Demographic Variables Influence on Culture Shock and Intercultural Communication Apprehension

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Abstracts: *The study investigated culture shock and intercultural communication apprehension of Nigerian students between the ages of 18 and above, in Girne American University. The volunteered students completed the following instruments: Cultural Distance Index, Culture Shock Questionnaire, and Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension, and demographic forms. Descriptive statistics, correlation coefficient analyses, and Main Effects MANOVA Model computed for the 352 participants. Significant positive relationship between culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension, were found suggesting that students that experience higher levels of culture shock are likely to be experiencing high level of communication anxiety. The results showed that gender, past travel experiences, were not influential factors in students' degree of culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension. However, length of stay in North Cyprus, and age influence levels of culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension.*

Keywords: Culture Shock, Communications, Intercultural Communications Apprehensions, Demographic variables

1. Introduction

International students, just like everyone, are social members of certain groups which they carry its cultural traits wherever they go. Chapdelaine & Alexitch, (2004) described cultural traits as socially inherited beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and meanings that determine the psychosocial development of self-concept and identity which guide our social behaviors. Transitioning to a different environment entail contact with people from different cultures, providing opportunity to experience new things different from the home culture but most times, the new experiences may lead to difficulty assessing accurately the cultural cues, taken for granted as simply part of the fabric of life, initially acquired and used before. Life becomes unpredictable and people have problems coping with even simple routine aspects of living. Cultural adaptation to the changes in the new environment is imperative to ease the problems resulted from the distortion in familiar environmental cues. According to Jameson (2007) cultural adaptation is the process of modifying our previous acquired way of life, beliefs, to accommodate the new ones in our current environment. The adaptation process can be challenging since the change is from familiar settings to an unfamiliar environment which can cause apprehensions, and anxieties. The aggregate of the anxiety, confusion, and disorientation people feel when cultural transition demands adjustment to their initial beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes is what Oberg (1954) construed as culture shock. Culture shock was explained in terms of dispositional predictors like personality traits of the sojourners or changes in situational variables but the role of effective communication in successful adaptation has added a new perspective on the understanding of culture shock (Zapf, 1991). Culture shock was defined by various researchers, for example, Oberg (1960) believed it to be disease of foreigners; process of adjustment to an unfamiliar settings (Pedersen, 1995), stress due to adaptive coping mechanisms (Berry, 1997), lack of skills to operate in the new culture (Furnham and Bochner1986) or the precipitating apprehension in communication due to loss of familiar environmental signs. However, Li (1999) believed the different conceptualization of culture shock, often observed in arguments about the etiology, prognosis, symptoms, and possible solution may be down to the complexity in the understanding of the concept of culture itself. Culture was defined by Tylor (1871) as complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities acquired by humans as members of a society. Ferraro (1998) suggests that culture includes everything that people have, think, and do as members of a certain society. According to Smith & Bond (1988), culture is a unique and shared mental programming belonging to different groups that regulates their social behaviors. Culture is set of codes that underlies the conventions, beliefs, values that in-groups use to communicate and function during social intercourse. The codes aid in creating and sustaining our perception, identity within and between groups. Hence culture influences socializations processes, identity, cognition, styles of communication, and social behaviors. Our self-concept, emotions, and communication competence are embedded in unique cultural identity and traits. Therefore when we encounter new and unfamiliar culture, anxiety may arise. Communication behaviours are rooted, and shaped by our culture, any change to unfamiliar environment may threaten our communication competence which may result in communication apprehension.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Globalization has profoundly influenced the education sectors and has led to massive academic revolution in the past century. Universities are marked by international students from various cultural backgrounds leading to cultural diversity on the campus. Cunningham (1991, p.1) stated that "A diversification among human communities is essential for the provision of the incentive and material for the Odyssey of the human spirit. Other nations of different habits are not enemies; they are godsends". Burbules& Torres (2000) assert that globalization has influenced global relations among nations, economy, technology and this has led to massive review of

most educational policies and practices. Educational concepts are being rethought and redefined to suit global context, and to accommodate students from vastly diverse cultural background, hence creating a multicultural academic environment.

