THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EGO IDENTITY STATUS AND ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE AMONG LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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Introduction

When entering college all students go through the process of transition, as they have to adapt to new educational and social environments. Adapting to these environments may be even more stressful for international students, who move temporarily out of their homeland to pursue their studies (Clara, 2004; Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003). International students face both the strain of cross-cultural transition and transition to college making them more vulnerable to experience adjustment difficulties than local students. In addition, their adjustment problematic areas may differ from the local students. However, being exposed to diverse alternatives of intercultural experience may result in better identity development which in turn would lessen adjustment problems. The present study attempts to contribute to our understanding of identity development in different socio-cultural context. It specifically looks at the effects of inter-cultural experience on students’ identity development. It also attempts to expose the effect of identity development on students’ adjustment.

Literature Review

Identity

Erikson (1968: 19) defines ego identity as a “subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity.” He proposed eight
psychosocial stages of personality development, each stage having a developmental task or emotional crisis which must be handled successfully for healthy development. In a conceptualization and operationalization of Erikson’s construct of ego identity, James Marcia (1966, 1987) identified four outcomes of the identity crisis period which are diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** A model of Marcia’s stages of identity development (Adapted from Carlson & Busist: 401, 1997, as cited in Blackshire, 2004, p. 17).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Have experiences crisis</th>
<th>Have not experienced crisis</th>
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<td>Committed to</td>
<td>Identity Achieved</td>
<td>Foreclosure</td>
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<td>future path</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not committed to</td>
<td>Moratorium</td>
<td>Identity diffusion</td>
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<td>future path</td>
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The *identity achievement* individual has gone through an exploratory period, has experienced doubt and indecision, and has come out with well-defined commitments. The *foreclosure* individual has undergone no, or very little, exploration. He or she without living through a crisis, remains firmly committed to the childhood based parental wishes and social values without questioning them. The *moratorium* individual is in the period of exploratory and decision-making, though, his or her commitments are only vaguely formed. The *diffusion* individual may have explored alternatives or may not have, but he or she has no commitments to any specific direction in life, and does not seem concerned with his or her lack of commitment (Marcia, 1966, 1987).

**Predictors of Identity Development**

The studies related to identity formation revealed that with growing age identity improves from relatively lower statuses (foreclosure and diffusion) to higher statuses (moratorium and
achievement) (Adams & Fitch, 1982; Adams & Jones, 1983 as cited in Ertuzun, 1999). "The results of numerous studies confirm that, in general, senior men and women have a stronger sense of personal identity than do their freshman counterparts" Waterman (1993: 54). The college experience provides a diversity of experiences and many opportunities that can trigger identity development (Hamrick, Evans and Schuh, 2002; Waterman, 1993).

Several theorists highlighted the influence of cross-cultural transition on one's searching out his/her identity (Adler, 1975; Berry, 1997; Zaharna, 1989). In general, their theoretical works suggested that cross-cultural experience causes individuals to reevaluate his/her definitions of self and others that consequently brings changes on identity. Huh and Kuh (2003) reported that experiences with interactional diversity have positive effects on students self reported learning and personal development with a wide range of desirable college outcomes.

Erikson (1968) emphasized that individual identity is grounded in culture and society. Since each has its own unique social structure that influence identity development of the individuals in that society, while examining the identity issues, cultural influences on the individual must be considered. Investigating the relationship between authoritarianism and different identity statuses in Malay context, Aknouche (2000) found the majority of subjects to be in the foreclosure identity status. Considering the cultural variations between Western and Malay context in identity formation she concluded that Marcia's (1966) ego identity status model become questionable in Malay context.

The literature on identity development and living arrangements suggests that living away from family may have positive influence on the individual to develop more mature identity (Jordyn & Byrd, 2003; Lebovici, 1999). Nevertheless, Schultheiss and Blustein (1994 as cited in Lucas, 1997) found that women who experienced greater psychological separation from parents tended to indicate statuses that showed less commitment.
Reviewing studies on identity conducted from 1966 to 1995, Kroger (1997) reported that the literature indicated few gender differences in identity structure. She suggested that “only the domains of sexuality and family roles may hold greater salience for women than men” (p. 747). Some other studies also reported similar findings (Jackson, 1990; Pastorino, Dunham, Jeannie, Bacho & Lamborn, 1997). Recent studies reported less gender differences on the identity domains, which are generally considered to be linked with the changing roles of women in contemporary societies although it may differ from one culture to another (Anthis, Dunkel & Anderson, 2004).

Adjustment

Adjustment is defined by Halonen and Santrock (1997: 6) refers to “the psychological process of adapting to, coping with, and managing the problems, challenges and demands of everyday life”. In contemporary approach adjustment increasingly involves an understanding of socio-cultural context issues such as culture, ethnicity and gender (Simons, Kalischman & Santrock, 1994).

A variety of measurements have been utilized in order to assess adjustment to college such as depression, self-esteem, emotional well-being, physical well-being, loneliness, interaction with university, and social involvement (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992; Galy, 1999; Gaudet & Clement, 2005; Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Robins, Nofle & Trzesniewski, 2005). According to Baker and Siryk (1989) successful academic adjustment requires a positive attitude toward goal setting, effective completion of academic requirements and a subjective sense of comfort in the academic environment.

