Building intercultural links: The impact of a multicultural intervention programme on social ties of international students in Australia

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Abstract

The present research examined the effects of a multicultural intervention programme on the development of social ties, cultural orientation, and psychological adjustment among international students in Australia. Ninety-eight international students from 11 Asian countries, including 47 participants and 51 non-participants of the intervention programme, completed two surveys, one month and four months after the programme (Time 1 and Time 2, respectively). The programme participants and non-participants were comparable in their background characteristics and personality tendencies. Nonetheless, over the three month period, participants (vs. non-participants) of the programme developed a greater number of new friends, especially local Australian friends. Moreover, the participants maintained their interests in local culture while non-participants weakened their interests. The programme participation however had no influence on students’ psychological adjustment. Potential implications of multicultural intervention programmes for educational institutions are discussed.
Building Intercultural Links: The Impact of A Multicultural Intervention Programme on Social Ties of International Students in Australia

(1) Introduction

(a) The Setting

International education is a global export industry today. Educational institutions from countries such as the U.S.A., Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand compete over more than 1.3 million students who seek to study in countries other than their own each year. Australia is among the countries with the highest proportions of international students on university campuses in the world. The number of onshore international students in Australia in the year 2008 rose to 435,263 (Australian Education International, 2009a). In years 2007/8, the total value of Australia’s education exports was over $13 billion, comprising education fees and living expenses, and supporting 42,000 jobs (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Many Australian universities have become reliant on full-fee paying international students. Along with the changing economy in the world, Australia’s international education policy also shifted over the past 25 years. Similar to that of the U.S.A. and Britain, the ‘aid’ orientation predominant before 1985 was replaced by a market-orientated ‘trade’ policy, and more recently, by an ‘enrichment through internationalisation’ orientation (Smart, Volet, & Ang, 2000). It is in such a socio-historical context that the present research was conducted.

(b) The Community of Interest

According to Paige (1990), international students refer to “individuals who temporarily reside in a country other than their own citizenship or permanent residence in order to participate in international educational exchange as students” (p.162). In 2008, the largest number of international students came to Australia from China (96,753; 22.2%), India (75,390; 17.3%), and Korea (28,296; 6.5%), followed by other Asian countries such as
Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Nepal, Indonesia, and Vietnam (Australian Education International, 2009b). In 2004 when the current project was conducted in a small university in Melbourne, roughly 25% of this university’s 11,000 students were international students and 86% of them from Asia, with the largest nationalities being Hong Kong (15%), Malaysia (8%), Indonesia (8%), and China (5%).

These young people from diverse cultures but with similar academic goals and experiences subscribe to a shared social identity of ‘international students’ and form a loosely-knit community (Kashima & Pillai, in press). These people are not only connected to each other through informal personal ties but are also bound together though their memberships in some publicly recognised associations, such as International Student Association (ISA), associations for students of the shared nationality (e.g., Indonesian student association), and various cultural clubs. In addition to students themselves, the community of international students consists of university staff from the international office, course advisers and counsellors, and further, accommodation providers and local business people who cater for students’ cultural needs. Upon enrolling in the educational institution, therefore, the new international students join in this large community, with a potential for establishing personal ties with its diverse members. Nevertheless, an often found problem among international students is their feelings of social isolation, loneliness, and disappointment with the lack of friendship ties, especially with local students.

(c) The Research Issue

The issue addressed in this project concerns the social inclusion and cultural integration of international students to the larger community within the host culture. According to the functional model of friendship network (Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1977), international students typically form three types of social networks, co-national, multinational and local.
Co-national friends are those from the same country of origin. Local friends are friends from the host country. Multinational friends are the remaining international students from countries other than their own. According to Bochner and his colleagues, the three categories of friends tend to provide distinct social relationships; co-national friends with intimate personal relationships, multinational friends with recreational and social relationships, and local friends with academic and instrumental relationships. Thus, according to Bochner et al., an intimate personal relationship between an international student and a local student is more an exception than a rule.

Nevertheless, a less well documented fact is that a majority of international students desire and expect to develop personal relationships with members of the host community and to learn their local culture. A preliminary study of Asian international students ($N = 115$) in the current university revealed that despite a vast majority of these students desiring to make friends with local students and expecting that doing so would be relatively easy, many actually developed a limited number of local friends, and most such ties were confined to academic contexts (Diss, 2003). Numerous reports within and outside Australia have also painted similar pictures. Mullins, Quintrell, and Hancock (1995) found that after six months in Australia, 66% of the 436 international students reported problems mixing with local students. In a qualitative study of eight international students, Smart et al. (2000) found that after 12 months in Australia none had any Australian friends that they could write to when they returned home.

