Effects of Cultural Backgrounds on Interpersonal Interactions Among Students from Different Culture and Nationalities: An Empirical Study on Stamford College Business Students

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Abstract
This study was conducted to investigate the effects of different cultural background on the Interpersonal Communication (IPC) among local and international students in Stamford College, a private college in Selangor, Malaysia. A mixed method was used to conduct this study. The main method was quantitative then a simple interview was conducted to enrich the data and to provide more detail. The study was participated by 250 business students from three different levels of study. The quantitative study had 140 local and 110 international students of business programme, and only 14 of the students were interviewed for the qualitative study. These 14 students were chosen based on random sampling of their nationality. The result of the study shown a positive result, the huge majority of participants reported that their different cultural backgrounds had a positive impacts on their interactions among different background and nationalities students. The results are supportive of the positive effects of cultural and student daily interactions. Findings of this study may encourage both local and international students from different cultural to experience new multicultural environment and improve their interpersonal interaction with people from different backgrounds.
Keywords: interpersonal,interaction,cultural,country

1. Introduction
 Izumi (2010) explains in his study that understanding of the sense of other people's life is one of the main aims to go and to study at a different background of country. There are few researchers in the field of academic have found that the interactions among students from different cultures at a new college environment have a lots of effects towards their academic performance and also the experience they gain. Qahar, Haryati and Ashkin (2014) have proved that students whom were able to survive and performed well in their academic in a multicultural environment significantly performed much well compared to those who performed under their own ethnicity and culture. The ability to interact with people from different cultural background is an important skill of students life (Gao,2011). Aidoo (2012) mentioned to increase the fruitful relations with people from different backgrounds may need student to understand and learn some basic skills like tolerance and communication.

Most of the researchers focused and conducted studies on the related issues but their findings were more relevant for the countries which have fundamental differences from Malaysia. There is a need and necessity to research in Malaysia since there is a track record of foreign students travelling to Malaysia to study keeps increasing since 2005 (Najeemah,2008).Since Malaysia itself has been recognised as the multiracial country. Therefore, this study was conducted to evaluate interactions among the international and local student studying in a public college. The findings will help the students to know the main factors that will affect their communication process.

1.1 Aim of the study
The aim of the study is to investigate the effects of different cultural backgrounds in the process of interactions (communication) among the local and international students in Stamford College, Selangor.

1.2 Significant of the study
The findings on the study will help to answer the effects of interactions among the local and international students and the impact towards the cultural on the process. It will be also helpful to the college to organise a training which is similar to the expatriate training process on the culture of the country. This could also support the process of higher education n introducing a subject like Intercultural Management or Cross Culture Management for students to learn the different culture and understand the norms.

2. Literature Review
Globalisation, it has given a lot of room and possibilities to study in different countries with different background of culture and language. Bandura (2005) once mentioned that "we have to see how culture helps to create the meaning in the life of a person or community". Globalisation creates the culture of real virtuality by the integration of various ways of communication on to interactive networking that creates interactive society and makes big influence on social, economic, political and cultural life of society. William (2005), culture points out people's aspiration to understand them and create their communities. This is very applicable by most of the business subjects

have 10% application of "world of work" concept integrated in student assignment to enhance the intercultural competence with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence to be engaged with social and employment – related perspective and gives a person a motivation to learn and the variety of learning opportunities. Deardorff (2006), explain that intercultural competence has three different categories; knowledge, skills and abilities where knowing and understanding cultural dimensions, conditions and circumstances have a crucial impact on the quality of contact and interpersonal communication with foreign people especially business students. Aggarwal (2011) students need to reflect upon intercultural competences and intercultural learning that can be gain through overcoming ethnocentrism and increasing the sophistication in dealing with cultural difference. Students' awareness that there is a close relationship between cultural and the language in which the language formed is the important to emphasis in the communication process. Jamil & Raman (2012) mentioned that one of the most important elements to learn the culture is by learning the language; this can be implemented by foreign students learning Bahasa Melayu and Pengajian Malaysia for foreign students. This gives an opportunity for students to explore and understand the nature of each culture and this open the door for better intercultural competence (Najeemah , 2008). Williams (2005) support that intercultural competency "is person's ability to communicate and interact with the representatives of another culture, group or community, therefore, it cannot be an isolated phenomenon". A teacher could help the students to recognise these segments of intercultural competency by using supervision an approaches of reflectivity and business teacher could develop this elements through group discussion and group interactions that they conduct during their lesson (Ramlee et.al., 2010). Chen & Starosta (2000) mentioned that intercultural competency can be easily develop among business students since they are learning globalisation , managing diversity and managing people as a part of their business subjects, and this also could be encouraged during the interaction in between classroom through a case study discussion or group assignment. Ramlee et.al (2010) agreed with it and says business lectures' should conduct the lesson more effective by learning different techniques in order to integrate this competence and by implementing "world of work" aspects in assignment to enhance their learning.

According to Marr (2009) interpersonal communication kept constant of its usage and practice which it assists the students to expand their skills in communication and community building and its impact is important. Aidoo (2012) mentioned that interpersonal relations or understanding at university may improve the student's life. Interpersonal relations or understanding are required for all educational and business related works; therefore communications and gatherings of student in university may required the skills (Marr,2009).

