

**CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FOR
POSITIVE WORD OF MOUTH AND THAI EDUCATIONAL IMAGE: MANAGEMENT
FOR EXCELLENCE AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL**

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Abstract

Entering university is a difficult time for most students due to adjustment problems during transition period. These difficulties in academic and sociocultural adjustment are especially obvious for international students. Therefore, this research aims to study factors that would be useful in providing guidance for universities in Thailand to improve whole system to support international students. The objectives were to explore internal and external factor important for international students studying in the international programs in Thailand as well as to examine causal relationship between toward predicting cross-cultural adjustment which impact positive word of mouth and Thai educational image. The results of path analysis, it was found that multicultural personality, cultural intelligence and social support were positively influence the degree of cross-cultural adjustment. Cross-cultural adjustment also related to positive word of mouth about Thai educational system and Thai educational image. Apart from that multicultural personality and cultural intelligence were also directly and indirectly related to positive words of mouth and Thai educational image via the mediator of cross-cultural adjustment. However, social support did not show significant relationship to both positive word of mouth and Thai educational image. Finally, the perceived Thai educational image was related to positive word of mouth behavior of the international students in Thailand. Therefore, Thai universities should manage student learnings to enhance and stimulate their multicultural personality and cultural intelligence and at the same time key stakeholders for international students (i.e. parents, instructors, university management, friends etc.) should strategically provide prompt supports to facilitate international students in Thailand.

Keywords: cross-cultural adjustment, positive word of mouth, Thai educational image, international students, international program

Introduction

As the number of international programs is rising significantly over years for private and public universities in Thailand. Maintain reputations and image of Thai educational system are crucial in attracting International students from worldwide in which they are important to foster sustainability of the international programs. International students are unique and special group of students in every country worldwide (Hendrickson, Rosen & Aune, 2011; Vergara, Smith & Keele, 2010). The number of international students is growing continuously with total amount of 3.3 million around the world in which it is forecasted to rise significantly every year (OECD, 2010). In addition, the enrollment number of international students worldwide is projected by UNESCO to reach 7 million in 2020 (UNESCO, 2009). Thailand has a main strength in being a gateway connects different countries in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). For this advantage of the strategic location of Thailand, it has the total number of 88,680 international students in the academic year of 2013 as reported by the Department of International Trade Promotion, Ministry of Commerce of (DITP, 2014). Thailand has shaped its vision to be the leading center for international education destination in 2015 (DITP, 2014). In achieving this vision, the governing bodies and higher educational institutions would need to have in depth understanding of international student life in a new culture to prepare any supportive platforms.

Entering university is a difficult time for most students due to adjustment problems during transition period. These difficulties in academic and sociocultural adjustment are especially obvious for international students (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Kettle, 2011; Vergara et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Williams & Johnson, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011) even with proper preparations before and after their departure to host countries to pursue their degrees (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames & Ross, 1994). The difficulties may emerge from many different problems of adjustment in a new culture with direct exposure to norms, values, languages, academic standards, and communication styles (Baba & Hosoda, 2014; Lewthwaite, 1997). Therefore, international students will be exposed to new values, norms and behaviors which may be very different to their own culture. The discrepancy of these programs associated with national culture will lead international student to have a stressful life living in a new educational and social settings (Matsumoto et al., 2001; Sumer, Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008). These lead toward objectives of this study as follows;

1. To determine internal factors which are important for international students studying in the international programs in Thailand.
2. To explore external factors which are important for international students studying in international programs in Thailand.
3. To examine causal relationship between the internal and external factors toward predicting degree of cross-cultural adjustment which impact positive word of mouth and Thai educational image