The paucity of contacts and personal ties between locals and international students is a non-trivial issue as it implies a lack of opportunities for ‘enrichment through internationalisation’ as assumed by the contemporary educational institutions and the globalising communities. Moreover, local ties are potentially rich resources for international
students’ psychological, social-cultural, and academic adjustment, as reported in earlier research (e.g., Kagitcibasi, 1978; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Searle, 1991).

(d) Research Objectives

To promote intercultural links, educational institutions around Australia conduct many intervention programmes today, some are larger scale than others. Intervention programmes to enhance the link between international and local students could be beneficial; however, empirical evidence on their effectiveness has not been as solid as one would desire (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Westwood and Barker (1990) for instance conducted a longitudinal study on the effect of peer-pairing programmes over a four-year period assessing various indicators, including academic achievement, drop-out rates and social adjustment among participating international students. They found that programme participants had higher achievement rates and lower drop-out rates than non-participants, and their friendship preference inclined to locals rather than co-nationals (see also Abe et al., 1998; Greenhoed, Abe, & Talbot, 2003; Nesdale & Todd, 2000). A majority of these evaluation studies, however, has focused on peer-matching programmes involving relatively small samples. Evaluations of multicultural programmes that involve international students as a main target with an aim to facilitate their social ties have been rare, although these programmes seem to have a practical advantage of being easier to organize compared to peer-matching programmes.

Do multicultural programme facilitate social ties, cultivate interests and understanding in the local culture, and aid psychological adjustment among international students? The primary aim of the current project was to answer these questions. For a number of reasons, we expected that participation in a multicultural programme would facilitate the development of social ties. First and most obviously, such a programme would give students an additional
opportunity to get to know each other. Nevertheless, there would also be more indirect effects of participation in such a programme, as implied in previous research. Participating in multicultural programmes requires participants to interact in the local language in a friendly atmosphere, and this can facilitate participants with non-native language background to increase their skills and confidence in social interactions (e.g., Abe et al., 1998). Moreover, the programme would potentially contribute to the development of common ground among international students, the knowledge base that facilitates social interactions and relationship development (Kashima, 2000). Assuming that one shares a low level of common ground with a potential interaction partner discourages social interaction, which may be common in intercultural encounters. However, multicultural programmes can alter such an assumption by providing an opportunity to recognise they share a considerable amount of common ground with others, thereby enhancing their motivation for intercultural interactions and interests in local culture. The notion of ‘knowledge and interests in the local culture’ has an important link to the construct of acculturation attitude (Berry, 1997). According to Berry, how the person feels about participating in the host society and maintaining his/her heritage cultural identity are two determinants of acculturation attitudes. Multicultural programmes may have a potential effect to enhance the participants’ cultural orientation towards the local culture by increasing their sense of familiarity with the local culture.

Furthermore, a multicultural programme might facilitate psychological adjustment of the students, especially if the intervention facilitates the positive orientation towards the local culture and promotes the development of social ties. Previous evaluation studies of peer-matching programmes also suggested that these programmes had positive effects on students’ adjustment (e.g., Abe et al., 1998; Olaniran, 1993).
Based on these considerations, the present project tested the following predictions: Compared to non-participants, participants of the multicultural intervention programme would subsequently develop a larger network of personal acquaintances in the new community, a stronger orientation toward the local culture, and better psychological adjustment.

(2) The Programme Development and Implementation

(a) The Procedure of the Multicultural Programme

The multicultural intervention programme which we refer to as the ‘bus excursion’ was carried out in February, 2004, at the beginning of an academic year in Australia. About 100 international students participated in the bus excursion (roughly 10% of international students who were informed about the programme). These students randomly rode on two busses, with a few senior international students, and accompanied by a supervisor (the first two authors of this paper). The destination of the excursion was Hillsville Sanctuary, a popular tourist spot roughly one hour from the university campus.