Culture was defined by Hofstede (1984, p.13) as "collective programming of the mind … that are reserved for describing people from the entire society". Recently Hofstede (2011a) described culture as s social process that involve collective programing of the mind, which are inferred by the differences that exist between members of in-group and out group. He believed that cultural programing creates and sustains sensory stability and coherence in our cognition, emotions, and guides our behaviors. Hofstede (2011a) believed that pattern of culture in a given society resulted from the stable popularized values over long periods in their history. He added that cultural trait do not always appear conspicuous, but can be inferred from the behaviors of members as they express some symbols, heroes, rituals and interact. As member of a culture, we are able to recognize signs, picture, and gestures, tell tales of legends, and heroes, partake in certain social ceremonies, and festivals that are peculiar to us.Jandt (2010) states that culture shape our communicative behaviors and understanding of other people's communicative behaviors. Therefore in encounter with others that were culturally programed differently, we are able to recognize different cultural values in their practices (Hofstede, 2011a).

Intercultural contacts occur as members of one culture encounter others from different cultures and they discover their dissimilarity. The dissimilarity may be misunderstood at times, and generate conflicting responses or negative feedback between them.

Samovar & Porter (1997) assert that communication behaviours of people in intercultural encounters vary, and can influence their adjustment processes. Samovar & Porter (1997) defined intercultural communication as communication between people whose different cultural perceptions are distinguishable enough to distort their communication. These differences may alter meaning of message because the message producer belong to different culture while receiver is a member of another culture; as the interpretations of the message rely on the perception of the parties involved (Samovar & Porter). Lindsay & Norman (1977) described perception as the process by which we attain awareness and understand stimulus around us to produce a meaningful experience in the world. Therefore, when in a different culture perceptual organization may distort, as sojourners struggle to maintain their initial information while internalizing new one. The aggregate of all impact of the new and unfamiliar experiences can lead to culture shock. According to Dee &Henkin, (1999), learning in a new culture that have different norms, values and belief systems can be difficult and challenging situation, as it is with most international students. These cultural differences influence how they perceive their new environment and their construction of reality. International students often experience some difficulties in

areas such as food, language differences, dress, values, climate, and homesick-ness and social relationship with the domestic students. Therefore,to realize the objective of the school, it is pertinent to fully understand concept of culture shock and its influences. Therefore the study examined demographic variables that impact on the relationship between intercultural communication apprehensions and culture shock.

1.2 Research questions

The research questions for this study are (1) Is there significant relationship between intercultural communication apprehension, and culture shock experiences among Nigerian international students in North Cyprus? (2) Is there significant difference in intercultural communication apprehension, and culture shock experiences among Nigerian students in North Cyprus based on gender? (3) Is there significant differences in culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension among Nigerian international students based on length of stay in North Cyprus? (4) Is there significant difference in culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension based on the age of Nigerian international students? (5) Is there significant differences in culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension based on previous stay in another country?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Research design is the blueprint for which the carrying out of a research is based upon. It includes the layouts, and details of the procedures required to initiate, sustain and finish a study.This study is a descriptive correlational research as the researcher is concerned in finding out the existence of a statistically significant predictive relationship between culture shock and intercultural communication apprehension, and also how much some demographic variables contribute towards the experience of culture shock and intercultural communication apprehension.

