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Cultural Variations and Socio-Ecocultural Understanding on Cross-Cultural Adaptation

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Abstract

Cross-cultural adaptation is a challenging process while sojourning abroad. The inability to understand cultural variation triggers psychological, physical or behavioral difficulties and maladjustment or misunderstanding. Socio-ecocultural underestimation is the root of intercultural resistance, stereotyping, ethnocentrism and racist sentiments among sojourners. Most of the cross-cultural adjustment studies have quantitatively demonstrated factors and predictors of adaptation success. However, the specific forms of cultural variation that impacted sojourning adaptability is blindly explained. Hence, this phenomenological paper autoethnographically observed the socio-ecocultural environment while sojourning in New Zealand. The findings highlighted that cultural awareness and sensitivity assist sojourner's cross-cultural adaptability due to the socio-ecocultural variation.

Keywords

Cultural Variations, Socio-Ecocultural, Autoethnographic, Cultural Sensitivity, Cultural Awareness, Cross-Cultural Adaptation

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Cultural Variations and Socio-Ecocultural Understanding of Cross-Cultural Adaptation

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Cross-cultural adaptation is a challenging process while sojourning abroad. The inability to understand cultural variation triggers psychological, physical or behavioral difficulties and maladjustment or misunderstanding. Socio-ecocultural underestimation is the root of intercultural resistance, stereotyping, ethnocentrism and racist sentiments among sojourners. Most of the cross-cultural adjustment studies have quantitatively demonstrated factors and predictors of adaptation success. However, the specific forms of cultural variation that impacted sojourning adaptability is blindly explained. Hence, this phenomenological paper autoethnographically observed the socio-ecocultural environment while sojourning in New Zealand. The findings highlighted that cultural awareness and sensitivity assist sojourner's cross-cultural adaptability due to the socio-ecocultural variation. Keywords: Cultural Variations, Socio-Ecocultural, Autoethnographic, Cultural Sensitivity, Cultural Awareness, Cross-Cultural Adaptation

Introduction

International mobility challenged a sojourner's physical, psychological, socio-cultural and financial fitness. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that an estimated 4.5 million international students had enrolled outside of their country of citizenship in 2011 (OECD, 2014). Factually, Asia (especially China, India, and South Korea) is the leading source (53%) of international students, especially to white countries (UK, Australia, and Canada). The Malaysian Government bonded substantial financial implication in sending students abroad (Latifah, 2015).

Apart from international students, expatriation gives some sojourning implication to the international mobility. According to the Worldwide ERC's 2014 Transfer Volume & Cost Survey, an average relocation cost per employee was \$42,548 (WERC, 2015). The company's return on investment (ROI) obtained through sending expatriates overseas is worthwhile if the international missions are accomplished. The country benefits from those who have successfully graduated and returned home, especially those students who are government-funded and who have successfully brought beneficial knowledge and expertise home.

Sojourning success is subject to a sojourner's personal competence in facing various politics, economics and socio-cultural challenges. Scholars (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Mendenhall, Stevens, Bird, & Oddou, 2008; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012) found that cross-cultural adaptability determines the success of sojourners overseas. The cross-cultural adaptations involve adjustment and acculturation processes which encompass the psychological and behavioral responses to ecocultural, socio-political and cultural context (Berry, 2010). A reflection on sojourner's affective, cognitive and behavioral differences may signify the changes experienced in a different socio-cultural environment (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). However, a sojourner's origin and cultural environment shaped his or her personality (Froese, 2012); this adds to adjustment difficulties and alienation in a new cultural setting (Froese, 2012; Froese & Peltokorpi, 2011).

Maladjustment may be due to intercultural incompetence, resulting in feeling: unpleasant, unnecessary, unwelcome, threatened, forced, annoyed, or other feelings that foster early returns (Mendenhall et al., 2008). The individuality of the person and subjectivity of the nature of the culture requires a qualitative explanation. This paper queries the extent of cultural variation and how it affects sojourner's cross-cultural adaptability when sojourning abroad. Specifically, this paper has observed socio-ecocultural variations and cultural influences while sojourning overseas. The following section discusses the concept of socio-ecocultural adjustment to the sojourner's cross-cultural adaptability. The study's methodology and discussion on the ecocultural experiences follow. The future of cultural variation and socio-ecocultural understanding ends our discussion.