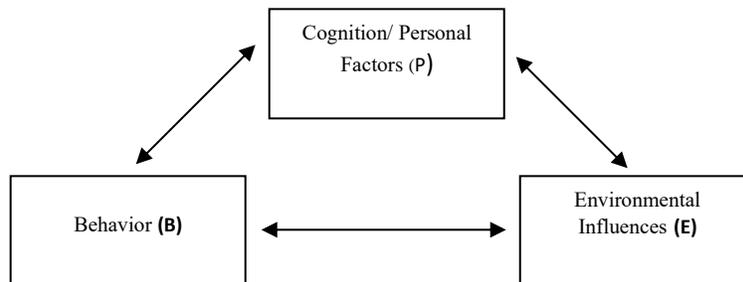
This research project would like address three main areas as the scope of the study which are 1) variable incorporated in this study, 2) target population and 3) research timeframe. Firstly, the main catalyst of this study is cross-cultural academic experience in which the scope of variables use as the determinants of this catalyst are 1) internal factors and 2) external factors of the international students Other variables which are expected to be influenced by cross-cultural adjustment are international students performance, positive word of mouth on Thai educational system and Thai educational image. Secondly, Target respondent is also addressed as the scope of this study. The target population of this study is international students studying international programs in Thailand. Research exclude students who study in the international programs in Thailand less than 3 months because it would not be sufficient for student to exposure themselves in the entire environment of both within and outside the classroom. The last scope of this study is research timeframe. This study is expected to collect data during 2018 and it is a cross-sectional study.

Theoretical and Research Framework

Social Cognitive Theory; Triadic Reciprocal Determination

This study will use social cognitive theory as a theoretical guidance to explain the behavior of international students. Instead of describing the behavior of human in term of one-sided determinism, this study employs a causation framework of the triadic reciprocal determinism as contributed by Bandura (1986 as cited in 1989). This view of social cognitive theory focuses on reciprocal causation framework that all three factors; 1) cognition and personal factors, 2)

environmental factors and 3) behavior. These three factors would influence each other through bidirectional interaction as represented by the double headed arrows (Bandura, 1989)



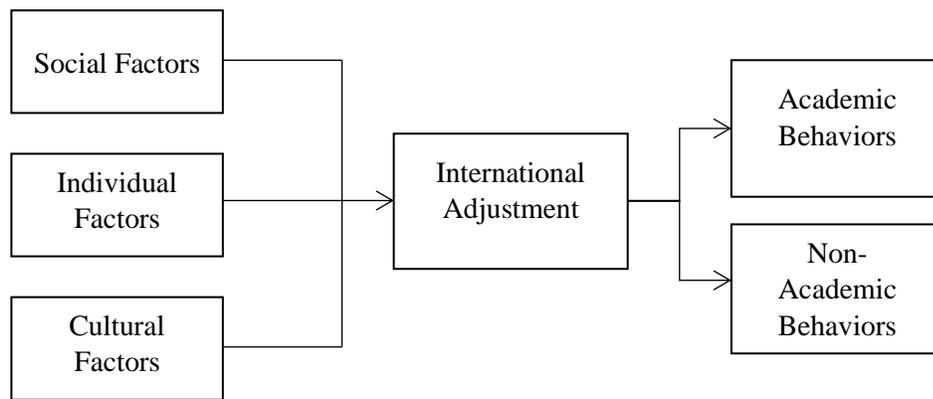
Triadic Reciprocal Determinism (Bandura, 1986 as cited in 1989)

The model illustrated that cognition and personal factors (P) has reciprocal causal relationship with behavior (B) such that expectations, beliefs, culture and perceptions can lead to certain behavior of human. In addition, behaviors and actions experienced can also impact and lead to modification of sensory system and brain structures (Greenough, Black & Wallace 1987 as cited in Bandura 1989). With regard to the relationship between cognition/personal factors (P) to the environmental influences (E), expectations, beliefs, culture and perceptions can be influenced by social/environmental factors via behavior modelling and instruction as well as social persuasion. However, people also lead to activation of social reactions and changes (Bandura, 1989). Lastly, there is also an existence in reciprocal relationship between the environmental influences (E) and human behavior (B). It is by nature that humans need to modify their behavior with regard to the environmental conditions and vice versa environmental conditions are also influenced and impacted by human behavior. As a result, human affect the nature of their experienced environment through selection and creation of situations” (p.4, Bandura, 1989) so they would determine activities and situations based on their preferences and competencies (Bandura, 1989; Emmons & Diener, 1986)