Predictors of Adjustment

Students' perception of stress during college transition has been found to be a consistent predictor of academic, social and emotional adjustment (Kerr et. al., 2004; Misra et. al., 2003; Fritchard & Wilson, 2003; Jorgensen & Dusek (1990) suggest
that “in general, psychological adjustment is related to increased use of mature, salutary coping styles and the reduced use of less efficacious and less mature coping actions” (p. 594). In another study, coping resources was also found to be a strong indicator of all areas of adjustment to college (Felix, 1987).

Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta and Ames (1994) reported that international students experienced a more difficult college transition than the local US students, and significant increase in psychological and somatic complaints. Misra et. al. (2003) reported that compared with local students, international students showed greater stress. Two studies in the IIUM context (Lilim, 2001; Soaure, 2001), although their sample size of international students was very low compared to local students, showed some significant differences between international and local students in the stress level and on some dimensions of the stress measurement. These findings indicate the necessity of further studies with a larger sample of international students of the IIUM.

Adam and Chase-Lansdale (2002) found higher number of residential moves and parental separation as significant predictors of adolescent adjustment. In another study the frequency of home visits was also found to be negatively associated with total adjustment to college (Felix, 1987).

Mailloux (2000) studied gender differences in adapting to college, and found no relationship between masculinity, femininity and adaptation to college. Spriggs et. al. (2004) also found no gender difference in first year college students’ adjustment.

The Relationship between Identity Development and Adjustment

An analysis of the vast literature on identity using different indicators of psychological well-being showed that adolescents with the highest identity status – identity achievement – have the highest level of psychological well-being (Meeus, 1995, as cited in Iedema & Meeus, 1998). Iedema & Meeus (1998) found support that higher developed identity results in better well-
being. Sammon, Reznikoff and Geisinger (1985) found highly significant relationship between ego identity and life-change stress. In a study with junior high school students living in urban poverty (De Haan & MacDermid, 1998), identity development was found to serve as a mediator between poverty and psychological adjustment.

Francis (1981) found that achieved subjects reported significantly more desire to continue their studies and higher GPA scores than diffused and fused moratorium subjects. In another study, sense of identity was also found to be positively related to GPA (Lounsbury, Huffstetler, Leong & Gibson, 2005). However, Carlson (1986) found no significant differences between identity status groups on GPA. He also compared different dimensions of adjustment with identity statuses. According to his findings comparison of overall adjustment showed diffusion-status individuals as significantly less well-adjusted while the achievement group was significantly more adjusted.

Recently, Robinson (2003) found that identity mediated the impact of academic integration in the prediction of persistence at the institution. In another study identity status was found to be a significant predictor of college adjustment, and there was a positive relationship between ego identity status and college adjustment (Coburn, 2004). More recently, Luyckx, Goosens, Soenens and Beyers (in press) showed that late adolescents indicate better profile of concurrent adjustment only when they have identified with a certain commitment. In sum, the vast literature indicates that both commitment statuses of achievement and foreclosure are accompanied by the best adjustment, followed by the two low commitment statuses which are moratorium and diffusion.
Theoretical Framework

Figure 2: Model for Identity Development and Adjustment to College

Hypothesis

1. There will be a difference between identity statuses of local and international students. While local students
are expected to be more in foreclosure status, international students are expected to be more in moratorium status.

2. There will be a difference between local and international students on the dimensions of adjustment. Local students are expected to be better adjusted than international students.

3. There will be a relationship between identity statuses and dimensions of adjustment. Specifically, both local and international students who are in committed statuses (Achievement and Foreclosure) will be better adjusted than those in non-committed statuses (Moratorium and Diffusion).

4. The longer students are at university, the better would be their identity development (more likely to be in Moratorium and Achievement compared to Foreclosure and Diffusion) and their adjustment.

5. There will be no gender differences on students' identity statuses and dimensions of adjustment.

Method

Participants

The sample will consist of 100 international and 100 local students of IIUM. The sample will be made up of students from the introduction to psychology classes who voluntarily accept to participate in the study.

Materials

Demographic Questionnaire: The demographic questionnaire will include age, gender, marital status, nationality, country of origin, year of study, and accommodation.

Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOMEIS-2): The EOMEIS-2 is a self-report inventory that requires subjects to rate 64 statements about exploration and commitment on a 6-point Likert-scale. The scale measures
identity in terms of both ideological identity domains (Politics, Religion, Occupation and Philosophical Life-Style issues), and Interpersonal identity domains (Friendship, Family, Sex Roles and Recreational issues).

Adjustment Measurements: In this study two dimensions of adjustment will be taken as outcome variables which are adjustment to college and psychological adjustment. Adjustment to college will be measured by Academic Adjustment and Social Adjustment subscales of Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Students' grade point average (GPA) will also be taken as an objective indicator of adjustment to college. In order to measure psychological adjustment the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene, 1970) and the General Health Questionnaire (Goldber, 1972) will be used.

Data Analysis Plan

After classifying every subject in one of the four identity statuses, to examine the first four hypotheses two-way ANOVA will be used. In addition, to examine gender differences on students' identity development and dimensions of adjustment t-test will be used.

References