Socio-Ecocultural Adjustment

Cross-cultural difficulties, ethnocentrism, racism, stereotyping and interpersonal rejection (Garris, Ohbuchi, Oikawa, & Harris, 2011) is experienced due to misinterpretation of the culture. Sojourners are needing to make an essential adjustment and react towards the differences and changes to prove a beneficial international mobility. Every international traveller is equipped with distinct cultural frame-of-references (Torbiorn, 1985); it is a system of mental programming of cumulative beliefs, values, and norms which is imitated, learned, taught, shared, and inherited over generations (Hofstede, 1983). Attitude, belief, value, and the so-called norm comprise the notion of culture. Thus, sojourner's cultural differences vary based on international mobility destination, goals, length of stay and expectation. Berry (2010) provides an effective socio-cultural context which facilitates the understanding of diverse cultural variation. In decision-making, sojourners are probed based on what's being taught as right, wrong, suitable, just or unjust. A rational alignment of expectation is vital to reduce cross-cultural difficulties in interacting or dealing with others due to contrast cultural frame-of-references.

According to Ward and Kennedy (1999), the ability to "fit-in" to the distinct cultural environment is crucial. It challenges a person's knowledge, understanding, experience and ability to negotiate physically and literally with all aspects hooked in to their daily living, working and interacting with others, especially in different socio-cultural locations. Dennis and Stroh (1993) shared a study of American expatriates, who reported that an education system, language, lifestyle, racial groups, religious groups, ethnic groups and organizations spurred internal rivalries—contributing factors to the sojourners' work-family difficulties experienced in Kuala Lumpur. In addition, transportation preferences in Kuala Lumpur were found unfavourable, causing the expatriates frustration (Butler & Hannam, 2013). Searle and Ward (1990) presented an empirical inclusion in their study on the cross-cultural adjustment between Asia (i.e., Malaysia and Singapore) and New Zealand in terms of socio-cultural context. Basically, cross-cultural adjustment involves an adaptation process of changing perception into appropriate manners which determine the sojourners' psychological and socio-cultural, holistic composition.

Inability to clearly understand the socio-ecocultural influences and establish meaningful cross-cultural adaptation and adjustment contributes to sojourning difficulties including a decreased productivity, increased drop-out rate among students, premature return, insufficient organizational and social support, intention, learned helplessness, frustration, marginalization, discrimination, strain, stress, uncertainty in future career development, and unsatisfactory performance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 2012). In addition, communication breakdown, intercultural conflict, spouse's involvement (Lauring & Selmer, 2010) and work-family conflict give additional strain. Discrepancy in international performance during sojourners' international stay was believed to depend on their coping

strategy, cultural knowledge, background, life experience, maturity, motivation, personality and styles of learning whilst dealing with socio-cultural uncertainty (Freeman & Lindsay, 2012; Froese, 2012; Harvey, McIntyre, Moeller, & Sloan, 2012). Therefore, it concerns the ability to adapt and adjust appropriately in a host atmosphere.

Apparently, the studies mentioned above listed quantitatively identified factors and predictors to cross-cultural adjustment. The literature on cross-cultural studies (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Mendenhall et al., 2008; Salgado & Bastida, 2017; Shaffer et al., 2012; Wechtler, Koveshnikov, & Dejoux, 2017) bluntly explained the specific forms of culture that jeopardize sojourner's cross-cultural adaptation. Therefore, the ecocultural approach (Berry, 2002, 2010) is found to significantly prepare one for the physical and psychological expectations. An awareness to cultural cues (i.e., a salient message related to a cultural attitude, belief, norms, and values) becomes a foundation to encounter socio-cultural surprises and acculturate with cultural differences (Berry, 2010; Sam & Berry, 2010). Friedman (2007) and Friedman, Dyke, and Murphy (2009) demonstrated that the cultural history and the notion of the concept of *Mianzi* (i.e., face-saving) and *guanxi* (i.e., pride) among Chinese subordinates in Hong Kong aid sojourners in avoiding social separations and feelings of annoyance. Hence, international sojourning is not only about grasping the economic opportunities, but also about forming mutual networking establishments with stakeholders in the host location.

According to Berry (2010), acculturation is found to be an important source of social and psychological development cross-culturally. Ecocultural becomes a subject in studying cultural and psychological phenomena. The human differences in cultural and psychological ecology indicated the patterns of shared ways of living in the social institutions. The social life outside of origin brings diverse socio-political influences which demand sojourners accurately acculturate and enculturate the cultural variations. Berry (2002) posited the ecocultural framework which brings three identifications: (1) ecocultural and socio-political elements which shaped a contextual underpinning, (2) biological and cultural adaptation elements indicates an adaptation process, and (3) psychological outcomes of the acculturation into a cultural phenomenon. These identifications help sojourners understand the impact of social-ecological changes and the need for life stands adjustment and cross-culturally adaptation.