In Reference to the above justification of Social Cognitive Theory, the triadic reciprocal determinism is used as the theoretical is intentionally employed in this study as the theoretical framework for the formation and guidance of the research framework. It can helps the researcher the casual relationships between variables as per set of hypotheses.

In addition, another theoretical framework used to guide this research is modified from Black, Mendenhall and Oddou (1991) to fit with this study especially on determining academic performance of the international students. Figure below illustrates the theoretical framework that conceptualizes the determinant of cross-cultural adjustment and performance of international students studying in the host countries.

Theoretical Framework



Theoretical Framework of International Student Performance

The theoretical framework consists of three main predicting factors for determining performance of international students. The first component is social factors include infrastructure, physical environment, local climate and social supports faced by international students in the host country. The second component is individual factors which include personal skills, knowledge, abilities and personality of the international students. These are internal characteristics embedded in each individual. The last component is cultural factors which reflect degree of discrepancies in cultural related factors between home and host countries of the international students. Culture can be an invisible barrier for international students and expatriates to adjust and fit themselves into a novel environment within the host country. To conceptualize the variable of international student performance, two performance dimensions are incorporated which are 1) academic behaviors and 2) non-academic behaviors. Apart from these theories, value chain for education will also be incorporated to provide guideline for external factors in which they can physically and

psychologically support adjustment of international students in the host countries. The research framework is presented below.

Literature Review

As a part of cultural factor, the discrepancy in national culture between home and host can cause major problems to international students (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Waxin, 2004). Cultural novelty and distance make social integration becomes difficult which also create negative impact on cross-cultural adjustment, psychological and sociocultural adaptation among both international students and expatriates (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Waxin, 2004). The more students face with high level of differences in values and norms from their home countries, the more likely that they will have difficulties adjusting to new sociocultural and academic environment in the host countries. This will have both direct and in direct impact on academic performance and tendency to participate in university activities. Therefore, national culture can be a problematic factor that distorts performance of international students which may lead to the decision to return home before completion of their degrees. This would be a failure for both international students and international educational institutions to retain them.

Cross-cultural adjustment is the important determinant for performance of expatriates and international students. The degree of cross-cultural adjustment of international students can be directly and indirectly influenced by various factors which include knowledge and skill to communicate (Guzman & Burke, 2003) and gain social supports from people or local students in the host country (Black, 1988; Black et al., 1991; Williams & Johnson, 2011). The variable of cross-cultural adjustment in this study is developed from the original adjustment model of expatriates, but one of the dimensions is adjusted to fit well with the context of international students. The framework of expatriate cross cultural adjustment consists of three main dimensions; general adjustment, interaction adjustment and work adjustment (Black, 1988; Black et al., 1991). However, adjustment of international students in this study has three dimensions with general adjustment, interaction adjustment and academic adjustment (Guzman & Burke, 2003)

Based on the adjustment of international students, general adjustment of international students refers to their behaviors related to general living conditions in the host country which include their adjustment to new conditions of transportation system, foods, standard of living and climate (Black 1988; Black et al., 1991; Guzman & Burke, 2003). Interaction adjustment of international students includes all behaviors associated to socialization and interaction with people in the host country. These refer to behaviors of communicating and building strong relationship with people in the host country (Black 1988; Black et al., 1991; Guzman & Burke, 2003). Academic adjustment is the dimension that indicates the academic and non-academic performance of international students as part of their educational requirement. This includes adjustment in programs, courses, class activities and events required by university.