In a survey of intercultural competence of Chinese students in some higher education institutions of the United States (US), found that the high level of direct interpersonal interactions with the host people had negative effects on the level of face to face interaction with their co- ethic people (Gao,2011). Izumi (2010) stated that it became clear that Japanese students in US instead of coping with different cultures in the multicultural environment of US and increasing of their intercultural communication competence, struggle to keep their own cultural and communicative norms which leads difficulties to work in US environment later. Therefore, based on the literature daily interpersonal interactions among students in college level with different background of culture is among important education related which need to be addressed.

3. Methodology
An embedded design of mix methods was applied, and the main method for this study was quantitative survey and qualitative interviews were done to enrich data. The embedded design was achieved through conducting of the quantitative survey and embedding of qualitative interviews into it, also the quantitative data was collected directly within the time frame of 6 to 7 weeks. The embedded design encompass the findings of survey or interviews to answer a question in the quantitative or qualitative methods in a large scale (Creswell & Plano , 2007).

3.1. Instrument
The quantitative questionnaires, demographic information, and a package of unstructured interview questions were the main instruments for this study. The quantitative questionnaire was designed based on the Likert scale with 4 options per each item, and 12 open - ended questions were prepared to conduct the interviews. Instruments used in this case were solely adopted from (Qahar,Haryati & Ashikin ,2014).

3.2. Data Collection Proceduer
The quantitative data were collected through direct and random distribution of survey questionnaire to participants. The qualitative interviews were done directly and individually. The interview session was recorded. The main location for the data collection is done during class timing of business students. Timetable was collected from the Coordinator and randomly goes in to the classroom especially targeting the final year students of Business School. The research was gained helped from other lecturers whom are teaching the final year in Business School and especially the target class used is Globalisation and Strategic Management. These two subjects are the compulsory subjects that the final student enrolled and it is the most convenient because the researcher plays the role of lecturer

in teaching both subjects.

3.3 Participants
The quantitative survey had 250 participants from both and local. The study was participated by 140 local and 110 international students from 10 different countries. This will enable and help the researcher to choose a particular number of participants which can represent all estimated population and their answers can be generalised to all population.

4.0 Findings
4.1. Quantitative findings
At the end of week 7th ,the analysis was conducted. The reliability test was applied to check the relationship of the used instruments and Cronbach's Alpha rating for the items was .705. Below table exhibit the simple demographic analysis of the respondents. In the table ELP was included. ELP stand for English Language Proficiency which student can rate them based on the IELTS exam and MUET (Malaysian University English Test). This scale is important because English was sued as the medium of connection between students and lecturers.

Table 4.1: Demographic information on participants

Variables	Malaysia Respondents	International Respondent	percentage
Respondent Malaysian International	140	110	56 44
Gender Male Female	60 80	77 33	42.8;70 57.2;30
Age 18 – 22 23- 29 >30	138 2	32 77 1	98.5;29 1.5;70 -; 1
ELP Moderate(4.00or less) Good (4.5 – 5.00) Very good (5.0 – 6.0) Excellent (>6.0)	99 25 13 3	32 33 25 20	

Based on the descriptive test for demographic information, this study had total participants of 250 from both local and international students as 140 local and 110 international students. From 140 participants 60 were male respondents and 80 were female respondents with (57.2%). There are 77 (70%) of male and 33 (30%) of international female students. The test also shows that local student age mostly fall in between the group of 18 to 22 about 138 (98.5%) and only 2 students are in the age group of 23 – 29 (1.5%). However this is different when compared to the international students where most of them fall into the categories age of 23- 29 about 77 students (70%) and one student above 30 and the rest of the students were in the age group of 18 -22. This table also indicates that 99 Malaysian ELP are at the moderate level and only 3 are excellent. This maybe because of the usage of Bahasa Melayu as the main language until O-Level compared to 32 students are moderate and 25 very good and 20 are excellent.

Table 4.2: Breakdown of students based on the nationality and ethnic

Country of respondent	Female	Percentage	Male	Percentage
Malay - Malaysian	21	26.2	28	46.7
Chinese – Malaysian	33	41.3	26	43.3
Indian – Malaysian	24	30	6	10
Others – Malaysian	2	2.5	0	0
Total	**80**	**100**	**60**	**100**
China	21		21	
Indonesia	3		12	
India	1		3	
Nigeria	6		21	
Pakistan	0		2	
Sudan	0		2	
Jamaica	1		12	
Iraq	0		1	
Singapore	1		0	
Sri Lanka	0		3	
Total	**33**		**77**	**100**

Table 4.2 indicates the frequencies based on their countries with the highest international female students are from China and no female student from Pakistan, Sudan, Iraq and Sri Lanka. The highest male students are from China and Nigeria, both have 21 respondents with one participant from Iraq. This table also exhibit that there are 21 Malay Malaysian female and 28 male, 33 Chinese Malaysian female and 28 male, 24 Indian Malaysian female and 6 male. There are only 2 female respondents belonging to the group of other – Malaysian which from the Sarawak with a background of Bidayuh.