The social-ecocultural context provides a look at complex interactions between sojourners and the host environment which may cause affection (i.e., feeling, emotion, and motivation) and interferences. Besides, observing the physical and environmental appearances in the host location gives new experiences or psychical challenges to sojourners when it may cause difficulties and dissatisfaction (Butler & Hannam, 2013; Dennis & Stroh, 1993). Lastly, the sojourner might observe the behavior of the other people in host location as complex to acculturate when their socio-ecocultural expectation is beyond the expected standards. Alas, Berry's ecocultural framework (2002) has signed some methodological issues which have perceived culture as national component and stability in characters. The nature of culture is dynamic which changes depending on the socio-cultural, economic and political environment in the host location. There are some parts of the world (especially in Southeast Asia) which are homes for diverse, distinct sub-cultures (ethnicities) that have given tonnes of mystification of acculturation among sojourners. It is imperative for sojourners in their international mobility to be sensitive and alert to the potential interpersonal rejection from others in different socio-ecocultural context (Sato, Yuki, & Norasakkunkit, 2014). Diversification of culture between home and host country depict the uniqueness of resonance identity and requires sojourner to harmonize their intercultural relations while sojourning abroad (Rozaimie & Ali, 2014). Thus, Ward (2008) posited that incorporating an ethnocultural identity into the relationship between individuals and host socio-cultural habitat is a sediment to enhance the acculturation understanding and process. Therefore, this paper explores the experienced socio-ecocultural

influences on the cultural variation while sojourning abroad for the first time. The following sections outline the methodology of acquiring the socio-ecocultural experiences.

Methodology

The phenomenological mode of inquiry captures the socio-ecocultural experiences while sojourning abroad. Phenomenological inquiry is about “the understanding of meaningful, concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation and is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 14). This paper does not attempt to establish a substantive theory or test a conceptual model or hypothesis, nor is it a generalization of the fundamental understanding on the socio-ecocultural adaptation. As mentioned earlier, the basic investigation initiated in this paper is the understanding how cultural variation affects the sojourning cross-cultural adaptation. It is important to explicitly clarify a specific spectrum of socio-ecocultural influences that threaten the adaptation processes lacks explanation in most cross-cultural adjustment literature.

Specifically, the empirical phenomenology embodied in this paper is “to experience the comprehensive descriptions which provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis to portray the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994). The author has undergone ethnographic field-work in Wellington, New Zealand. The author was awarded an academic attachment through the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia: an “overseas research program.” This research program is also known as an internship program, academic visit or post-graduate attachment. The purpose of the internship program is to meet a renowned scholar in cultural psychology studies, undertake research work in the world’s prominent university, establish research networking and enhance the research horizons. The program ran for three months (from 28 February to 5 June, 2012) and was attached to the Centre for Applied Cross-cultural Research (CACR), Victoria University of Wellington (VUW), New Zealand. The Human Ethics (hecpolicy) committee School of Psychology, VUW approved (dated 25 April, 2012) the related research and writing conducted with CACR. In this paper, the initial data is captured and experienced through in-depth conversations during casual encounters with an individual (Burgess, 1995) and participation in social events. According to Polkinghorne (2005), the narratives or stories are the data obtained that exclusively stand as an untainted description of the experiences.

Methodologically, the autoethnography is a form of narrative study recorded and written by the individual who is experienced in the subject of the study (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Clark, 2017; Friedman, 2007; Friedman et al., 2009; Spry, 2001). It is “a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (Spry, p. 710). The ethnographer, having a realist agenda, considers privilege and “...maintains commitments to outmoded conceptions of validity, truth, and generalizability” (Denzin, 2006, p. 20). The experiences, discourse, and self-understanding are found unified against larger cultural assumptions (Minh-ha, 1991). The expression of self-interest (Miller, 2001) ought to be a form of confirmation on the self-reflective critique that inspires the others upon their own life experience and interactions with others within sociocultural contexts (Spry, 2001). The autobiographical writing of the researcher’s experiences is as an active agent or research investigator. The realism of the investigation reinforced through the field notes, observations, interviews and practical experiences. In addition, the autoethnographic method is imposed and credible due to the insufficiently related references to the exceptional socio-cultural appearances of the observed environment. Hence, the description of the socio-ecocultural findings in this paper is well represents and sufficiently justifies methodological validity (Winter, 2000) and credibility (Patton, 1999).

The data in this paper were presented in the reflective writing form where the author used a notebook to capture the socio-cultural strange moments. The benefits captured through self-experience on ethnocentric field-work and gave a first-hand experience to dismantling the decrypted issues (Lauring & Selmer, 2010) on cultural variation and socio-ecocultural adjustment, as focused on in this paper. Thus, the findings in this paper are presented through the autoethnography approach, which descriptively concerns itself in its unique context (Spry, 2001). The narrated socio-ecocultural experiences are illustrated and contextualized to identify possible levels of indexing codes relating to emerging themes and patterns. The codes then are checked to identify any single instances or recurring patterns (Polkinghorne, 2005). A diagram of cross-cultural adaptation is drawn, and the possible elements are labelled based on the understanding of the cultural variation encountered. The following section illustrates the author's encryption of the selected once in a lifetime experience sojourning outside of his Southeast Asian socio-ecocultural origin.