2.2 Sampling and Instrumentation

Over 500 participants (Graduate, and undergraduate Nigerian students) were invited to participate in this study. The minimum age required to participate is 18 years, which is the major age in Nigeria. The participants were recruited in the classrooms and also through Facebook web link. Of the total number, students who were contacted in person, and through Facebook webpage, 352 indicated interest to participate in the study. The students that agreed to participate were asked to complete the following forms: consent form, demographic form, Culture Shock Questionnaire (Mumford, 1998), and Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (Neuliep&McCroskey, 1997).Both scales have internal consistency of more than .70.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The results of the analysis revealed a positive relationship between CSQ (M = 11.62, SD = 3.9) and PRICA (M = 40.93, SD = 4.7) and a statistically significant correlation [$r(350)$ = .439, $p < .05$], suggesting that students with higher levels of culture shock tended to experience higher levels of intercultural communication apprehension and vice versa. Both core culture shock, and interpersonal stress also showed a positive significant relationship with intercultural communication apprehension [$r(350)$ = .241, $p < .05$; $r(350)$ = .341, $p < .05$] respectively.

There was no statistically significant difference in CS, and ICA based on gender, F (2, 349) = 0.845,$p < .05$; Wilk's Λ = 0.95.These results showed that male students (M = 11.42, and 41.05 SD = 4.092, and 4.994) and female students (M = 11.90,and 40.77 SD = 3.606,and 4.324) tended to experience similar levels of culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension.

One way MANOVA evaluated the relationship between levels of Nigerian international students' intercultural communication apprehension, culture shock and age. The factor variable, age had three categories: 18-21, 22-25, and ≥ 26 years. The two dependent variables are the levels of culture shock CS, and Intercultural communication apprehension ICA from different age categories. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in age groups on CS, and ICA, F (4, 698) = 3.67,$p < .05$; Wilk's Λ = 0.959, partial η2 = .21 The test of between subject effect showed that age has a statistically significant effect on ICA ($F (2, 349)$ = 3.96; p =.025; partial η^2 = .22) but not on CS ($F (2,349)$ = 2.79; p =.053; partial η^2 = .16). A post hoc test showed statistically significantly different mean scores of ICA between l8-21 group and 22-25 grouponly (p = .033). The results showed no statistically significant difference in CS, and ICA based on Previous stay in another country, F (2, 349) = .151; p <.05. Wilk's Λ = 0.984.

For length of stay in North Cyprus, the results showed a statistically significant difference in CS, and ICA based on length of stay, F (8, 692) = 2.38,$p < .05$; Wilk's Λ = 0.947, partial η2 = .27. The effect size (d = .27) was slightly bigger than Cohen's convention for a small effect (d = 0.20). The test of between subject effect showed that length of stay has a statistically significant effect on both ICA ($F (4, 347)$ = 2.02; p =.026; partial η^2 = .23) and CS ($F (4,347)$ = 2.78; p =.043; partial η^2 = .31).

3.2 Discussion

This study sought to investigate the culture shock, in terms of communication apprehensions, and the impact of demographic variables. Correlation between intercultural communication apprehensions ICA, and culture shock CSQ revealed a significant positive relationship. The CSQ had two sub scales, core culture shock and interpersonal stress, which also