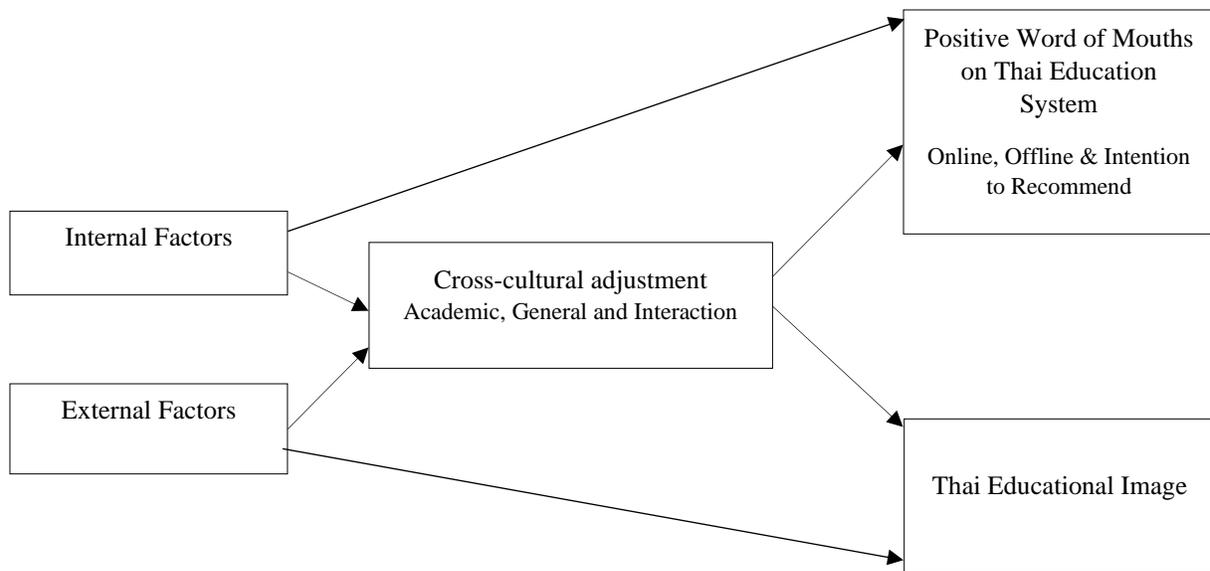
International Student Performance

International student performance can be categorized into two different dimensions of behavioral engagement and academic performance. These two reflect both extra-curricular and curricular activities respectively. This study defines behavioral engagement as effort and participation of international student in extra-curricular activities (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007) they can voluntarily join because they have good relationship with the university community. In addition, student engagement relates to both psychological and behavioral factors of international students (Thien & Razak, 2013). Student engagement is a mixture of psychological and emotional factors that foster sense of attachment and belonging at their university with participative behavior (Finn, 1989; Finn & Rock, 1997; Thien & Razak, 2013). Performance of international student on curricular (teaching and learning) activities are reflected by academic performance. Academic performance is always a pressure and cause of stress to students (REF), especially international students who have to face with new context in their processes of education and cultural environment. Therefore, success of international student in university composed of both academic and social (non-academic) domains in which they are equally important (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Guzman & Burke, 2003).

According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) international students' engagement consists of three dimensions which are categorized as behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Even though engagement is an abstract concept which is also difficult to measure, previous research has found that it is an important and useful

variable (Fredricks et al., 2004; Finn & Rock, 1997; Marks, 2000). Behavioral engagement is a comprehensive variable which covers behaviors of students participating in broad-range of both academic and non-academic activities. The focus of this study is centered on behavioral engagement because it generates directly on students' performance as well as it is more accurate to be measured. Positive behavior engagement indicates the tendency of attending academic and non-academic functions which involve as part of their learning efforts (Fredricks et al., 2004).