Findings

Through the daily routine and participation in the official duties and Centre's meetings, the author physically, psychologically and behaviorally became passionate about observing the similarities and differences between Malaysia and New Zealand. The most shocking experiences transpired on the social development due to the politics and economics standard differences between those countries. The encryption of the selected experiences is briefly inductive as follows. Only a few selected obvious variations were reported, revealing tonnes of cross-cultural experience recorded between Malay and New Zealander socio-cultural variations.

Entering the Freezer. The temperature in Malaysia is ranged between minimum 22°C (night) to the most 40°C (day), so it was shocking to feel 16°C on the ground during midday when I walked out from the airport in Auckland. It reminded me of my trip to Genting Highland, Cameron Highland and Mount Kinabalu back in Malaysia. Luckily, I had prepared myself well with a coat-cutting jacket and boots. Back at home, I would just simply wear my sandals or slippers while traveling.

Locating the Qibla. While waiting for the connecting flight to Wellington, being a Muslim, I had to perform my prayer which I had missed due to the 16-hours flight from Kuala Lumpur to Auckland. So I started searching for the prayer room at the airport. However, I had difficulties reading the airport guide. I was really hoping that somebody could at least show me the direction of the Qibla (a direction heading to Mecca in Saudi Arabia) so that I could perform my prayer. Back in Malaysia, (when traveling in neighboring countries), it is easy to spot a Muslim through his outfits and Malay-facial features as the majority of Malays in Malaysia are Muslims. In the end, I ended up sitting on the bench (outside of the airport building) confidently facing to the West-North direction to perform my prayer. Before that, I was also surprised to find that there was no water tap or pipe available in the washroom for ablution. Hence, I only took a few compulsory washing steps. In Wellington, I felt relieved when a Muslim friend lent me a Qibla compass, then I could relocate the right direction and perform my prayer confidently.

Sensitivity vs Ignorance. While looking for an apartment to rent, I greeted a guy who was smoking outside of the apartment. Trying to be friendly, I asked him, "How much did you rent a room in this apartment?" I was shocked at the cynical reply, "Don't you want to know how much I bought my pinkie undies too?" I blinked my eyes unbelievably and explained to him that I was a newbie in town and was desperately looking for a place to stay or a room to rent temporarily. After sharing the incident with a Malaysian, she explained to me that my sharp question was rather "personal" to the Western norm. Fortunately, the man was rather

helpful as he ushered me to meet the apartment manager and explained the process of renting a studio-room at the apartment. However, I was shocked again after being informed that the rental rate would be counted on a weekly basis, which would never happen back in Malaysia.

Jumper the Parachute. Set my feet in New Zealand during the fall. The temperature got colder day-by-day. With an unpredictable weather, it was a struggle for me to find heat, especially when it was raining outside. Standing outside of the building was the worst scenario for me, as I was occupied with rain and Antarctica cold wind. Although the school's building was heat-insulated (with removable heater units are available and switched-on), a lab-mate saw me trembling and looking cold; she suggested that I should wear a jumper. I replied, "Are you joking? You are suggesting that I wear an uncomfortable, bulky and an alien-looking parachute suit here in school?" Looking blankly at me she replied, "Do you know what a jumper is?" Then I answered, "Is a jumper with a parachute suit, or is it a casual jumpsuit?" Looking blush, she explained a jumper is a type of clothing, thicker than a jacket, worn during cold days. Back in Malaysia, you hardly notice anyone wearing a jumper, even during the wet season at the end of the year.

Sunlight Is Life. As mentioned earlier, I had been to New Zealand during the transition season of winter. I did not experience much sunlight; only during an outing or outdoor celebration had I experienced a little for a few hours. Back in Malaysia, a shady area is targeted during a sunny day; fan and air-conditioning are much appreciated. I do believe other than a heater, New Zealand is obviously a wrong business market target for air-conditioning. The sun-heat at home gives me fantasies about immigrating to cold countries with the beautiful pleasant snow. Thus, struggling with the cold weather was a great lesson for me to appreciate the sunlight back at home.

Time-Saving. Come winter, people have to adjust their watches manually for the daylight saving time. The clocks were turned back one hour. Although I have heard of the official announcement, since it was never practiced, I took no action about it. It troubled me when one fine day, I came for a breakfast meeting an hour earlier, although my watch showed the promised time as scheduled. Passionately waiting for a friend, he came with the not-guilty face; being late seems as though nothing happened. Being emboldened, I learned that we could adjust the time occasionally depending on the weather seasons.

Reading Weather Forecast. Due to the unpredictable weather, I took the effort to learn to read the daily weather forecast to equip myself with accessories like thermals, gloves, jackets, jumpers, pullovers, raincoats, scarfs or winter/snow caps to keep warm. Back in Malaysia, there are only two things of great concern when it comes to clothing: official or casual.