Bus excursion was selected as a form of programme because it would enable students to get to know one another in a relaxed atmosphere. We planned to have a conversation time followed by introduction of new acquaintances to others on the bus. By the time the bus reached the destination, many small groups had been formed which were maintained throughout the day. Our prior experiences in similar programmes had informed us that because most students participate in such an excursion by themselves and seat randomly on the bus, they were likely to meet with people from countries different than their own and in different academic programmes. We also invited several senior international students to the excursion, who volunteers to assist during the orientation week, as it would be beneficial for
new students to meet the senior students who were keen to pass on their local knowledge to the newcomers.

(b) Research Methods

Research Design

An evaluation study of our multicultural programme was conducted subsequently. This involved 47 of the bus excursion participants and 51 non-participants. Both groups completed the first survey four weeks after the excursion, then the second survey three months later. The design of the study was thus an independent group longitudinal design. Assignment to the two groups was non-random because participation in the bus excursion was by individual choice.

Participants

Forty-seven of the 98 respondents in the evaluation study were males and 51 were females. Among the excursion participants, 25 were males and 22 were females. All students were enrolled in the first year of an undergraduate \( n = 68 \) or a postgraduate \( n = 30 \) degree course at the university. They were from 11 Asian countries (see Table 1) and had been in Australia on the average of 0.9 years \( (SD = 1.0 \text{ years}) \) at the time the first survey (Time 1). Roughly half of the students were enrolled in a business degree and the rest were in other diverse areas of study (see Table 2). The mean age was 23.6 years \( (SD = 3.80 \text{ years}) \).

Materials

The survey forms at Time 1 and Time 2 were similar, and included demographic questions, a measure of social ties, cultural orientation, relationship orientation, social anxiety, and psychological adjustment, administered in this order.

Social Ties. Social ties were examined by a social ties questionnaire used in previous research by the third author (Kashima & Loh, 2006). The Time 1 and Time 2 questionnaires
slightly differed. On the first page of the Time 1 questionnaire, respondents were first asked to think of all people they had met since arriving in Melbourne, and to list their names. Then on the second page, they were instructed to select up to 20 individuals from the list, whom they considered as a personal friend or an acquaintance. With respect to each individual, respondents were then asked to indicate the person’s cultural background by circling one of four options: Australian, the same country as own, other foreign county, and “don’t know”. The numbers of co-national, international, and local ties were obtained from these responses.

The list of personal friends and acquaintances were kept in a sealed envelop with the participant’s ID code, and presented to the same participant again at Time 2. The Time 2 questionnaire asked them whether or not they still kept in contact with each of these individuals and regarded them as a friend or an acquaintance. If the relationship had been maintained they were to write their initials again in the new questionnaire provided. Next, they were asked to list new friends or acquaintances they had made since the first survey, and to indicate their cultural background, as described above. The numbers of lost ties and new ties of different cultural backgrounds were obtained by using the responses from both times.

Respondents on the average reported 16.84 friendship ties at Time 1 (SD = 4.70), including 9.71 (SD = 4.34) co-nationals, 4.64 (3.11) internationals, and 2.28 (2.72) locals. The rough ratio of 4:2:1 was consistent with a prior report by Diss (2003). The average friendship ties at Time 2 was 21.80 (SD = 8.52), including 13.40 (SD = 6.35) co-nationals, 7.98 (4.89) internationals, and 4.09 (4.24) locals. It is noted that variability in the size of friendship ties was quite large, especially at Time 2. The average respondent lost 3.00 ties and gained 7.92 new ties between Time 1 and Time 2.

Cultural Orientation. To assess respondents’ cultural orientations, we devised new scales separately for home cultural orientation and local cultural orientation. For home
cultural orientation, 12 behavioural statements relevant to the media and communication related to the student’s culture of origin were presented (e.g., “Visit information websites from my country”, “Listen to music from my country”, “Check the major news of the day in my country”). They were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 ‘not at all important’ to 5 ‘very important’. For local cultural orientation, 12 statements relevant to the media and communication concerning Australia were presented (e.g., “Visit Australian information websites”, “Listen to Australian radio”, “Check the Australian major news of the day”) and rated on the same scale.

Responses from Time 1 survey were factor analysed with the Maximum Likelihood extraction method. Two clear factors emerged (accounting 19% and 18% of the variance). After a varimax rotation, the first factor consisted of items of home cultural orientation only and the second factor consisted of items of host cultural orientation only. Because of the relatively small sample size, we used .40 as the minimum size of factor loadings and retained seven items for local cultural orientation (α = .82) and six items for home cultural orientation (α = .78). See Table 3 for summary of results. The two orientations were uncorrelated (r = -.01 and -.02 at Time 1 and Time 2). Overall, respondents had a stronger orientation towards the local culture than the home culture at both Time 1 (M = 3.07, SD = .71 vs. M = 2.70, SD = .77, t_{97} = 3.45, p < .001) and Time 2 (M = 3.01, SD = .68 vs. M = 2.83, SD = .78, t_{97} = 1.78, p = .08).

