ACADEMIC ADAPTATION OF THAI GRADUATE STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

• Factors influence adaptation process
  • Communication skills (language skills, interaction with host members)
  • Demographic factors (age, gender)
  • Cultural factors (cultural similarity or distance)
  • Psychological factors (loneliness, homesickness)
  • Individual factors (prior learning experiences, anxiety management)
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

• To explore the academic adaptation experiences of Thai international graduate students in Australian universities

• Two research questions:
  • 1) What are the difficulties for Thai international graduate students studying in Australia; and
  • 2) How do they cope with those difficulties during their academic adaptation process?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

• This study aims to examine these questions based on Dunn’s (2006) model of International Academic Adjustment
DUNN’S (2006) MODEL OF INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENT

- Academic Major
- English Language Proficiency
- Academic Achievement
- Housing
- Extracurricular Involvement
- Peer Relationships
- Interactions with Faculty
- Pre-departure Preparedness
- Financial and Employment status
- Orientation & Advising Experiences

Academic Adjustment of International students
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (1)

• Research design
  • a qualitative research approach
  • Participants (7 female and 3 male Thai students aged from 25 to 44. Two Masters degree students and eight PhD students)

• Data Collection
  • Ten participants were recruited through snowball sampling method
  • All interviews were guided by the interview protocol
  • The data collection process started in July and completed in September 2013
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (2)

• Data analysis

  • Interviews were transcribed into Thai language by the first author and later was translated into English language
  • Thai translation scripts were sent to participants for accuracy checks
  • Two bilingual colleagues of the first author were asked to review the transcripts in order to assure the adequacy of the translation
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY (3)

• Similar responses from the participants were organised into 7 groups based on the Academic Adjustment Model:
  • 1) Pre-departure Preparedness and Orientation & Advising Experience
  • 2) Housing Situation
  • 3) Peer Relationships and Interaction with Faculty,
  • 4) Extracurricular Involvement
  • 5) Financial and Employment Status
  • 6) Academic Difficulties (Academic major, English Language Proficiency, and Academic Achievement)
  • 7) Coping Strategies
RESEARCH FINDINGS (1)

The academic difficulties experienced by the Thai graduate students:

• language barriers
  – difficulty in academic writing, and oral communication in giving presentation and expressing ideas in seminars

• unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches
  – In Thailand, students attend class in universities where the lecturer teaches the theory and the students effectively rote learn the material. Whereas in Australia students are expected to form and defend opinions, be pro-active; and classes tend to be more practically based.
RESEARCH FINDINGS (2)

The coping strategies preferences:

- **Acceptance and integration**
  - accommodating what is required for higher degree study in Australia

- **Venting of emotion**
  - keeping in touch with family back home and asking them for guidance and support helped students cope with stress associated with emotional issues—e.g. anxiety, depression, and loneliness

- **Social support**
  - prefer making use of the co-national friends who share the same language and culture background for academic and emotional support
  - making efforts to see faculty members for academic assistance such as proofreading their written assignments
CONCLUSIONS

• All factors of IAA Model related to academic adaptation of Thai graduate students.

• Academic difficulties encountered by the Thai graduate students could mainly be attributed to the students’ language abilities and their previous educational experiences.
RECOMMENDATIONS

• Recommendations for Australian universities:
  - providing sufficient comprehensive language assistance & learning guidance
  - providing counseling sessions about overcoming or managing stress
  - adding advice & experiences given by the senior Thai students to the orientation program

• Recommendations for prospective students:
  - seeking a proactive way to study & approach supervisors/academic staff for assistance
  - having financial support for study
THANK YOU FOR YOUR LISTENING

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