indicated significant positive relationships with ICA. These results implied that culture shock, and interpersonal stress is a significant variables in predicting intercultural communication apprehensions and vice versa, confirming the researcher expectations that culture shock experiences vary with the communication competence of the sojourners/or in this case Nigerian international students. The findings that all variables of culture shock were positively correlated suggest that various forms of strain in adjusting to new environment may influence the experience of communication apprehension. Previous researches have also revealed similar findings (Zapf, 1991; McCroskey, 1970; Jandt, 2010; Chapdelaine&Alexitch, 2004; Samovar & Porter, 1997; Apaibanditkul, 2006; Lin, 2012; Kim, 2006), suggesting that effective communication with the members of the new culture influences experience of culture shock by sojourners. The findings suggest that communication is paramount in adjustment to new culture. This result echoed the same assertion from Kim (2006), that the road to successful adjustment to a new environment is smoothened by the quality and quantity of interaction between the sojourners and members of the new culture. Jandt, (2010) stressed the importance of reducing the barriers to effective communication, in intercultural communication, to coping with culture shock. As the findings of this study demonstrated that predicting relationship exist between ICA and CSQ, the researcher was inclined to emphasize that the causes, symptoms, and solutions to ICA and CSQ are communication based. Therefore, successful transition to new culture require, to a great extent, quality interaction free from mitigating barriers.One way MANOVA test showed no statistically significant difference in CS, and ICA based on gender of the participants. For CSQ, females scored slightly higher than males. Female students indicated a mean of 11.90 with deviation of 3.6 in culture shock total scale, while males had a mean of 11.42 with standard deviation of 4.1. Though the findings showed no significant difference, but the slight mean difference may implied that: females tend to feel more strain to adapt, confusion in identity, homesick, and wish to leave the new place. However, no significant difference was found at p-value= .05 contrasting with the work of Lin &Rancer (2003);Chapdelaine&Alexitch, 2004 which found a significant difference in acculturative stress between males and females with females experiencing more difficulty in adjustment. In terms of ICA, interestingly enough, the mean of males were 41.1, standard deviation of 4.9 were slightly more than females mean of 40.8 and standard deviation of 4.3. Also no significant difference were found on gender and ICA. The slight mean difference may implied that males tend to feel more anxious in relating with others, uncomfortable making sense of gestures in communicating with members of the new culture, and apprehensive engaging in intercultural interactions.Though significant differences were found between ICA, and CSQ based on length of stay, but the findings did not confirm the use of time models to represent culture shock experiences. The results suggest that the experience of culture shock may be dependent on timing,but no universal uniformity on severity as that may depend on individualual dispositional factors (Dukic, 2010).Significant difference in the levels of culture shock, and intercultural

communication apprehension existed among the various age groups .The between group test was strongest for 18-21 age group, implying that ICA and CSQ experiences are prominent with younger students. The result indicate that age maybe a factor in affecting students' levels of ICA and CSQ. Age was also found to be a predicting factors that affects experience of culture shock, and communication apprehension in previous study involving international students (Apaibanditkul, 2006).Contrary to the researcher's expectations, MANOVA test revealed no significant difference in CS, and ICA among the participants, based on previous stay in another country. This result may be due to the relative young ages of the participants, and most are undergraduate students. The influence of past travel experiences on sojourners adjustment has been a contentious issue among researchers. For example, Klineberg& Hull (1979); Juffer, (1983); Kealey, (1989); Abe, (2008);Chung, (1988); Li, (1999) all found significant negative relationship between past international experience and culture shock. The adjustments experiences they have endured in their previous sojourns help for smoother adaptability in the new environment, but Torbiorn, (1982) stressed that easy adaptability by sojourners who had previous international experiences may not entirely be attributed to their vast travel experience, but other confounding variables not considered or controlled in the study.

4. Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to ascertain the Nigerian students' levels of culture shock CSQ and intercultural communication apprehension ICA, and the nature of the relationship that exist between the two constructs. Another goal of the study was to the relationship/ influence of some demographic variables on ICA and CSQ. There was a significant positive relationship between intercultural communication apprehension, and experience of culture shock. The current study revealed positive significant relationship between culture shock and perception of cultural differences, but intercultural communication apprehension and perception of cultural differences did have a weak positive, but not significant, relationship. The results also showed that Nigerian ethnicities did not differ significantly in the experience of culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension. It was revealed that numbers of friends (social support) was negatively related to culture shock, but not with intercultural communication apprehension. There was no significant gender difference in the experience of culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension but females were found to experience interpersonal stress than male students. There was a significant difference in the level of intercultural communication apprehension, and culture shock values based on age. The length of residence in North Cyprus also showed a significant difference in the experience of culture shock and communication apprehension. It was revealed attempting to speak Turkish, inside classroom or outside, do not account for differences in the experience of intercultural communication apprehension, and experience of culture shock. There was no significant differences found in culture shock, and intercultural communication apprehension

based on the students previous international travel experiences.

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