**Relationship Orientation.** The development of friendship ties may be influenced by a personality variable of relationship orientation. According to Pham (2003) individuals with high relationship establishing orientation (REO) emphasize forming new relationships with others whereas those with high relationship maintaining orientation (RMO) emphasize maintaining already established relationships. If participants and non-participants of the
excursion programme differed in these relationship orientations, any differences in their subsequent social ties may be due to this factor. We therefore used Pham’s Relationship Orientation Scale to measure REO and RMO. The REO scale involved five items (e.g., “how often do you try to meet new people?”) and the RMO scale involved four items (“how important is it to you to maintain relationships with people you have known most of your life?”). Each statement was rated on a seven-point scale (1 ‘never/not at all’ and 7 ‘always/very much’). A higher score reflected a stronger tendency to establish new friendship (REO) or to maintain existing friendships (RMO). Coefficient α for REO and RMO were .74 and .63 at Time 1, and .80 and .71 at Time 2, respectively.

Social Anxiety. Another construct that should be strongly related to social ties development, thus should be compared between the participant and non-participant groups was social anxiety. Anxious students are less likely to develop social ties. Moreover, they may not participate in the bus excursion. To measure social anxiety, the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) was devised on the basis of the Social Interaction Anxiety Scale developed by Mattick and Clarke (1989, cited in Kleinknecht, Dinnel, & Kleinknecht, 1997). This scale was intended to measure international students’ anxiety in mixing in new social situations in particular (e.g., “I find myself worrying that I won’t know what to say in social situations”), with 17 items. The response scale ranged from 1 ‘It does not describe me/It is not true of me’ to 7 ‘It describes me/It is very true of me’. Coefficient α was .90 and .86 at Time 1 and 2. Time 1 and Time 2 measures were highly correlated, $r = .75, p < .001$. The average student scored significantly lower than the mid point of the scale ($M = 3.33, SD = 1.07$ at Time 1; 3.28, .93 at Time 2).

Psychological Adjustment. We adopted Crano and Crano’s (1993) Inventory of Student Adjustment Strain (ISAS) to measure international students’ psychological adjustment. The
scale involved 12 items (e.g., “I feel I should never have come to Australia”, “I feel excited about new experiences”, and “I feel homesick”) rated on the same 7-point scale as used for the SIAS. Psychological adjustment at Time 1 ($\alpha = .84$) and Time 2 ($\alpha = .76$) were moderately correlated, $r = .58$, $p < .001$. Average respondents scored higher than the scale midpoint on psychological adjustment ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.00$ at Time 1; 5.03, .81 at Time 2), thus they were well adjusted psychologically.

Procedure

To recruit participants for the present study a flyer about the study was circulated during the orientation week for international students. Students interested in participating in the study completed the information sheet with their contact details and returned to the researchers. Study participants were also recruited at the end of the bus excursion. Students who were interested in participating were asked to give their contact details to their excursion supervisor.

A few weeks after the excursion, participants of the programme and non-participant comparison group (recruited in parallel) were invited to take part in the first survey, in a meeting room at the international student advisors’ office on the campus. Three months after the first survey, they were contacted and invited to complete the second survey at the same venue. Participants received $A20 for completing both questionnaires.

(3) Results

(a) Equivalence of Excursion Participants vs. Non-Participants

To examine the equivalence of the excursion participant group and non-participant group, we first compared the background characteristics of these two groups through a series of $t$-tests and $\chi^2$-tests. The two groups were found to be similar with respect to all variables we tested, including age (non-participants: 23.24 years, participants: 23.89 years), gender
ratio (males 43% vs. 53%), marital status (married 6%), time in Australia (.99 years vs. .82 years), country of origin (see Table 1), study area (see Table 2), English-speaking background (6% vs. 4%), IESTS score (the International English Language Testing System, which measures ability in listening, reading, writing and speaking; 6.02 vs. 6.05), previous study abroad experience (26% vs. 21%), postgraduate ratio (31% vs. 30%), and housing (living with other friends 67% vs. 72%; with family members 24% vs. 11%; with non-students 6% vs. 15%; alone 4% vs. 2%), all ps > .10.

