

**Cross-cultural Transition in Higher Education:
The Academic, Psychological and Sociocultural
Adjustment and Adaptation of International
Postgraduate Students at a British University**

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis reports on a longitudinal, mixed methods investigation of the academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation of a multinational sample of international postgraduate students undertaking one-year taught MA degrees in the humanities and social sciences at a single British university ($N = 225$). Despite a considerable body of empirical research on student sojourner adjustment, longitudinal mixed methods studies are rare (Zhou and Todman, 2009). Thus, this study combined a quantitative questionnaire-based approach with a qualitative interview-based approach. The quantitative element investigated associations over time between a set of contributory factors (English language ability, prior overseas experience, pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK, autonomy in the decision to study abroad, intercultural competence, social contact, and social support) and a range of adjustment outcomes (academic achievement, psychological wellbeing, satisfaction with life, sociocultural adaptation). The qualitative element aimed to monitor students' academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment processes over time. A further research interest was in whether and, if so, how an academic sojourn abroad affects student sojourners' intercultural competence.

Data-collection took place over a period of 14 months and comprised three stages: in stage one (October) participants completed a self-report survey; in stage two (October to June) a sample of 20 student volunteers participated in three waves of one-to-one interviews; in stage three (June) participants completed a second self-report survey. Additionally, students' academic grades were obtained from the host university (November). The study revealed a number of associations between 'pre-sojourn' factors, social connectedness, and students' level of adaptation. Moreover, three distinct patterns for academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment could be teased apart from the data though students experienced the sojourn in distinct and nuanced ways. Finally, the study provides indications for the malleable and dynamic nature of intercultural competence over time. Informed by the empirical findings and in response to the paucity of theoretical models of the international student sojourn, this study proposes a new conceptual model of student sojourner adjustment and adaptation. The suggested model shows some similarities with other models in the wider acculturation literature, but it also refines and extends these models in scope.

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Last but not least I very gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contributions of my participants. I would like to thank all the international students who participated in my study, most especially my 20 loyal interviewees, for allowing me to be part of their cross-cultural adjustment journey and for sharing their experiences with me.

Dedication

To my late grandfather Josef, 'Trauner Opa', who loved England.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Prologue

This study addresses a growing, global, intercultural¹ and educational phenomenon – student mobility in higher education (HE). An increasing number of students study at HE institutions outside their country of origin, predominantly at English-speaking universities (OECD, 2012a). The global popularity of these academic sojourns² abroad has resulted in a growing scholarly interest in the ‘international student experience’, including how to effectively support student sojourners in their adjustment (e.g. Andrade and Evans, 2009). According to latest OECD statistics, the international student population stood at nearly 4.1 million in 2010 (OECD, 2012a). The increase in the number of international students (ISs) is a phenomenon of growing importance to researchers, educators and policymakers around the globe. Various terms have been used to refer to this student group, including *student sojourners*, *foreign students*, and *overseas students*. All these terms commonly describe individuals who leave their country of origin to undertake tertiary study abroad (Ramsay, Jones and Barker 2007).

Although numbers are increasing across Europe, the United Kingdom (UK) remains the main European destination country and the second most popular globally after the United States (US): in 2011/12, 19 per cent (some 435,230 students) of the UK’s total student body were non-UK students (UKCISA, 2013). This means that almost one in five of the total UK university student population is ‘international’ (Scudamore, 2013). Moreover, almost 70% of all full-time taught postgraduates – the focus group of this study – are non-UK (UKCISA, 2013). Despite recent efforts on the part of the UK government to limit the rise of international student numbers in the future, student sojourners in the UK and elsewhere will nonetheless remain an important part of the HE student body for the foreseeable future (Coppi, 2007), and will continue to contribute to the finances and diversity of their host institutions (Coughlan, 2011). Thus, how to improve their study experience has become a strategic issue for many receiving countries and host universities, in particular given the fierce competition between them (Li, Chen and Duanmu, 2009).

¹ This thesis uses *inter* and *cross* cultural synonymously throughout, although there is some debate about distinctions between the two (e.g. Gudykunst, 2003).

² A *sojourn* is commonly understood as a temporary stay abroad for a specific purpose such as academic study (Ward, Bochner and Furnham, 2001).

The 'international student experience' (Hellstén and Prescott, 2004) can be demanding, arduous and stressful. Challenges can range from the practical to the emotional: upon arrival in the host country, ISs need to organise suitable and affordable accommodation and transportation, they may need to adjust to an unfamiliar climate, learn to communicate in a foreign language and, most importantly, they need to adjust to a new academic system (Pedersen, 1991; Misra, Crist and Burant, 2003). Moreover, ISs may experience homesickness, isolation and difficulties in interaction with host nationals (Mori, 2000; Yeh and Inose, 2003; Olivas and Li, 2006). Although ISs share some adjustment challenges with local peers who enter academia for the first time, such as loneliness and adjustment to the specific demands of academic study for example (Andrade, 2006), research has consistently found that ISs generally face greater challenges than their local counterparts. Challenges particularly salient to ISs include issues related to language proficiency for those who are second language (L2) speakers of the host language, and intercultural adjustment (Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Sercombe, 2011). As Evans (2009) highlights:

For domestic students, the transition to university can be exciting, unfamiliar, and certainly challenging. For international students it is all of that and more [...] much is unfamiliar to a new international student: the culture, the environment, the climate, and usually the language. (p. 103)

As a result of loss of familiar support systems, student sojourners have also been found to experience more stress and anxiety than their domestic peers, both socially (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Rajapaksa and Dundes, 2002; Fritz, Chin, and DeMarinis, 2008) and academically (Ramsay et al., 2007). According to Furnham and Tresize (1983), student sojourners face challenges in three areas: in addition to the challenges common to all sojourners such as living in an unfamiliar cultural environment, student sojourners must simultaneously cope with academic study and the challenges associated with being young adults (Figure 1.1).