Chocolate Fish vs Fish-and-Chip. When socially having "small-talk" with lab-mates, I have been asked about the "chocolate fish" (a fish-shaped marshmallow covered/wrapped with chocolate). Chocolate fish is perceived to be a popular local confectionery item and in Kiwi culture, it is used as a common reward for a good job done. To my great surprise, I thought it was just a kind of catching cold-water fish specially made for fine-dining or to make best fish-and-chip. With confidence I answered the question and said, "Yeah, I like those fried dried and crunchy, served with sweet-sour, thousand-island dressing." My lab-mate gave a questionable smile and the following day, with a blue-face, I had received a packet of chocolate fish for free.

Tight Budget. Having *Halal* food is not a problem in New Zealand. There are many Malaysian and Muslim restaurants available around the city. Even though New Zealand is practicing a secularism philosophy of governance, the locals were highly concerned about the food hygiene and practices of other religions. When having dinner in a local restaurant, the owner took the initiative to explain how foods were prepared according to the Muslim *Halal* requirement. However, with a tight budget, home-cooking was a cheaper and better option.

Unfortunately, lacking cooking talent, I opted for bread and spread and fruits—especially apples, kiwis, and bananas for daily meals. Back in Malaysia, imported New Zealand's crunchy apples and kiwis are considered semi-luxury fruits which are of a similar price to when I bought double quantities in New Zealand. Other than being concerned about *Halal* logos printed at canned or packed food, I noticed I started spending hours reading the labels when doing my grocery shopping. Reliable discount coupons for shopping and other life utilities (e.g., dining, haircut, kitchenettes, and toiletries) become a survivor-kit, especially for tight-budget sojourners. In addition, websites and shops for second-hand items are highly visited to find necessities within budgeted expenditures. All those practices and life-concerns are non-frequently apprehended issues back at home.

Protocol-less. As a capital city of New Zealand, Wellington hosts many arts and cultural events occasionally. There are many exhibitions, events or campaigns organized around the cities, in which visitors receive giveaway food and gifts. However, it is also the peaceful sceneries that hinder visitors from fighting over the gifts. In an occasion, where the city Mayor was invited to officiate, the launching event only took half an hour, which might take hours with speeches and long itinerary program back at home. There was no guard, usherette or a special VIP table that served food and beverages to celebrate the Mayor. In another event, I had an opportunity to meet one of New Zealand's members of parliament (MP) in his caravan canopy on the Wellington's Harbourside Sunday market (beside the Te Papa Museum). He was not there to sell anything but to take initiatives to meet with taxpayers to show his representational duties and updated projects are undertaken. This was considered a brilliant political initiative, as compared to most Malaysian MPs who could only be seen and approached through an official appointment or when they are attending events as an invited guest. While participating in an event held at the Te Herenga Waka Marae (Maori's meeting hall), I noticed that there are some similar protocols between the Maoris and Malays. It took hours of launching the events with some customary ceremonies taken place.

Other Observable Elements. People were working hard on weekdays from Monday to Friday. Thus, to destress themselves after working hard throughout the working days, I was invited to join a chat at the bar or lounge on a Friday afternoon after work. As a Muslim, alcohol is prohibited, and the bar and lounge are synonymous with alcohol. Due to the social restriction, it is considered taboo for Malays to visit bars and lounges in Malaysia. However, to please friends on their invitation, I got rid of my sinful fear, and I was surprised to be served with fruit juice and snacks instead. Having memorable chats with friends, I was able to establish a friendship, exchange information and create a more meaningful understanding of their salient cultural preferences. The classification of domestic waste has also been regulated (the color of the waste bag differentiation: green and yellow plus glass-bin) which is a trial policy in Malaysia. Cashless to shop and highly dependent on the debit card payment system, Electronic Fund Transfer at Point of Sale (EFTPOS) is brilliant for reducing pickpockets. A summons is issued if the driver carries more passengers than the number of seats available. For instance, a five-seated car can occupy a maximum of five passengers, including the driver; an infant should occupy the infant seat. Unfortunately, the number of passengers is not an issue with the traffic in Malaysia. Notably, friendly greetings with the shop owners, public transport drivers, and other ground cleaners could create a harmonious living. Internship in New Zealand was a mind-opening exposure to deeply understand the concept of trust and respect for others and to avoid feeling helpless while sojourning in a distinct socio-cultural location. The reasoning behind the acculturation processes on the socio-ecocultural adjustment and cross-cultural adaptation is discussed below.