Next, we compared the two groups with respect to their personalities. A preliminary analysis found REO was positively associated with the number of Australian friendship ties ($r = .31$, $p < .01$ at Time 1); therefore, whether or not the groups were equivalent in REO was important. Result showed participants and non-participants were indeed comparable in their REO and RMO, $t_s < 1$. Further, the two groups were similar in their degree of social anxiety at Time 1, $t < 1$.

Thus, the two groups were similar with regard to their demographic summary and personalities. Subsequently, we completed main analyses both with and without controlling for REO, RMO, and social anxiety. These analyses produced the same results. For simplicity, we will report on results without covariates.

(b) Friendship Ties

**Total Friendship Ties.** We predicted that participants of the bus excursion programme would develop a larger network of personal ties in the new community over the time, relative to non-participants. The total numbers of friendship ties at Time 1 and Time 2 were compared between the participant and non-participant groups, in a 2 (Group) × 2 (Time 1 vs. Time 2) mixed-design ANOVA, with the latter variable as repeated measures. A significant Time main effect was found, suggesting that students generally increased their friendship ties over
three months ($F_{1,96} = 57.30, p < .001, \mu^2_{p} = .37$). Nonetheless, the result also suggested that the expansion of friendship ties was greater among the programme participants (16.40 vs. 23.00) than the non-participants (17.24 vs. 20.69), as indicated by a significant Group × Time interaction effect ($F_{1,96} = 5.62, p < .05, \mu^2_{p} = .06$). See Figure 1. When the first survey was administered a month after the excursion, the number of friendship ties differed little between the participant and non-participant groups. Three months later, however, the friendship ties in the participant group exceeded those in the non-participant group. This supported the effect of the bus excursion programme. Nevertheless, additional evidence need to be consulted.

New Ties. Over the three-months period, respondents lost as well as gained friendship ties. Thus, the size of the new ties made over this time period might be a more important index than the total ties. We compared the new ties between the two groups. Supporting the effect of the programme, participants of the excursion programme reported a greater number of new ties ($M = 9.32, SD = 6.07$) than non-participants ($6.63, 4.99$), $t_{96} = 2.41, p < .02$ at Time 2.

Specific Ties. We were also interested in testing if programme participants developed more friendship ties with local students compared to non-participants. As prior reports suggested, international students tend to find making local ties to be particularly difficult. Results were encouraging. Participants of the programme indeed reported having gained more local friends ($M = 2.45, SD = 2.37$) than non-participants ($1.41, 2.15$), and this difference was significant, $t_{96} = 2.27, p < .03$. In contrast, the two groups had gained similar numbers of new conational ties, and international ties, $ts < 1$. Hence, programme participants were successful in making local Australian friends in particular (see Figure 2).

\( (c) \) Cultural Orientation
It was anticipated that excursion participants might strengthen more their local cultural orientation relative to home cultural orientation over the three month period, compared to non-participants. To test this expectation, we analyzed local and home cultural orientation scores in a 2 (Group) \times 2 (Time 1 vs. Time 2) \times 2 (Local vs. Home Orientations) mixed-design ANOVA. The latter two factors were repeated measures. The analysis yielded a significant Group \times Time \times Orientation interaction effect, $F_{1,96} = 3.83, p < .05, \mu^2 = .04$. Also, a main effect of orientation ($F_{1,96} = 7.21, p < .01$) and a Time \times Orientation interaction effect ($F_{1,96} = 5.44, p < .05$) were significant, suggesting, respectively, that respondents tended to have stronger local (3.04) than home (2.77) cultural orientation overall, and that while home cultural orientation generally strengthened over time ($F_{1,96} = 5.78, p < .02$), local cultural orientation was stable ($F < 1$). See Figure 3. The group main effect was non-significant, $F_{1,96} < 1$, and no other significant effect was found.

Simple effects analyses were performed to clarify the pattern of the three-way interaction effect. It was revealed that over the three month period the non-participant group significantly weakened their local cultural orientation (3.15, 2.96), $F_{1,96} = 4.40, p < .05$, and increased their home cultural orientation (2.64, 2.80), $F_{1,96} = 4.47, p < .05$. In marked contrast, the participant group maintained the same level of local cultural orientation (2.98, 3.06), $F_{1,96} < 1$, and home cultural orientation (2.77, 2.87), $F_{1,96} = 1.77, p > .10$.

