, neuroticism, self-esteem, and extroversion, and their impact on international students' acculturation. However, as the authors do not have sufficient samples for support, few first-hand data can be used to conduct a comprehensive analysis. Data from different countries and different years may affect the analysis of the data and cause limitations in the current study. Nevertheless, the authors made a compilation of the effects of five personality traits on acculturation and made certain suggestions for the continued exploration of acculturation in international students in the future, namely group discussions with social software and the addition of acculturation courses. The specific effects of these recommendations still need to be practiced and concluded by real schools.

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