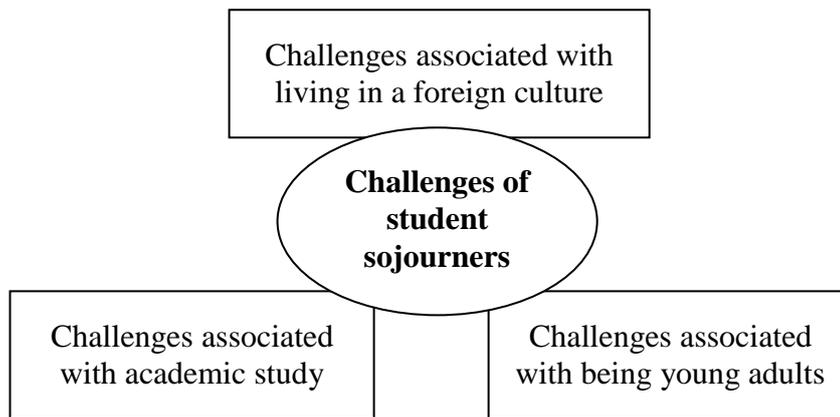


Figure 1.1 The Challenges of Student Sojourners

In light of the rise of international student numbers in the UK and the dominance of this group on taught postgraduate programmes (UKCISA, 2013), this three-stage mixed methods research project sought to capture the cross-cultural transition experiences of international postgraduate students in the UK. Specifically, the study aimed to explore factors associated with the adjustment and adaptation to life and study in the UK of a multinational sample of ISs undertaking one-year taught MA programmes at a single university. International postgraduate students present a particularly interesting case for academic research on sojourner adjustment as these students typically go through a ‘triple transition’ (Jindal-Snape and Ingram, 2013). Firstly, they move to a new country, secondly they move into an unfamiliar educational system, and thirdly they move into a new level of academic study (i.e. the postgraduate level) which generally requires a great deal of independence. Prior research indicates that any of these transitions can lead to adjustment problems such as anxiety, loss of self-esteem and low academic achievement (Jindal-Snape, 2010), but student sojourners undertaking postgraduate degrees are confronted with all three transitional processes simultaneously (Figure 1.2).

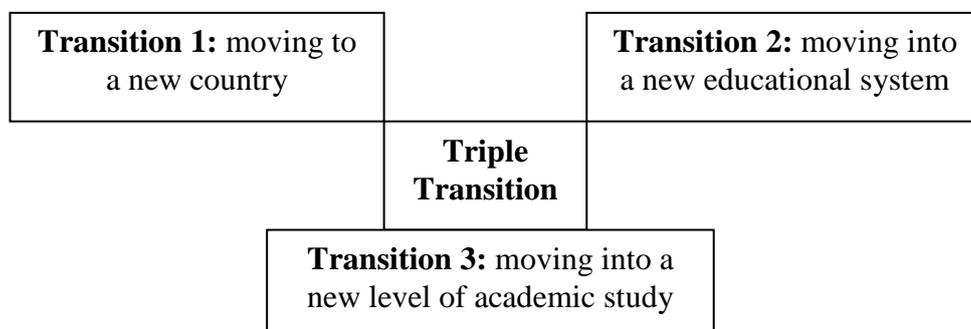


Figure 1.2 The ‘Triple Transition’ of International Postgraduate Students

‘Adjustment’ here refers to the dynamic, interactive processes involved in functioning in the new environment (Anderson, 1994), and ‘adaptation’ refers to the outcomes of these adjustive processes (Pitts, 2005). Further detailed discussion of key terms and conceptual points of reference is provided in the glossary (1.3).

In the following chapters, this doctoral thesis reports on quantitative and qualitative data collected over a period of two years and discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. The specific research interest was in the interrelationships between a broad number of adaptation indices (i.e. adjustment outcomes) and contributory factors across three domains of enquiry: academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment. As Zhou and Todman (2009) point out, studies on student sojourners have tended to pursue these three areas separately, although a recent UK-based study by Young et al. (2013) has integrated both, academic and psycho-social elements of student sojourner adjustment. This study continues this direction of research and thus integrates a broad range of contributory and outcome factors from across these three domains of enquiry (Figure 1.3). The methodological aim was to combine a predictive and a monitoring approach in one study (see 1.2) in order to explore adjustment processes over time (monitoring), and to investigate the effects of a set of contributory factors on adjustment outcomes (predictive). The conceptual aim was to develop and extend in scope Ward et al.’s (2001) acculturation model and to develop a conceptual model specific to the international student sojourn.

The study measured an unusually broad number of adaptation indices – degree of success in assessed academic work, psychological wellbeing, satisfaction with life in the new environment, and sociocultural adaptation – and contributory factors, suggested in the literature, including English language ability, previous overseas experience, knowledge about the host country, motivation for study abroad, intercultural competence and the degree and quality of students’ social contact during their sojourn. The study also explored how students themselves felt they were adjusting over the course of their degree programme, with their views captured in a series of one-to-one interviews.

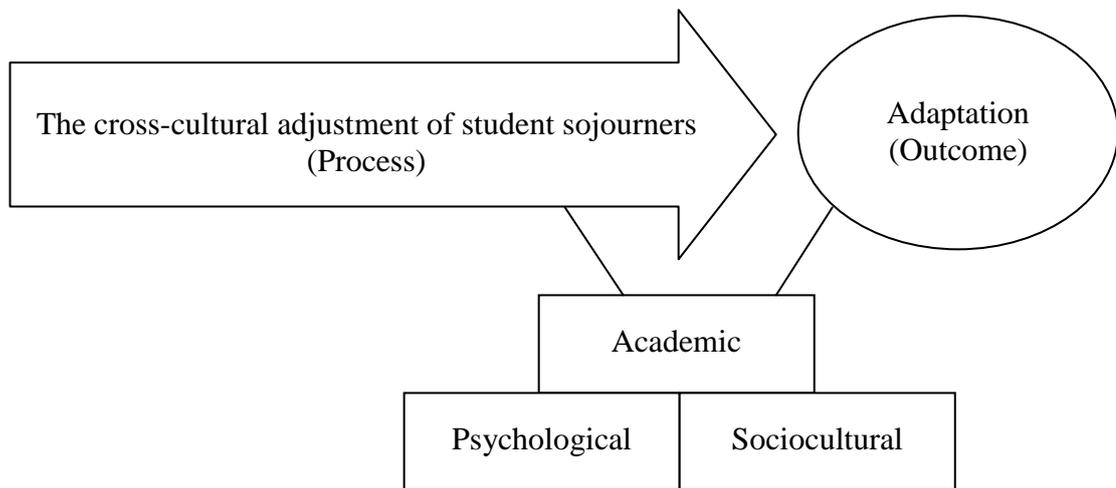


Figure 1.3 The Research Foci of this Study

Participants were 225 non-UK postgraduate students from a wide range of countries undertaking one-year taught MA programmes³ at the same British university. In order to develop an advanced empirical and theoretical understanding of the cross-cultural transition experiences of these students, a mixed methods approach was adopted. Data was collected in three stages:

1. In stage one, a large sample of students ($N = 223$) completed a self-report questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative responses. At this point, participants had been one week into their programme of study.
2. In stage two, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with a smaller sub-sample of student volunteers ($N = 20$) at three points in time: two weeks into the degree programme (T1), five months into the programme (T2), and nine months into the programme (T3).
3. In stage three, a second self-report questionnaire was administered to the same larger sample of student sojourners at the end of their academic sojourn. At this point, students were nine months into the programme.

Two consecutive cohorts of international students undertaking MA degrees in the humanities and social sciences participated in the study. Data-collection commenced in the first week of teaching in early October, and ended with the completion of the degree programme in November of the following year.

³ One-year taught MA programmes in the UK typically include an intensive taught element and a comparatively smaller research element with a student-led research project carried out over the summer months.