\textit{(d) Psychological Adjustment}

The predicted effect of programme participation on psychological adjustment was probed in a 2 (Time) \times 2 (Group) mixed-design ANOVA. The effect of group was not significant, $F_{1,95} < 1$. Time \times Group interaction was also non-significant, $F < 1$. Thus, the intervention programme had little impact on the psychological adjustment of the students.

\textit{(4) Discussion}
(a) What has been learned about the research issue?

In this study we compared two groups of international students, a group who participated in a multicultural intervention programme and the other who did not. Between one month and four months following the intervention programme, two significant differences emerged in these groups. First, the programme participants developed more friendship ties, especially the local Australian ties, compared to non-participants. Second, the participants sustained their local cultural orientation whereas non-participants weakened it and developed stronger home cultural orientation. These two groups were found to have similar background characteristics as well as personality tendencies.

It is important to note that the group differences emerged only four months after the intervention programme. Critics may suggest that a successful intervention programme should have revealed its effect immediately before our first survey. We would argue that while some effects of interventions should certainly be immediate, other effects might develop more gradually. Moreover, some of the immediate effects may not necessarily be sustained. For instance, immediately after the bus excursion, many participants would have listed people met on the bus as their friends of acquaintances; nevertheless, many of these potential friendship ties may not have been sustained due to lack of further contacts. In contrast, the bus excursion might have triggered more cognitive and attitudinal changes in participants, such as interests in new experiences and self-efficacy in forming local ties.

As we have speculated earlier, the experience of the multicultural bus excursion may enhance the sense of common ground and interests in local participation. From this perspective, then, it seems not surprising to have obtained these delayed effects in the current study such as stronger social ties with the locals and sustained interests in the local culture shown four months after the programme by the participants. Future research should
investigate the psychological changes that might be triggered by multicultural programmes further.

In contrast, the present study found little evidence to suggest that the bus excursion programme positively affected the participants’ psychological adjustment, because no difference in the level of psychological adjustment was found between the two groups. This may be because most of our study participants were generally well-adjusted. However, according to previous research on effects of social support on psychological adjustment, beneficial effects of social support were limited to international students who were highly acculturated to the host culture (Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004). A possibility that effects of intervention programs might also be moderated by acculturation level should be explored in future research.

(b) How do the results relate to the research objectives?

The primary aim of this project was to determine if field excursion programmes for international students can facilitate intercultural friendship ties, thereby contributing to the enrichment of the experiences of international students and to the internalisation of the university communities more generally. Our findings add new evidence to the prior research (e.g., Westwood & Barker, 1990) that found the peer-matching programmes involving both international and local students can increase the number of friends among international students. A new aspect of the current study was that only international students were involved in the intervention programme. The current results suggested that participants of the programme compared to non-participants indeed developed more friendship ties with local students, and sustained their interests in the local culture several months after the programme. Our study seems to suggest, therefore, that this form of intervention can potentially provide with a successful avenue for strengthening the local-international links.
On the bases of the present findings, the following applications may be recommended. It should be noted, however, that the present findings were derived from a study involving Asian international students in a tertiary institution in Melbourne, Australia. Applicability of our recommendations should be carefully considered if background characteristics of the target international students, such as their age, religious background, and cultural origin, differ substantially from those of participants in our study. Further, other factors must be also considered before the relevance of our findings can be determined such as characteristics of the host institution (e.g., the composition of the student body) and the type of the programme.

We propose that educational institutions should be encouraged to develop and conduct intervention programmes that aim to enhance social engagement among international students. It is important that such a programme provides participants with an opportunity to interact with other international students in a relaxed atmosphere. It is advisable to involve some senior students in such a programme who can pass on their knowledge and experiences to the newcomers. We believe it is not indispensable to involve local students in such a programme. However, it is advisable that the programme will emphasize various aspects of the local culture – such as places and events that are widely known and enjoyed by the locals. Learning about such shared local knowledge would be useful for participants when they try to develop relationships with the local people.

We also propose that multicultural programmes may be more effective when students are in the same academic programme or in the same residential college thus are able to sustain their contacts after the programme. Although students in different programmes may learn much from each other, it would be more difficult for them to sustain their social ties. In order to develop culturally integrated university campuses, it is also recommendable to give
support to clubs and associations that bring together the local and international students with shared interests, in inclusive and non-competitive environment. International student offices and international student associations might be encouraged to take active roles in the development of such clubs.