It was empirically found that there is a positive relationship between degree of engagement of student in university and academic performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Willms, 2003) especially valid for the influence of behavioral engagement on students' literacy skills and their academic performance (Borman & Overman, 2004; Finn & Rock, 1997; Willms, 2003). In addition, previous research also found that there is a positive relationship between behavioral engagement and student performance on extracurricular activities in university (Jordan, 1999).



Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Internal and external factors have significant influence over degree of cross-cultural adjustment, positive word of mouth and Thai educational image among the international students studying in international programs in Thailand

Hypothesis 2: Cross-cultural adjustment has significant relationship the positive word of mouth on Thai Educational system and Thai educational image among the international students studying in international programs in Thailand

Hypothesis 3: Thai educational image has significant influence over positive word of mouth on Thai educational system among international student studying in the international program in Thailand

Methodology

There are two phases of the research procedure. These phases are designed to be in line with the research objectives. The three phases are; 1 qualitative research which aims to explore internal (Personal) and external (Environmental) factors and 2 quantitative which aimed to examine a causal relationships.

Data Collection and Analysis:

Information, concepts, theories and related studies will be gathered for analysis and developed to be the fundamental background of this research. Next explorative step is to conduct in-depth interview with key informants who are crucial for understanding personal and environmental factors to enhance degree of cross-cultural adjustment. Therefore, the key informants are divided into 2 groups to explore external factors which are important for international students studying in international programs in Thailand. Group 1: 15 International Students Objective: To know crucial characteristics of international programs (Teaching and Learning) in effectively supporting international students Group 2: 5 11 Experts (University Management Position, Dean, Program Directors): Objective: To find out important supports from the school or faculty which are critical for international student to perform. Interview of the key informants will be transcript, analyze, synthesize and integrate data to define and determine the two variables of personal and

environmental factors. Lastly, validation of data from the interview stage of qualitative research. The validation will be done by using Data Triangulation to cross-validate data and capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon. Then, quantitative research were conducted to examine the casual relationship between variables in the research framework. The research used questionnaire survey such that collect data by launching questionnaire to the international students studying in international programs that So, Simple Random Sampling will be used as the sampling technique in which 400 international students will be asked to complete self-administered questionnaire .Path analysis will be conduct using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses as presented through lines in the research framework.

Results

In depth interview was conducted understand personal (internal) and environmental (external) factors which relate to cross-cultural adjustment of the international students. The results were as follow. For personal/internal factor, Multicultural characteristics/ personality was found to be the factor which related to adjustment of the international students. such that it was the characteristics of individuals encompasses skill ability and behavior for multicultural adaptability and intercultural effectiveness.