Montgomery (2010) points out that despite their status as transient visitors, student sojourners form an integral and permanent part of the academic community in many countries:

Although individually these students remain in universities for a limited period of time, as a group they are always present on campuses and in classrooms and are therefore a significant element of the social and cultural landscape of higher education. (xi)

Thus, cross-cultural transition of ISs in HE provides a fruitful focus of research at the intersection of education, cross-cultural communication, and social psychology. It is envisaged that this thesis will be of interest not only to researchers in the field but also to academic and administrative staff working with ISs on a daily basis.

This thesis proceeds as follows: the remainder of Chapter 1 presents the background and rationales for the study (1.2), including sections on trends in global student mobility (1.2.1) and ISs in the UK (1.2.2). Next, key terms and concepts are ‘unpacked’ in the glossary (1.3). Section 1.4 briefly outlines the main empirical and conceptual contributions of this study. This is followed by a review of guiding literature (Chapter 2), including a discussion of the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter 3 presents the research design and outlines the data-collection procedures. Chapters 4 to 8 report on the empirical findings, starting with the descriptive statistics for the contributory factors and outcome variables (Chapter 4). Chapters 5 to 8 are organised thematically, starting with academic adjustment and adaptation (Chapter 5), followed by psychological adjustment and adaptation (Chapter 6), sociocultural adjustment and adaptation (Chapter 7), and social ties and friendship networks (Chapter 8). Finally, Chapter 9 provides an integrated discussion and attempts a conclusion.

1.2 Background and Rationale for the Study

Educational sojourns abroad are not only increasingly popular; it is also believed that they have many positive outcomes for students. The transformative potential of a study sojourn abroad has been claimed in linguistic and broader intercultural terms (e.g. Brown, 2009). *Graduate Prospects*, a UK government-supported job and postgraduate study online platform, lists “immersion in another culture” and “improving your language skills” as key outcomes of study abroad (Graduate Prospects, 2013). The academic and discursive literature has further highlighted benefits such as increased intercultural awareness and world mindedness, and improved interpersonal skills (Drews, Meyer and Peregrine, 1996; Beall, 2012). It is believed that study abroad helps

ISs to achieve ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (Byram, 1997; Spencer-Oatey, 2010). This is also exemplified in the statement below, displayed on the official website of the European Commission (2013a):

Many studies show that a period spent abroad not only enriches students' lives in the academic and professional fields, but can also improve language learning, intercultural skills, self-reliance and self-awareness. Their experiences give students a better sense of what it means to be a European citizen.

Although many ISs are able to adjust well to the host environment, it is believed that a significant number also experience adjustment difficulties associated with study abroad (Andrade, 2006). Thus, not all student sojourners perform equally well in the new environment and positive outcomes are not always achieved (Sandhu, 1994; Ryan and Twibell, 2000), leaving some students with lowered self-esteem or even unable to complete their sojourn (Pitts, 2005). Although international and ‘home’ students face similar challenges, such as loneliness, social acceptance, and academic pressure, ISs have consistently been found to experience more difficulties than their domestic peers (Andrade, 2006), including language and intercultural issues, and academic and social anxiety (Furnham and Bochner, 1986, Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Johnson and Sandhu, 2007; Ramsay et al., 2007). Mental health issues such as depression, sociocultural problems (e.g. difficulties of negotiating daily activities, friendship formation), and academic problems may therefore be part of an academic sojourn abroad (Sam, 2000).

To avoid or alleviate these problems and experience a successful sojourn, academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment is crucial (Black and Stephens, 1989; Ward et al., 2001). The dynamics of these adjustment processes and their outcomes must therefore be further investigated. Researchers have recently called for a holistic approach to the study of cross-cultural student sojourner adjustment (Zhou and Todman, 2009), thus three adjustment domains (academic, psychological and sociocultural) are investigated in this study. Moreover, in light of the wealth of cross-sectional studies there have also been calls for more longitudinal perspectives exploring the subjective student sojourner experience in more detail (e.g. Pitts, 2005).

To date, two main strands of longitudinal investigations can be distinguished in the literature on student sojourners’ adjustment and adaptation: (1) predictive and (2) monitoring studies. Predictive studies focus on how pre-departure variables affect post-arrival adaptation, and monitoring studies aim to capture the changing patterns of

sojourner adjustment over time (Ward et al., 2001; Zhou and Todman, 2009). A combination of predictive and monitoring approaches seems desirable to capture the full spectrum of ISs' cross-cultural transition experiences. Such knowledge can not only assist prospective student sojourners to prepare for their time abroad, but can further help receiving institutions to facilitate adequate support services. Moreover, a combination of predictive and monitoring approaches is important conceptually – one approach alone will not result in a comprehensive model of student sojourners' adjustment and adaptation.

The international student experience is now a major export industry (Brown, 2008a), with many universities in popular destination countries relying on income generated through international students' tuition fees (Ward et al., 2001). For some UK universities this represents one third of their total fees income (MacLeod, 2006). In light of the economic importance of this group, complex marketing strategies have begun to emerge and there is now fierce competition between universities, both around the world and within individual countries, to attract and retain ISs (Ryan and Carroll, 2005; Montgomery, 2010). In relation to the above, researchers and educators have called for 'responsible recruitment' (Addison and Cownie, 1992) and the provision of appropriate support services to ISs (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). Peterson et al. (1999) warn: "Higher education institutions that take international students for granted, as 'cash cows', do so at their own peril" (p. 69). Appropriate support services are paramount to help ISs in experiencing a successful sojourn and ultimately in retaining student numbers (Carr, McKay and Rugimbana, 1999; Lee and Wesche, 2000). However, responsibility to 'adapt' or 'adjust' to the host culture is often left to the sojourning students (Bevis, 2002). Yet, as Andrade (2006) states, universities cannot expect international students to 'just fit in'. Rather, there is a responsibility, in fact a moral imperative, for receiving institutions to provide tailored services to aid this student group in coping with the challenges inherent to cross-cultural transition (Zhai, 2004). These support services can only be effective when the adjustment processes of this student segment are fully understood.

1.2.1 International student mobility

HE is becoming more and more international in orientation and ‘internationalisation’⁴ is becoming a key factor, shaping and challenging the HE sector in many countries (Knight, 2006). ISs have in recent years come to constitute a large proportion of the student body in universities around the globe. In the past three decades, the number of ISs worldwide has soared from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.1 million in 2010, a fivefold increase (Figure 1.4). Projections estimate that this number could grow to eight million by the year 2020 (Forest and Altbach, 2006). Since the year 2000 alone, the number of students enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship has increased by 99 per cent, with an average annual growth rate of 7.1 per cent (OECD, 2012b). It has been suggested that this development mirrors the progress of globalisation in that period of history (Gürüz, 2008).