Discussion

The findings of this paper have offered a foundation for the understanding of how the acculturative process takes place. Appropriate information about the socio-cultural fitness and psychological well-being is important for effective adaptation and cross-cultural adjustment. Winning cross-cultural adjustment with sufficient social learning and adaptation (Sam & Berry, 2010) is considered essential to the intercultural connectedness between home and the host socio-cultural habitat (Berry, 2002). There are several elements of cross-cultural adaptation that are identified and derived from the autoethnographic experiences as featured in the findings. To recap as mentioned in the methodological section, the understanding of the cultural variation and socio-ecocultural adaptation encountered in New Zealand is possibly encrypted, reflected, illustrated and summarized in a diagram as in figure 1.

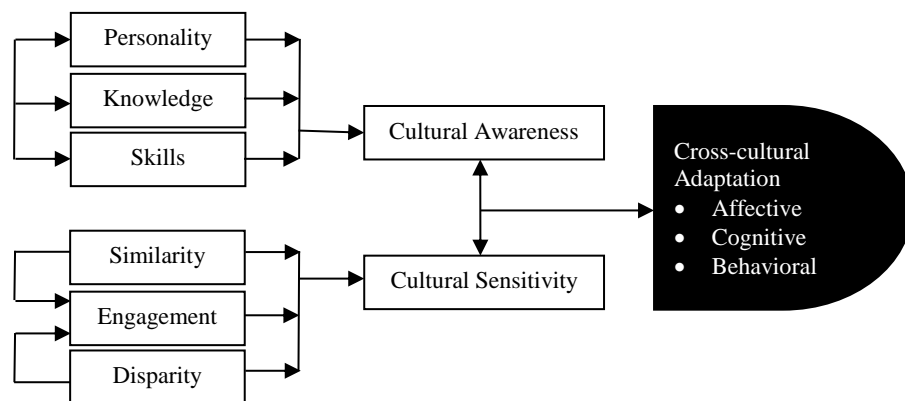


Figure 1. Cultural Variation and Cross-cultural Adaptation Diagram.

There are two elements of cross-cultural adaptation posited in acculturating the different socio-ecocultural environment due to the cultural variations. First, **cultural awareness** is an element that depends on a person's ecocultural personality, cultural knowledge, and intercultural skills. The one's *personality* caused anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural encounters (Froese, 2012). Sojourner's intended expectation at the visited location overshadowed their ability to make a necessary cross-cultural adjustment. However, in intercultural encounters, the sojourner and other people in the host locations may interpret the cultural cues based on his/her personal social-cultural frame of preferences (Hofstede, 1983; Torbiorn, 1985). The clear examples are shown in the findings on the issues of sensitivity vs ignorance, tight budget and other observable elements of the socio-ecocultural environment in New Zealand. Furthermore, scholars (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Harvey et al., 2012; Luring & Selmer, 2010; Ward, 2008) discussed that insufficient *knowledge* or unawareness on the host country's cultural composition and disability in making appropriate social adaptations. Transitions and interactions are found to reduce the quality of life and significantly impact family and working environment and performance. The findings have shown that the knowledge about weather, language, local government's laws, rules and procedures, locals' protocols and practices are necessary to aid sojourner's daily life abroad. Lack of cultural *skills* turns sojourners toward frustration and helplessness. The findings in this paper have shown how strange faces of people around caused the sojourner to be afraid of asking for the direction of the Qibla. Similarly, the unawareness to perceived "personal" issues during a conversation with others receives a cynical response instead. This scenario provides additional support to the sojourning hardness as shared in the prior studies (e.g., Butler & Hannam, 2013; Dennis & Stroh, 1993; Friedman, 2007; Friedman et al., 2009). As highlighted, understanding the cultural

components builds consciousness to the cultural differences. In particular, the realization of self-cultural elements assists the adaptation of the cultural perspectives of others.

In addition, expectations of needs and interpretations of the socio-ecocultural environment in the strange places are important in obtaining a beneficial rapport with locals. Illustrated in the findings, false judgment towards others have caused the feeling of annoyance, helplessness, social complication and cynical feedback—which reduce the ability to integrate with the others in the host country. Reflecting on the self-social norms and value of others helps to disclose the relationship which increases the transmission efficiency of an intercultural encounter. Therefore, awareness on the heterogeneity of socio-cultural habitat is vital for developing sufficient cultural competence while sojourning abroad. Although originating from homogenous socio-cultural habitats, individuals with adequate knowledge, skills, and personality (Froese, 2012; Friedman, 2007; Friedman et al., 2009) are able to acculturate with others who display contrasting socio-ecocultural preferences. Possessing sufficient intercultural awareness builds confidence in coping with socio-ecocultural changes, especially with regards to the attitudes, beliefs, norms, and values of others. Therefore, knowledge about self-cultural elements and others' needs and expectations motivate sojourners to establish a fruitful cross-cultural adaptation.