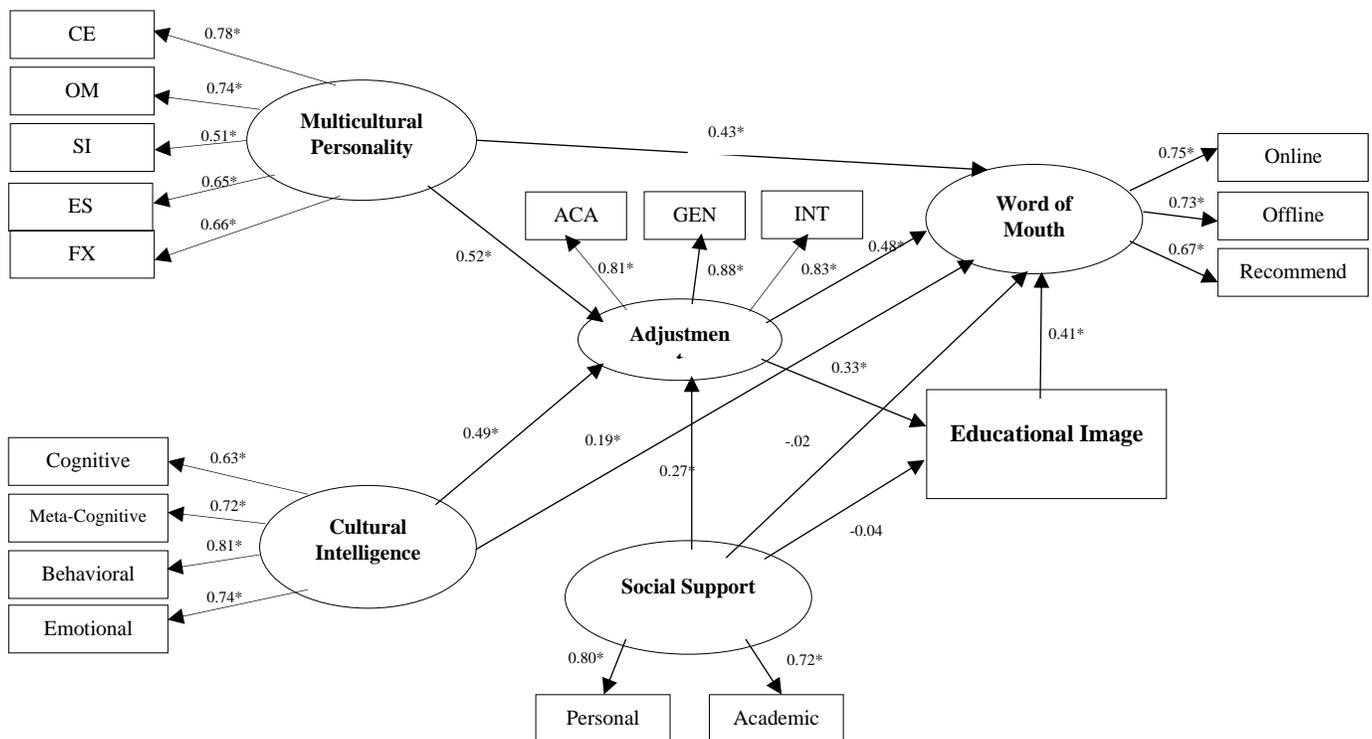
In addition, cultural intelligence such that was the capability of persons to relate to different cultural situations and be able to live, study or work effectively within a novel cultural environment. This also included the ability to understand and associate so the unfamiliar interaction between people of different nationalities and situations.

For the external factor, it was found from the interview that social support was the key in enhancing the degree of adjustment among the international students who study in Thailand. *Social Support*. It extent to which the international students rely on someone in the host country, which may include friends, instructors, family, advisors etc., to turn to in time they need or in crisis situation in order to find directions to improve their quality of life and study. These covered three main aspects which were personal and academic supports.

Therefore, the variables derived from in-depth interview appeared to two for internal factors which were multicultural personality and cultural intelligence. In addition, the external factor

was all closely linked to the definition and components under concept of social support which would enhance degree of cross-cultural adjustment of international students and at the same time stimulate word of mouth behavior as well as lead to the perceived Thai educational image among international students in Thailand. Next, the variables would be put for further path analysis to test for the possible causal relationship among variables.

In test for the causal relationship reliability and validity of the construct and measurement were tested. All of the measurement were tested to be reliable with acceptable range of Cronbach's Alpha. The confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test for construct measures The results showed that the measurement model yield good fit with the fit indices of ($\chi^2 = 297.5$, $df = 76$, $p = 3.91$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $CFI = 0.920$, $TLI = 0.890$ $SRMR = 0.008$). This implied that the variables in the model were internally consistent and it could be used for further analysis to test for their causal relationships



CE= cultural empathy, OM = open mindedness, SI = social initiative, ES = emotional stability FX = flexibility ACA= academic adjustment, GEN = general adjustment, INT = interaction Adjustment