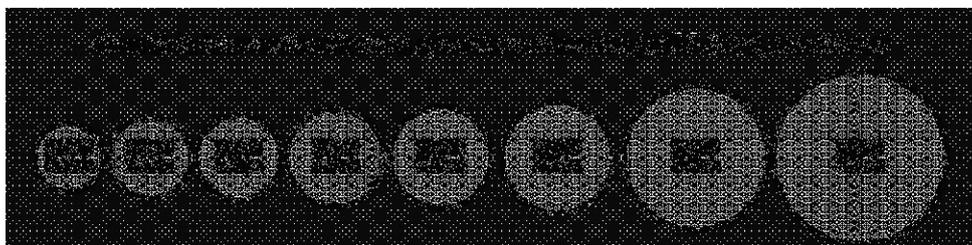


Figure 1.4 Growth in Global International Student Numbers⁵

Reasons for the increase in student mobility include changes in infrastructure and capacity of HE institutions as well as broader macroeconomic factors. For many universities around the world, recruiting ISs is now a central plank of their mission for success as global research and teaching institutions and, perhaps less overtly, a good financial investment for continued viability (Wright and Schartner, 2013). The rapid expansion of the HE sector in many countries and the related intensification of financial pressure on education systems have made tuition fees an essential source of income for many universities (OECD, 2010). ISs represent a particularly lucrative source of revenue as their tuition fees are often higher than those of domestic students. This provides a short-term monetary benefit for HE institutions in the receiving countries, while at the same time offering smaller or less developed HE systems a cost-effective alternative to national provision (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). What is more, students

⁴ One widely used definition views internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2003: 2).

⁵ Source: OECD, 2012b

from countries with rapidly growing economies are now increasingly mobile and therefore able to embark on academic sojourns abroad (Bodycott, 2009). Decreasing transport costs, the spread of new technologies, and the internationalisation of labour markets have further driven the progress of global student mobility (OECD, 2010). Finally, claims that cross-cultural educational exchange promotes peace and aids the bridging of nations have been an impetus for many institutional and governmental study-abroad schemes such as for example the Fulbright Act of 1945 in the United States (Pitts, 2005).

In Europe, building mutual understanding among young Europeans through educational exchange has been actively encouraged since the early years of European integration. One initiative in particular stands out for its role in pan-European academic exchange: the European Union's Erasmus programme. Since its launch in 1987, this education and training scheme has enabled some three million students to study and work abroad (European Commission, 2013a). More than 4,000 HE institutions in 33 European countries⁶ currently participate and more are waiting to join (ibid.). In 2009-10, some 213,266 individuals participated. Spain sent the greatest number of students abroad (31,158) and was also the most popular destination country for Erasmus students (35,389), followed by France (26,141) and the United Kingdom (22,650) (UK Parliament, 2012). Current plans for a new 'Erasmus for All' scheme would extend the scope of the programme even further, enabling five million people to take part in cross-cultural educational exchange across Europe, including HE staff and vocational students (European Commission, 2013b). However, despite the ambition of Europe's education ministers to reach 20 per cent student mobility by 2020, current figures show that in most European countries the number of mobile students is still below 5 per cent. In the UK for example, twice as many Erasmus students study on the island than go from the UK to the continent to study (De Wit, 2012).

At the national level, international student enrolment varies greatly from country to country and ranges from below 1 per cent to more than 20 per cent. Recent OECD statistics show that ISs account for 10 per cent or more of the tertiary student population in Australia, Austria, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Switzerland and the UK (OECD, 2012b). Figure 1.5 below shows the percentage of ISs in HE for the top host countries.

⁶ This includes some non-EU member states such as Croatia, Iceland, Norway, Turkey, and Switzerland.

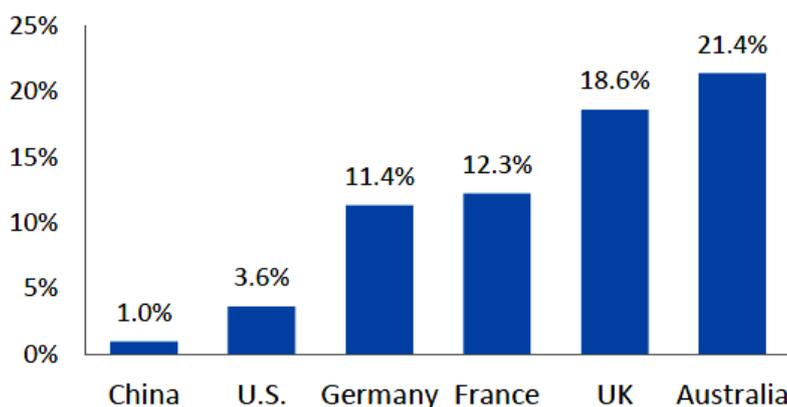


Figure 1.5 International Student Enrolments for Top Host Countries 2010/11⁷

With 41 per cent of the global share, Europe is the most popular destination region in absolute numbers, followed by North America (21%). However, the fastest growing destination regions are Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania, and Asia, reflecting the progressing internationalisation of the global HE market (OECD, 2012b). The two most popular destination countries are the United States (19%) and the UK (12%), followed by China, France and Germany (Figure 1.6). Students' rationale for their destination choice may include the language of instruction, the academic reputation of a particular country or institution, geographical proximity, historical links between countries, differences in entry requirements⁸, migration networks⁹, or future immigration and work opportunities (OECD, 2011).

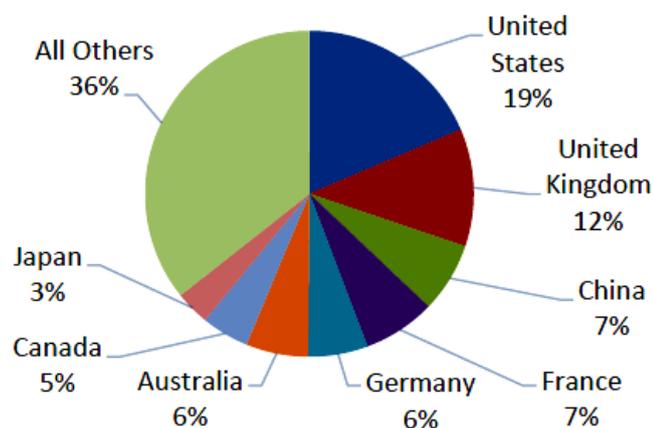


Figure 1.6 Top Host Countries for International Students in 2011¹⁰

⁷ Source: Atlas of Student Mobility (IIE, 2012)

⁸ e.g. geographical proximity and differences in entry requirements are likely to explain the influx of students from Germany to Austria

⁹ e.g. concentration of students from Turkey in Germany, or students from Mexico in the US

¹⁰ Source: Atlas of Student Mobility (IIE, 2012)

From the numbers presented above, the dominance of English-speaking host countries is evident. Gürüz (2008) states that:

[...] this is a clear indication of the nature of the global demand, that is, Anglo-Saxon type of higher education in the English language, in particular American type of higher education. (p. 184)

According to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007), several factors have made the Anglo-Saxon countries key players in the global HE market. First, these countries have consistently sourced students from a variety of countries, whereby they have created a diverse market and ensured stable recruitment numbers. Second, they traditionally recruit large numbers of students from India and China, the world's most prominent source countries with strong growth potential (Yao, 2004; Coughlan, 2011).