From the 14 items of the quantitative section of Interpersonal Communication Competence (IPC) items, only 12 items covered the quantitative results for the purpose of this paper. A descriptive test was used to analyse the 12 items. Based from the analysis 65.2% of participants already experienced some interactions with the people from different culture and nationalities and 87.5% of them agreed that their interactions with students of different nationalities helped them to communicate, 78.3% of them agreed that interactions help them with collaborative learning, 63.4% mentioned that it gives them opportunity to involved in the activity organised by the campus.88% of them were happy when they interact with different people from different culture background and 88% also agreed that they love to interact with people regardless from any different background and culture.83.1% accepted that their daily IPCs were very useful for their private and public lives, 87.3% of them agreed that they learned some essential communication skills from their IPCs with local/international students during their study. 89.2% of participants also accepted that they feel comfortable during their IPCs with people from different culture.89.2% agreed they have improved in their communication skills and 76.5% mentioned that they able to develop a professional relationship. 88.5% agreed that IPC has developed a good networking. To get a better understanding on the analysis, a simple t-test was conducted. It was applied to compare the mean scores of Malaysian to international participants of this study and no significant differences found as t (250) = 1.663, p>.05. The same test was used to compare the mean scores of female and male participants. No significance difference found t (250) = .090,p>.05.

4.2 Qualitative findings

From the qualitative findings 14 students were interviewed; 3 from Malaysia students and 10 from 10 different countries. The students were selected based on random selection. As a result of the qualitative data, the participants will be coded as MSX (X for number of the student) for Malaysian participants and ISX for international students. The coding was adopted from Qahar,Haryati & Ashikin (2014) for convenience purpose. In this study the student been coded as (i) MS1, a Malay-Malaysian student, (ii) a Chinese- Malaysian student,(iii) a Indian – Malaysian student and (iv) a Bidayuh- Malaysian student. International students (i) IS1,a China student, (ii) IS2, a Indonesia student, (iii) IS3 a India student, (iv) IS4 a Nigerian student,(v) IS5 a Pakistan student,(vi) IS6 a Sudan student,(vii) IS7 a Jamaican student, (viii) IS8 a Iraq student, (ix) IS9 a Singapore student and (x) IS10 a Sri Lankan student. Most of Malaysian students MS1, MS2 and MS3 agreed that the relation with the different and same race of Malaysia and other cultures have positive impact and it attracts them to learn different and new culture. This lead them to be more open minded. However MS4 disagreed that it gives them room to grow and help them to participate and engaged in collaborative learning. MS4 feels that they are very much comfortable to interact with Malaysian compared to other culture. IS1 mentioned that the first aim to study abroad was to improve and gain new networking therefore they preferred to interact with different cultures. The student says, "This open communication with international students helps me to learn more things and improve my English". IS3 mentioned "I have Indian friends in Malaysia, where sometimes we speak in our mother tongue but then this helps me to understand the other culture in Malaysia and I am very happy". IS2 says it's positively effects my communication. IS4 says communicating with different culture gives them opportunity to learn new and different perception and opinion. IS5 feel that their culture is the best but then change mind, from ethnocentric to open minded. IS6 and IS7 say "they feel happy and this helps them with collaborative learning and this is very comfortable during IPC and lead to new experience". IS8 agreed that "it is great experience and a new opportunity and feels that they feel that they gain freedom as in home country". IS9 agreed it's a great opportunity even the facilities is not as high tech as in their home country and love the food".IS10 accept and agreed that interact with their classmates help them to improve their learning. In this survey, some Muslim participants had positive effects on their daily interactions and accepted that culture and tradition norms had no negative impact. From the survey it was clearly reflected that different cultures were not a problem to communicate, but they understand the importance to learn the different cultures.

5.0. Discussion

According to the results of this study, different cultural norms have positive effects on the process of IPC among the local and international Business Students in Stamford College. Nearly 90% of participants from the survey reported that they feel comfortable during their interactions without considering their cultural differences. Overall it shows a positive effect of the interactions. These findings were contrast with the findings of Abdullah (2008), where the result of this study confirmed that different culture and religious had a positive effect on the process of

interactions among local and international students. This study also found almost all participants of both quantitative and qualitative sections willing to have good interactions with people of different cultures and countries to gain new cultural information and learn the essential skills in communication as well. The qualitative discussion shows that the continuous communication gives room to exchange ideas and opinion which helps them to improve in their professional relationship. These studies gained in the survey were people from Asian countries which may have the same culture or social background.

6.0. Conclusion and recommendation

There could be further study on the qualitative analysis focusing on universities with more international students from different parts of the world which may bring difference. According to the result, it shows that different cultural background of Business students in Stamford College had positive effects in their interactions in the college. The result also reflected, both local and international students already experience interactions with students from different culture. Findings of this study may be helpful for university students, education policy makers and also researchers. Future study can also focus more on the education policy makers and IPC which can help the university or college to set standard rules or training which may help the integration between the local and international students.

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