(d) Limitations and future research directions

The evidence summarized above nonetheless needs to be interpreted with extreme caution. In the present project participation in the intervention programme was non-random. Although the data were supportive of the equivalence of the two groups in terms of their background and personality characteristics, it is still possible that the groups somehow differed in some important ways. For instance, recent research has suggested that independent self-construal (Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006) and motivation to study abroad (e.g., Chirkov, Safdar, de Guzman, & Playford, 2008) to play important roles in the adaptation of international students. It is possible that these two groups differed systematically in such characteristics with important implication for their adjustment. Moreover, the present evaluation study lacked prior measures. In sum, it is difficult to draw a causal link between excursion participation and the subsequent data. Results are nevertheless encouraging. We suggest that future evaluation studies on multicultural intervention programme will use random assignment of participants where it is possible.

In addition to the lack of random assignment of participants, this evaluation study was limited in a number of ways. Although we examined friendship ties, we have focused only on the quantity of the ties, ignoring their quality. We also neglected the students’ memberships in groups which may have important implications for the development of their social relations. We also failed to find systematic links between social ties and cultural orientations.
in the present data. More systematic investigations are required in future to clarify how social relations and learning of new culture progress interactively.

(5) Conclusion

The present study examined the longitudinal consequences of participating in a multicultural intervention programme for social tie development, cultural orientation, and psychological adjustment of international students. Students who participated in the programme tended to develop a greater number of friends overall and particularly local (Australian) friends over the period of three months. They also maintained their interests and involvement in the local culture while the non-participant group weakened their local cultural orientation and strengthened the home cultural orientation. Though these results are preliminary and causal effects of the programme participation cannot be established, implications of the present study for further research are encouraging. Therefore, education providers should be encouraged to organise multicultural intervention programmes.
References


Table 1: Country of origin of excursion participants vs. non-participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Non-Participants</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>22 (22%)</td>
<td>11 (22%)</td>
<td>11 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>15 (15%)</td>
<td>6 (12%)</td>
<td>9 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>11 (11%)</td>
<td>5 (8%)</td>
<td>6 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>17 (17%)</td>
<td>10 (20%)</td>
<td>7 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>11 (11%)</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
<td>7 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>9 (9%)</td>
<td>5 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>5 (5%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>98 (100%)</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
<td>47 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Study areas of excursion participants vs. non-participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study area</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Non-Participants</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>47 (48%)</td>
<td>22 (43%)</td>
<td>25 (53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia</td>
<td>14 (14%)</td>
<td>8 (16%)</td>
<td>6 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>10 (10%)</td>
<td>7 (14%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>5 (5%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>4 (4%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>15 (15%)</td>
<td>10 (19%)</td>
<td>4 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>98 (100%)</td>
<td>51 (100%)</td>
<td>47 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Factor Loading, Eigenvalues, and Percentage Variance for Local Cultura Orientation and Home Cultural Orientation Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check the Australian major news of the day</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read local newspaper</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read Australian books or magazines for my spare time</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to Australian radio</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring or e-mail Australian friends</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the gossip of Australian celebrity</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Australian current top 10 songs</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow current top 10 songs in my country</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the major news of the day in my country</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to music from my country</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit information website(s) from my country</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check the major news of the day in my country</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read local papers in my language</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% variance explained</td>
<td>19.06</td>
<td>17.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 = Local Cultural Orientation, 2 = Home Cultural Orientation.
Figure Captions

*Figure 1.* Friendship ties at Time 1 and Time 2.

*Figure 2.* New friendship ties developed by programme participants and non-participants over the three-months period. Error bars are 95% CIs.

*Figure 3.* The local and home cultural orientations of participants and non-participants of the excursion programme at Time 1 and Time 2. Error bars are 95% CIs.
Building International Links

Graph showing the increase in friendship ties over time for non-participants and participants.
Building International Links

Friendship Types

- Locals
- Internationals
- Conationalists

Friendship Ties

- Non-participants
- Participants

The graph illustrates the comparison of friendship ties between non-participants and participants across different friendship types: locals, internationals, and conationalists.
Local Cultural Orientation

Home Cultural Orientation

- Non-participants
- Participants