Intrinsically linked to this successful establishment of a target market are professional marketing strategies on behalf of the universities (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007).

Finally, these countries have the capacity to provide a good which is in high demand: the opportunity to study in English at internationally renowned facilities. The perceived utility of the English language has been identified as the main driving force behind the popularity of Anglo-Saxon destination countries (Forest and Altbach, 2006).

While English-speaking countries remain popular, new competitors have recently emerged, in particular in Asia and the Middle East (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). As Coughlan (2011) points out, the international HE market is becoming more like international air travel “with the trade routes of this multi-billion business wrapping themselves around the globe in every direction” (Chasing Quality section, para. 6). English-speaking universities can therefore no longer rely on their central position in the global HE market. As a reaction to the dominance of English-speaking countries, some European states have increased their marketing efforts in countries with which they share historical and linguistic relations (e.g. France with francophone Africa). Also, to overcome their linguistic disadvantage, some countries using languages other than English have changed their medium of instruction for certain degree programmes to English (Forest and Altbach, 2006; OECD, 2011). This is especially true for the Scandinavian countries, where the use of English is widespread (Table 1.1).

All or nearly all programmes offered in English	Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, UK, USA
Many programmes offered in English	Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden
Some programmes offered in English	Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey
No or nearly no programmes offered in English	Austria, Brazil, Chile, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Russia, Spain

Table 1.1 Countries Offering Tertiary Programmes in English¹¹

1.2.2 International students in the UK

The expansion in international student numbers in the UK HE sector over the past four decades is noteworthy. In 1973 there were 35,000 ISs sojourning in UK universities. By 1992, this number had increased to 95,000 (McNamara and Harris, 2002). Currently, roughly half a million non-UK students are enrolled at UK HE institutions (Buchanan, 2013), with those coming from outside the EU more than doubling in the last ten years (Baker, 2011). Overall, the increase in students undertaking full-time postgraduate degrees has been much bigger (73.1%) than the rise in full-time undergraduates (28.5%) (ibid.). The reasons why students come to the UK are varied and include the perceived standard and quality of education in the UK, that the English language is spoken, the international reputation of UK education, and the presence of well-known universities (McNamara and Harris, 2002).

Britain presently attracts around one in ten students who study outside their home country, generating about £8 billion a year in tuition fees alone. This number could increase to £17 billion by 2025 (BBC, 2012). ISs contribute an estimated £14 billion a year to the UK economy, helping HE institutions as well as the wider society to thrive (Beall, 2012). However, recent changes in immigration policy to counter abuse of the student visa route, place severe constraints on students from outside the European Economic Area (EEA)¹² and have triggered a public debate about the effects of politics on UK HE. A May 30, 2012 letter to Prime Minister David Cameron signed by 70 university chancellors, governors and presidents reads:

International students [...] play an important role in towns and cities up and down the country, and contribute significantly to local economies. They also

¹¹ Source: OECD, 2011

¹² The EEA includes all EU-member states as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

bring significant cultural richness and long-term political and social benefits to this country, and return many benefits to the countries from which they come [...] in this Olympic year, when our universities will be hosting athletics teams and media from across the globe, we urge you to send a clear message that genuine international students are also welcome in, and valued by, the United Kingdom (UKCGE, 2012).

This letter follows fears that ISs are being unfairly targeted as part of the UK government's pledge to cut the total net migration to the UK to below 100,000. Currently, students from outside the EU are counted towards this figure (Paton, 2012). The letter is also an indication of how much UK universities have come to depend on the income generated from overseas students (Coughlan, 2011).

Of particular concern to students is a series of changes to the student visa system. On 6 April 2012, the Tier 1 post-study work visa (PSW) was closed to all new applicants (UK Border Agency, 2012). Under this visa scheme, graduates from UK universities were previously allowed to remain in the UK for up to two years in order to look for work. Under the new regulation however, students from non-EEA countries cannot remain in the UK after graduation unless they earn at least £20,000 in a skilled job and are sponsored by an employer (Paton, 2012). Nonetheless, non-UK students, in particular those from EEA-member states who are not affected by the recent changes, will remain a major part of the student body in UK HE for the foreseeable future (Young et al., 2013). In fact, after the recent fears of the impact of aggressive immigration policies on student sojourners, a recent government report published in the summer of 2013, sets out plans to attract more ISs to the UK and estimates a growth in numbers of 15 to 20 percent over the next five years (Buchanan, 2013).

The most recent statistics report an increase of 6 per cent in international student numbers between 2009-10 and 2010-11, with full-time undergraduate study up 9 per cent, full-time taught postgraduate degrees up 8 per cent and full-time research postgraduate degrees up 4 per cent (UKCISA, 2013). Currently, non-UK students constitute 19 per cent of the overall student body in the UK, and almost 70 per cent of full-time taught postgraduate degrees (Table 1.2). Although China, India and Nigeria were the top three sending countries of ISs to the UK in 2011-12, ISs as a whole come from a variety of different countries and thus represent a diverse and heterogeneous group.

Of the four UK countries, in 2010-11, England attracted the highest number of non-UK students (351,150), and London was the most popular destination region (102,735). In the same year, the two top non-EU sending countries were China (PRC)

and India, followed by Nigeria and the United States. The top two EU-sending countries were the Republic of Ireland and Germany, followed by France and Greece. However, the number of non-UK students fluctuates across disciplines and HE institutions. In 2010-11, business and administrative studies (125,450), and engineering and technology (53,335) attracted the highest number of non-UK students.

Level of Study	Full-time	Total
First degree	14%	13%
Postgraduate taught	69%	46%
Postgraduate research	48%	41%

Table 1.2 Breakdown of Non-UK Students by Level of Study 2011-12

The internationalisation of HE brings practical implications for universities, with calls for valuing and promoting diversity increasingly issued in learning and teaching missions and quality enhancement groups (Montgomery, 2010). Moreover, the surge of international student numbers has led to a burgeoning literature on their adjustment and adaptation, and the effects that their presence brings to campuses and classrooms around globe, including in the UK (see Andrade, 2006 for a review). An understanding of ISs' experiences and institutional commitment to students' needs is paramount if UK universities are to retain ISs and aid them in their adjustment process.

1.3 Key Concepts and Glossary

Before relevant literature is reviewed in Chapter 2, a number of key concepts and terms are 'unpacked' in the glossary below.