Secondly, **cultural sensitivity** is another important element appearing on the cross-cultural adjustment while sojourning abroad. As illustrated in the findings, the Malays have explicitly perceived the “personal” aspect discovered among Westerners during an interpersonal interaction. However, insensitivity to cultural elements is a source of ethnocentrism, racism, stereotyping and interpersonal rejection (Garris et al., 2011) against those coming from the “out-skirt” cultures. Sojourners' experienced social difficulties, anxiety, uncertainty, annoyance or cynical looks due to their unexpected responses or underestimation of reasoning (Salgado & Bastida, 2017; Wechtler et al., 2017). Therefore, socio-cultural sensitivity is an explicit and implicit appearance of the socio-ecocultural environment. Although obtaining the *similarity* point of the ecocultural differences from wider perspectives is time-consuming, having sufficient cultural awareness is able to support proper adjustment and establish beneficial adaptation. Sojourner's ability to probe the point of similarity between different cultural settings will reach the socio-ecocultural adjustment exertion. People may share the same interests or cultural elements (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, norms and/or values) but they express them from different cultural definitions. For example, as illustrated in the findings, there are some similar traditional protocols between Maoris and Malays. Therefore, comprehending the similarity gives a communal respect which helps reduce uncertainty due to variations of contexts. Notably, the knowledge about cultural similarity bridges the relationship between people crossing from a different socio-ecocultural environment.

Next, identifying the *disparity* between socio-ecocultural identity creates significant confidence among sojourners to initiate the implicit and explicit connectedness to others abroad. Appropriate engagement produces sojourning enjoyment and satisfaction (i.e., international mobility goal accomplishment). However, international goal attainment requires significant attentiveness in order to comprehend the transition and interaction process (Berry, 2002; Sam & Berry, 2010; Sato et al., 2014). Moving forward, according to Hofstede (1983) the *engagement* between individualist and collectivist cultures demands significant self-monitoring and motivation in order to have an acceptable attachment point. Hence, the institute requires respect and tolerance towards others' opinion, preferences, views and other ecocultural perspectives in different attachment contexts. Besides, attentive and empathic elements of personality (Froese, 2012) offer rewards for an accurate socio-cultural impression. Therefore, comprehending cross-cultural similarity and disparity in a tolerant way helps sojourners to make necessary adaptations. Understanding the nature of socio-ecocultural environments creates a beneficial commitment to affective attainment (i.e., semotional reaction), relationship

continuity (i.e., interaction and relationship) and normative assigned (i.e., obligation and goals of international mobility).

Thirdly, the ability to make appropriate **cross-cultural adaptation** is crucial in order to reduce social difficulties. Coming with cultural variations, sojourners require a deep understanding of the affective resonance, cognitive comprehension, and acceptable behavior. It is perceived that a cultural mindset is a dependence on the affective, cognitive and behavioral interaction (Ward & Kennedy, 1999) of socio-ecocultural adjustment. An *affective* resonance is comprised of emotions or feelings in response to social encounters. For example, as shown in the findings, the sojourner felt distressed looking for a direction of the Qibla with non-familiar faces surround, then cynically answered in response to the color of the undies and felt blue once he received a packet of chocolate fish. Apparently, the socio-cultural disorder creates an annoyance and helplessness due to economics, politics and social system differences between home and the host country. Hence, this paper provides further support to the previous studies (e.g., Butler & Hannam, 2013; Dennis & Stroh, 1993; Salgado & Bastida, 2017; Wechtler et al., 2017) on the differences in the country's physical facilities and social systems to determine the sojourners' ability to reduce social expectation and obtain proper psychological adaptation. Therefore, it is important that sojourners find a point of adaptation between cultural sensitivity and awareness in reducing social shock.

The *cognitive* comprehension is about knowledge concerning the social system which regulates the daily living, work, and interaction with others at home and the host country. It is essential for sojourners to make necessary pre-departure cultural training in order to make appropriate estimation and socio-cultural expectation whilst sojourning in distinct cultural locations. Having sufficient information on accommodation, facilities, immigration, traffic system, weather, population, ethnicity and other related daily living necessities, one is able to reduce discrimination, marginalised assumptions, uncertainty or other strains and stressors (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Butler & Hannam, 2013; Shaffer et al., 2012). However, as illustrated in the findings, there is some unexpected information such as the weather at the host location (see issues of sunlight is life, time-saving and reading weather forecast). In addition, most of the information can be obtained through shared online public domain websites or other specific international mobility agents.

Lastly, sojourners' appropriate and acceptable *behaviors* or manners portrayed in the host country depends on their attitudinal references back at home. Hence, the social acceptance of the locals (Freeman & Lindsay, 2012; Friedman, 2007; Friedman et al., 2009; Harvey et al., 2012; Sato et al., 2014) affects sojourners' performances (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Salgado & Bastida, 2017; Shaffer et al., 2012) and ability to cope with different social practices in the host country. Furthermore, the amount of social involvement, interaction and expectation (Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Wechtler et al., 2017) between sojourners and the locals determined the learning-coping strategy played in their cross-cultural adaptability. It has been proven in this paper that the behavioral understanding is enhanced when the sojourner willingly joined and participated in the social activities and official events with locals. Social exposure and involvement are able to reduce stereotyping, false judgment or assumptions about local practices in the host country. Therefore, sojourners' appropriate manners displayed have helped in establishing an effective cross-cultural adaptation in distinct socio-cultural location.