* = $p < 0.05$

Results and Findings

The results from path analysis via structural equation model of the international student study the international program in Thailand appeared to have a well fit between the model and the data set ($\chi^2 = 311.25$, $df=83$, $p\text{-value}=0.03$, $\chi^2 / df=3.75$, $RMSEA=0.05$, $GFI=0.90$, $CFI=0.91$, $NFI=0.95$). It also shown in the results that the predicting variables in the model could explain up to 64 percent of the dependent variable of Positive Word of Mouths on Thai Education System. The key results and findings were analyzed and reported based on the following hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 partially significant such that the multicultural personality ($\beta=0.52$, $p < 0.05$), cultural intelligence ($\beta=0.49$, $p < 0.05$) and social support ($\beta=0.27$, $p < 0.05$) had significant positive relationship with cross-cultural adjustment of the international students studying in the international program in Thailand. In addition, the multicultural personality ($\beta=0.43$, $p < 0.05$) and cultural intelligence ($\beta=0.19$, $p < 0.05$) also appeared to have positive relationship with positive word of mouth. However, social support did not show to have significant relationship with positive word of mouth ($\beta=-0.02$, $p > 0.05$) and Thai educational image ($\beta=-0.04$, $p > 0.05$). For hypothesis 2, the results shown that it was significant such that cross-cultural adjustment had positive relationship with positive word of mouth ($\beta=0.48$, $p < 0.05$) and Thai Educational image ($\beta=0.33$, $*p < 0.05$). Lastly, the perceived Thai educational image has positive relationship with positive word of mouth on Thai educational system ($\beta=0.41$, $p < 0.05$). Overall, from the results of path analysis, it was found that multicultural personality, cultural intelligence and social support were positively influence the degree of cross-cultural adjustment. Cross-cultural adjustment also related to positive word of mouth about Thai educational system and Thai educational image. Apart from that multicultural personality and cultural intelligence were also directly and indirectly related to positive words of mouth and Thai educational image via the mediator of cross-cultural adjustment. However, social support did not show significant relationship to both positive word of mouth and Thai educational image. Finally, the perceived Thai educational image was related to positive word of mouth behavior of the international students in Thailand.

Conclusion and Discussion

The objectives were to explore internal and external factor important for international students studying in the international programs in Thailand as well as to examine causal relationship between toward predicting cross-cultural adjustment which impact positive word of mouth and Thai educational image. The results of path analysis, it was found that multicultural personality, cultural intelligence and social support were positively influence the degree of cross-cultural adjustment. Cross-cultural adjustment also related to positive word of mouth about Thai educational system and Thai educational image. Apart from that multicultural personality and cultural intelligence were also directly and indirectly related to positive words of mouth and Thai educational image via the mediator of cross-cultural adjustment. However, social support did not show significant relationship to both positive word of mouth and Thai educational image. Finally, the perceived Thai educational image was related to positive word of mouth behavior of the international students in Thailand. Therefore, Thai universities should manage student learnings to enhance and stimulate their multicultural personality and cultural intelligence and at the same time key stakeholders for international students (i.e. parents, instructors, university management, friends etc.) should strategically provide prompt supports to facilitate international students in Thailand.

In Thailand, the enrolment rate of both undergraduate and graduate levels has explosively increased over the last 20 years. Due to the declining birth rate in Thailand, the actual number of enrolment will not grow as much in the future (UN, research; 2015). Therefore, universities and government have to seize opportunity for expansion from international students. Success of international students on academic and non-academic experiences in the host country is the most important factor to be in considerations of international universities and governing bodies of the higher educational institution. As cross-cultural adjustment is the key success factor for international student, university should initiate systems and mechanisms to support them. Tool for improvement should be varied to fit with different behavioral and physiological conditions of the international students which are for example international student center, international academic advising center, counseling service, international student clubs and communities. Therefore, international students who face with problems during their study can access to specific assistance that helps them cure their specific problem. This would partially stimulate awareness of

international universities and other governing bodies to put hands together in lifting up degree of academic and non-academic successes among international students in Thailand.

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