1.3.1 Cross-cultural transition

Before we can arrive at a working definition of cross-cultural transition, we need to first consider the terms 'culture' and 'transition'. Finding a suitable definition for the latter is relatively unproblematic. Meleis (2010) defines a transition as "a passage from one fairly stable state to another fairly stable state" which is "triggered by critical events and changes in individuals or environments" (p. 11). In the context of this thesis, the move to the UK for the purpose of tertiary study can be seen as a critical life event (Ward et al., 2001) that prompts the students' transition. Throughout their sojourn, the students move from one state (i.e. pre-sojourn state) to another state (i.e. post-arrival adaptation state) – this transition requires adjustments to the new environment (Figure 1.7).

Establishing a working definition of 'culture' is a much more challenging task. Culture is a complex and ambiguous concept that has been conceptualised in a variety

of ways in the literature (Minkov, 2013). It has generated so much debate among scholars, that Berry (1997) describes it as “the c-word, mysterious, frightening and to be avoided” (p. 144), while others question the usefulness of the concept all together (e.g. Barber, 2008). Srivastava’s broad conceptualisation of culture as “cultivated behaviour” that is “learned and socially transmitted” (p. 10) seems most useful, although it is important not to equate the ‘cultural’ with the ‘national’ as is promulgated by Hofstede and others (e.g. Hofstede, 2003; Tan, 2006). Rather, it is important to emphasise the complex, multifaceted and dynamic nature of cultures and societies (Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2004), and to acknowledge the existence of smaller sub-cultures within a larger culture (Fong and Chuang, 2004).

Perhaps, the notion of ‘community of practice’ is more useful than the concept of culture for this study. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1998), a community of practice is “an aggregate of people who come together around some common endeavour” (p. 490). In this view, ISs transition into the ‘cultural space’ (St. Clair and Williams, 2008) of a different (academic) community of practice, rather than a different culture in the national sense. Nonetheless, practically, the cross-cultural transition of student sojourners involves, of course, the crossing of national boundaries (i.e. the move to another country).

1.3.2 Adaptation and adjustment

Ambiguity surrounds the concept of cross-cultural transition and a variety of terms have been used to describe the affective, cognitive and behavioural changes experienced by cross-cultural sojourners (Kim, 2001). The determining variable for a successful sojourn abroad is typically conceived in the literature in terms of ‘adjustment’ or ‘adaptation’ to the new environment (Ward et al., 2001). Thus, these two notions are employed as the two main conceptual frames of reference in this study. There is little consistency in the literature in defining and conceptualising adjustment and adaptation and many researchers and theoretical frameworks make no clear distinction between the two – often the terms are used interchangeably (Stanton and Revenson, 2007). However, it is important to make a clear distinction between the two if a sound research framework is to be developed. In this study, ‘adjustment’ refers to the dynamic, interactive processes involved in functioning in the host environment (Anderson, 1994), while ‘adaptation’ refers to the outcomes of these adjustive processes (Pitts, 2005). In this conceptualisation,

adjustment is best approached longitudinally as a process that can be explored over time, while adaptation can be viewed as a measurable outcome of the sojourn in an area of high salience to the student sojourner, including academic, psychological and sociocultural aspects (Figure 1.7).

While much of the literature reported below does not make this distinction, it is crucial for this study as it aims to monitor academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment processes over time, while also measuring and attempting to predict outcomes of these processes (i.e. adaptation). In accordance with Ward et al. (2001), this study distinguishes ‘psychological’ and ‘sociocultural’ domains of adjustment and adaptation. Moreover, as the students in this study sojourn for the purpose of obtaining a degree, ‘academic’ adjustment and adaptation is also included as a conceptual focal point (Figure 1.7). The three adjustment domains are further discussed in Chapter 2.

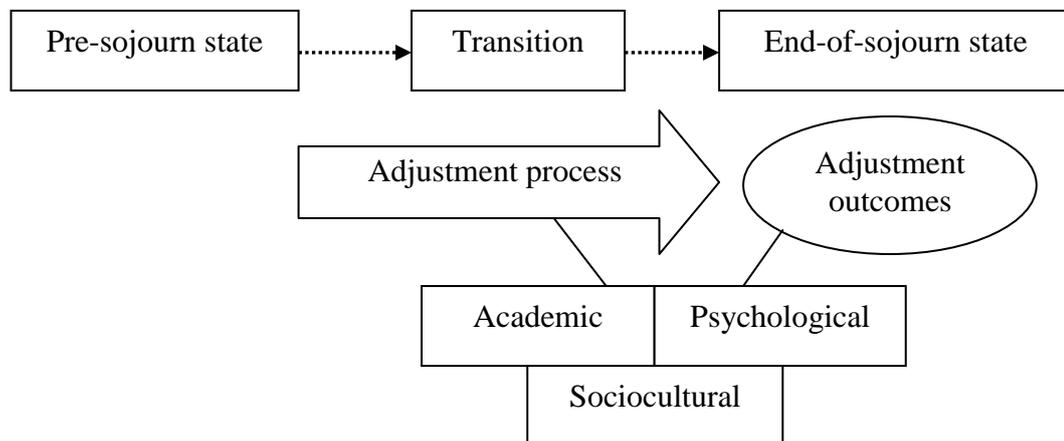


Figure 1.7 Adjustment and Adaptation in Student Sojourners’ Cross-cultural Transition as Conceptualised in this Study

1.3.3 Sojourners

Similar ambiguity surrounds the term ‘sojourner’ which has been used to refer to not only ISs, but also a range of other cross-cultural travellers such as refugees, missionaries, diplomats, military and humanitarian aid personnel, and expatriates on overseas assignments (Ward et al., 2001). For the purpose of this research, two important distinctions must be made. Firstly, we must differentiate between individuals who might live in the new culture more or less permanently (e.g. refugees), and those who undergo cross-cultural transition as more temporary visitors (e.g. international students). While some transition experiences might be shared by all sojourners, regardless of the length of their stay abroad, some might be more specific to either long-term or short-term timeframes. Those who reside

abroad for an indefinite period of time are likely to make a greater commitment to their host country than temporary visitors. Also, members of the host society tend to expect greater cultural conformity from those who stay for longer periods, whereas temporary visitors tend to be forgiven for their ‘cultural blunders’ (Kim, 2001). Secondly, we must distinguish voluntary and involuntary sojourns. Some individuals relocate out of necessity (e.g. refugees), whereas others ‘volunteer’ to relocate for a set amount of time after which they intend to return to their country of origin or relocate to another country yet again (Ady, 1995; Ward et al., 2001; Pitts, 2005). The latter assumption is of course often incorrect. For example, many ISs remain in their country of choice after completion of their studies to look for work (Ward et al., 2001).

For the present study, the term ‘sojourner’ refers to a person who has temporarily relocated to a territory outside of her/his country of origin for an extended period of time and for a specific purpose such as obtaining a university degree (Ward et al., 2001; Pitts, 2005). It is important to note that what distinguishes sojourners from tourists or travellers is that the length and nature of their stay abroad usually demands a certain degree of cultural immersion and adjustment (Martin and Harrell, 1996; Ward et al., 2001). For example, ISs need to adjust to differences in the education system in order to be successful academically (Zhou and Todman, 2009).