Remarkably, this paper enhances the understanding on the socio-ecocultural variation that is crucial for the cross-cultural adaptation while sojourning abroad. To reemphasize, mutual understanding of the elements of the cross-cultural adaptation, as shown as in Figure 1, is substantial to facilitate sojourner's adaptability to the cultural variations on the foreign socio-ecocultural environment. However, the acceptance of the cultural variation on the socio-ecocultural adaptability demonstrated and illustrated in the findings is subjected to the empirical limitations.

Limitations

There are some limitations accounted for in this study. First, this paper autoethnographically observed the cultural variations in a location by a person who sojourned to New Zealand. Different sojourners may record different experiences and social-cultural encounters. Sojourners' facing struggles abroad depend on the composition of the socio-ecocultural environmental encounters—apart from sojourner's self-cultural frame-of-references. Secondly, the data were only derived from one location (Wellington, New Zealand). Sojourners may face different stressors, or enjoyment while sojourning to different socio-ecocultural locations. Different locations may offer different forms of facilities, hardness, sceneries or attitudinal influences from the locals. Thus, the generalization of issues from this paper are limited. The results are possibly relevant to other sojourners with similar socio-ecocultural backgrounds and sojourning experience at similar settings in New Zealand, but it is quite difficult to extend the findings to other developed countries with different social systems. The climate change and dynamic nature of a country's economic and political systems indicate the subjectivity of the findings for current socio-cultural habitation. Nonetheless, this paper could enrich the phenomenological inquiries through autoethnographic exploratory field-work studies. The different approach of qualitative inquiry may give supplementary understanding to the discussed issues as highlighted in this paper. There are some research implications, as offered for discussed in the next section.

Implications

There are both empirical and theoretical implications of the findings obtained in this paper for future knowledge enhancement. As illustrated earlier, cultural variation between distinct group members has caused international mobility difficulties, anxiety, frustration or uncertainty. The inability to make the necessary adjustment or socio-ecocultural adaptation is the result of a sojourning failure, unsatisfactory performance, social breakdown and possible family conflict. Based on the findings, it is the sojourner's obligation to establish a harmonious transition and interaction in a different social context. To comprehend the implicit contrast of the host's culture is equally important to adjustment to physical appearances.

Empirically, an autoethnographic approach applied in this paper provides different perspectives to comprehend the specific forms of cultural variation expectation while sojourning. It may give an added value to the local inquiry on ethnic diversity and connectivity among multicultural society, especially in Southeast Asia's socio-cultural setting. For those who are planning to sojourn abroad, it is important to incorporate precise elements of cultural awareness and sensitivity into the preparation.

Theoretically, this paper highlights the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity which aids in giving additional support for the international mobility research. Blending those two aspects (i.e., awareness and sensitivity) strengthen habitual and ecocultural processes (Berry, 2002, 2010; Sam & Berry, 2010; Sato et al., 2014) and ascertain adaptation and cross-cultural adjustment (Ward, 2008; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Tapping cultural issues on socio-cultural variations are perceived as important in connection with moral consequences—which are associated with religious perspectives, etiquette, and social manners. Therefore, undertaking an appropriate acculturation understanding, one can create a harmonious relationship with others in a different socio-ecocultural environment and reduce sojourning conflict and difficulties. The research implication in this paper possibly augments the importance of sojourners' social quality and ability to appropriately adjust and adapt to the different socio-cultural setting.

Conclusion

This paper reflects on how a sojourner who was naive to the foreign-culture challenged himself to travel outside of his socio-culture habitation for the first time. Notably, the cultural variations have reduced the sojourner's excitement when encountering socio-ecocultural difficulties (e.g., physical, psychological and behavioural difficulties) abroad. However, the appropriate transition and adjustment processes have facilitated the sojourner in successfully acculturating and creating a memorable adaptation. Moreover, an affective, cognitive and behavioral affirmation has helped in reducing inappropriate socio-cultural sentiments; this is crucial to strengthening the socio-cultural integration abroad. The connectedness between cultural awareness and sensitivity on cross-cultural adjustment is vital to eliminating alienation among sojourners due to the cultural variations. In the other words, acculturation processes can be difficult due to personal restrictions and over-expectation over the socio-ecocultural environment in other countries. The key to success in the cross-cultural adaptation, as demonstrated through autoethnographic writing in this paper, is cultural **awareness** and **sensitivity** towards cultural variation.

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