1.3.4 Student sojourners

Student sojourners are a rapidly growing sub-segment of cross-cultural sojourners, currently numbering around 4 million people worldwide, and the number is growing (OECD, 2012a). Although it is important to acknowledge that ISs represent a diverse and heterogeneous set of people, they share some common characteristics and circumstances that allow them to be identified as a group (Misra and Castillo, 2004). This includes their status as transient visitors and the need to adjust to various aspects of the host country in order to be successful (Ward et al., 2001). When researching ISs’ adjustment and adaptation, it is crucial to remember what distinguishes student sojourners from other sojourner groups: ISs encounter not only acculturative stress, but also what is referred to as ‘academic stress’ (Misra and Castillo, 2004), making the study of this sojourner group particularly fruitful.

Various terms have been used to refer to this sojourner group, including *international students*, *foreign students*, and *overseas students*. All these terms

commonly describe individuals who leave their countries of origin to undertake tertiary study abroad. However, it is important to distinguish between those students that relocate to attain a degree, and those who travel abroad as exchange students and therefore return to their universities of origin to complete their degrees (Pitts, 2005). The experiences of these two groups might differ quite substantially, in particular in terms of academic demands. In this study, the term ‘international students’ refers to individuals who have left their country of origin for the purpose of study and are now pursuing tertiary education in a different country, i.e. they are enrolled in HE programmes outside of the country where they have received their prior education (OECD, 2012b). The specific research focus is on postgraduate students who are undertaking a full programme of study abroad. It is important to note that ISs have previously been defined as non-citizens of the country in which they study; however this definition is now widely regarded as inappropriate as it includes permanent residents as a result of immigration and can therefore lead to an overestimation of international student numbers (OECD, 2010).

Who is considered an ‘international’ student may vary from country to country for legal or tuition fee purposes (Gürüz, 2008). For example in the UK, students from EU-member states are counted as ‘international’ in the national statistics (cf. UKCISA, 2013), while they are classed as ‘home students’ for tuition fee purposes and therefore pay the same rate as UK-students¹³. In the present study, the terms ‘non-UK students’ and ‘international students’ are used interchangeably throughout to refer to all students who have relocated to the UK to study. Finally, ‘international postgraduate students’ are those that have relocated abroad for one year or more to complete a master’s or doctoral degree.

1.3.5 Home students

A range of terms are commonly used to refer to students who are attending university in the country where they have previously been educated (Carroll and Ryan, 2005). This includes *home students*, *domestic students* and *local students*. In this study, these terms will be used synonymously to refer to students who have spent their formative years in the UK and are now enrolled at a British university. It is important to note that the distinction between ‘international’ and ‘home’ students is in many ways an artificial

¹³ Students from the EEA-member states Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, as well as those from Switzerland pay the high ‘international fees’ but do not need to obtain a visa to live or study in the UK

one, with some home students exhibiting traits which might be considered more characteristic of international students (e.g. using English as a second language) and vice versa (Harrison and Peacock, 2008).

1.4 Empirical, Methodological and Conceptual Contributions

The empirical and methodological contributions of this doctoral thesis include the following. Firstly, a comprehensive review of the empirical and theoretical sojourner adjustment literature to date (Chapter 2). Secondly, an empirical investigation of the applicability of culture-learning and social skills frameworks (e.g. Furnham and Bochner, 1986), and stress and coping frameworks (e.g. Berry, 2006) for the study of student sojourner adjustment. Thirdly, an investigation of a broad range of contributory factors in relation to adjustment outcome variables beyond the purely psycho-social and from across three domains of enquiry (i.e. academic, psychological, sociocultural). Unusually, the study employs a fine-grained measure of academic performance (i.e. taught and research-based academic achievement) as an indicator of the degree of success in academic adaptation (Chapter 3). Fourthly, a combination of a predictive and a monitoring approach to the study of student sojourner adjustment by employing a longitudinal mixed methods design of quantitative questionnaires (predictive) and qualitative interviews (monitoring). Such an approach has been very rarely employed in studies of student sojourner adjustment, despite its advocacy by a number of researchers, (e.g. Zhou and Todman, 2009). Fifthly, this is the first empirical investigation to explore changes in student sojourners' intercultural competence over time, using Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven's (2001) *Multicultural Personality Questionnaire* (MPQ). Sixthly, this study investigates the predictive power of the MPQ scales over time, where most previous studies, as outlined in Chapter 2, employed a concurrent research design.

Conceptual contributions of this study include the following. Firstly, refining and 'unpacking' the concept of cross-cultural transition by providing distinct definitions for *adjustment* and *adaptation* for the first time, where adjustment is conceptualised as a process and adaptation as a measurable outcome (see 1.3). Secondly, updating, refining and extending in scope Ward et al.'s (2001) acculturation model to fit the international student context (Chapter 2). This thesis puts forward a new, integrated conceptual framework for the study of student sojourner adjustment and adaptation (see 9.3). Thirdly, subjecting Bochner, McLeod and Lin's (1977) *Functional Model of Friendship*

Networks to qualitative longitudinal empirical investigation for the first time, and putting forward an updated model of student sojourners' social contact patterns (Chapter 8).

Chapter 2. Guiding Literature

This chapter presents a review of the theoretical and empirical literature of relevance to this study. The literature review proceeds as follows. First, traditional and contemporary theoretical approaches to the study of cross-cultural transition in general are reviewed (2.1). Secondly, areas of salience to student sojourners' cross-cultural transition are discussed, including academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation (2.2). Then, contributory factors to international students' adjustment and adaptation commonly identified in the literature are discussed (2.3). At the end of the chapter, the conceptual framework for this study will be introduced along with the specific research questions. A number of strategies were used to identify relevant literature, including computer searches for relevant journal articles using the database *Web of Knowledge*. Search terms included 'international students', 'adjustment' and 'adaptation'. Moreover, recent reviews of studies on student sojourner adjustment were consulted (e.g. Andrade, 2006; Zhou et al., 2008; Smith and Khawaja, 2011; Zhang and Goodson, 2011).

There is an ongoing need to refine conceptual models from the broader acculturation literature and apply them to the international student context (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Scholars have consistently observed a lack of widely accepted conceptualisations and assessment methods for the study of cross-cultural transition (e.g. Ward et al., 2001; Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver, 2006). This is particularly true for research on student sojourners' adjustment and adaptation as most theoretical models to date are more specific to the experiences of long-term sojourners such as immigrants (see for example the models of Berry, 1997, 2006; Bourhis et al., 1997; Piontkowski, Rohmann and Florack, 2002; Safdar, Lay and Struthers, 2003; Navas et al., 2005). In order to fill this gap, the conceptual aim of this study was to develop a theoretical model tailored specifically to the international student sojourn.

2.1 Theoretical Approaches to Cross-cultural Transition

Cross-cultural transition involves a range of complex psychological and social processes (Ward et al., 2001). Historically, investigations of these phenomena began in the early 20th century in response to the steady influx of immigrants to popular destination countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, and Israel. A variety of theoretical approaches have been proposed to investigate the dynamics

of cross-cultural transition. However, as Kim (2001) points out, the works that emerged from this research are far from cohesive:

The complex nature of the phenomenon manifests itself in the variety of existing conceptions, making it difficult for individual investigators to gain a clear picture of the body of knowledge accumulated over the decades. (p. 11)

Thus, the section below provides an overview of classic and contemporary approaches to the study of cross-cultural sojourner transition.

2.1.1 The U-curve hypothesis

One of the most popular and frequently cited theories of sojourner transition is Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve hypothesis. This recuperation model describes four adjustment stages: An initial 'honeymoon' phase of excitement and euphoria which is followed by a phase of disenchantment or 'culture shock' (see also Oberg, 1960), a stage of recovery and, eventually, full adaptation (Figure 2.1). There is no clear definition of culture shock in the literature (Furnham, 2004), but in 1960 Oberg described it as:

[...] anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life (p. 24).

Box 2.1 lists several aspects of culture shock as promulgated by Oberg (1960).

Box 2.1: Aspects of Culture Shock (adapted from Furnham, 2004)

- Strain due to the effort required to make necessary psychological adjustments
- A sense of loss and feelings of deprivation in regard to friends, status and possessions
- Confusion in role, role expectations, values
- Surprise and anxiety after becoming aware of cultural differences
- Feelings of impotence due to not being able to cope with the new environment

According to Oberg, culture shock can result in symptoms such as longing for home, fear of host contact, feelings of helplessness, anger and hostility, and concerns about daily activities. In addition to the above, academic difficulties might occur for student sojourners (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) have extended the U-curve model to include the re-entry experiences of sojourners when they return home. In their W-curve model they suggest that sojourners undergo a similar

adjustment process, again in the shape of a U, when they return to their countries of origin.

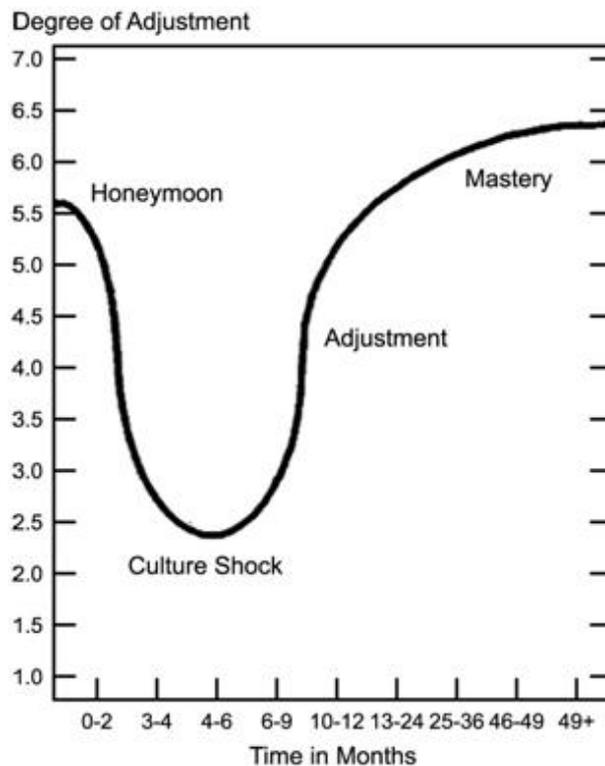


Figure 2.1 The U-Curve Model of Sojourner Transition¹⁴

Despite its popularity in the sojourner adjustment literature and cross-cultural training programmes (Martin and Harrell, 1996), little empirical evidence has been found that supports the U-curve hypothesis (Church, 1982; Furnham and Bochner, 1986). In fact, recent findings do not support the notion of early ‘honeymoon’ euphoria. Rather, they depict the initial sojourn stage as a time of anxiety and nervousness. For example, studies on international students (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1996a, 1996b; Brown, 2008a, 2008b; Brown and Holloway, 2008) have found that the most severe adjustment difficulties tend to occur in the early stage of the sojourn when coping resources are likely to be at the lowest while the number of life changes is high (Ward et al., 2001). In addition, the general trend observed in longitudinal, monitoring studies of student sojourner transition is that psychological adjustment for example remains variable over time (Ward et al., 1998), suggesting that external stressors, perhaps of an academic nature, might ‘upset’ student sojourners’ psychological adjustment from time to time.

¹⁴ Source: Uwaje, 2009

Hence, the sojourner adjustment process might in reality be less predictable than suggested in the U-curve model.

Apart from weak empirical support, two further problems with early models of sojourner adjustment and the idea of ‘culture shock’ remain. Firstly, they were strongly influenced by medicine and psychiatry, viewing culture shock in the same way as a medical problem and focusing on its pathological symptoms (Ward et al., 2001; Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver, 2006). This perspective originated in research on migration and health, when indications that migrants were overrepresented in hospital admissions led to the assumption that migration and mental illnesses were inextricably linked (Ward et al., 2001). Secondly, as several scholars have pointed out (e.g. Bochner, 1986; Pitts, 2005), the U-curve and W-curve models conceptualise sojourner adjustment and culture shock as an inherently negative experience, or as a “crisis to be weathered before successful adaptation can occur” (Pitts, 2010: 193). This problem-based view of cross-cultural transition tends to neglect the positive aspects of intercultural encounters and its growth-facilitating nature (Kim, 2001). Along the same lines, Adler (1987) highlights that culture shock is not “a disease for which adaptation is the cure, but it is at the very heart of the cross-cultural learning experience, self-understanding, and change” (p. 29). For this study, Kim’s (2001) view of cross-cultural adjustment as a ‘double-edged process’, with both problematic and growth-producing elements, seems most useful:

As people experience difficulties in an alien environment, they also acquire new cultural learning and growth. Cross-cultural adaptation is thus a double-edged process, one that is simultaneously troublesome and enriching. (p. 21)

2.1.2 From culture shock to ABC

In the 1980s, the widespread rejection of the traditional view of ‘culture shock’ paved the way for the development of new theoretical frameworks that went beyond mental health concerns (Ward et al., 2001). Rather than counselling and therapy for the ‘culturally shocked’ sojourner; preparation, orientation, and the acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge and social skills began to dominate the discourse on cross-cultural transition (e.g. Bochner, 1982, 1986; Furnham and Bochner, 1982). Sojourner adjustment has since been extensively studied from a social psychological perspective, investigating its affective (A), behavioural (B), and cognitive (C) elements. An illustration of these three approaches can be found in Ward et al.’s (2001) ABC Model of Culture Shock (Figure 2.2).

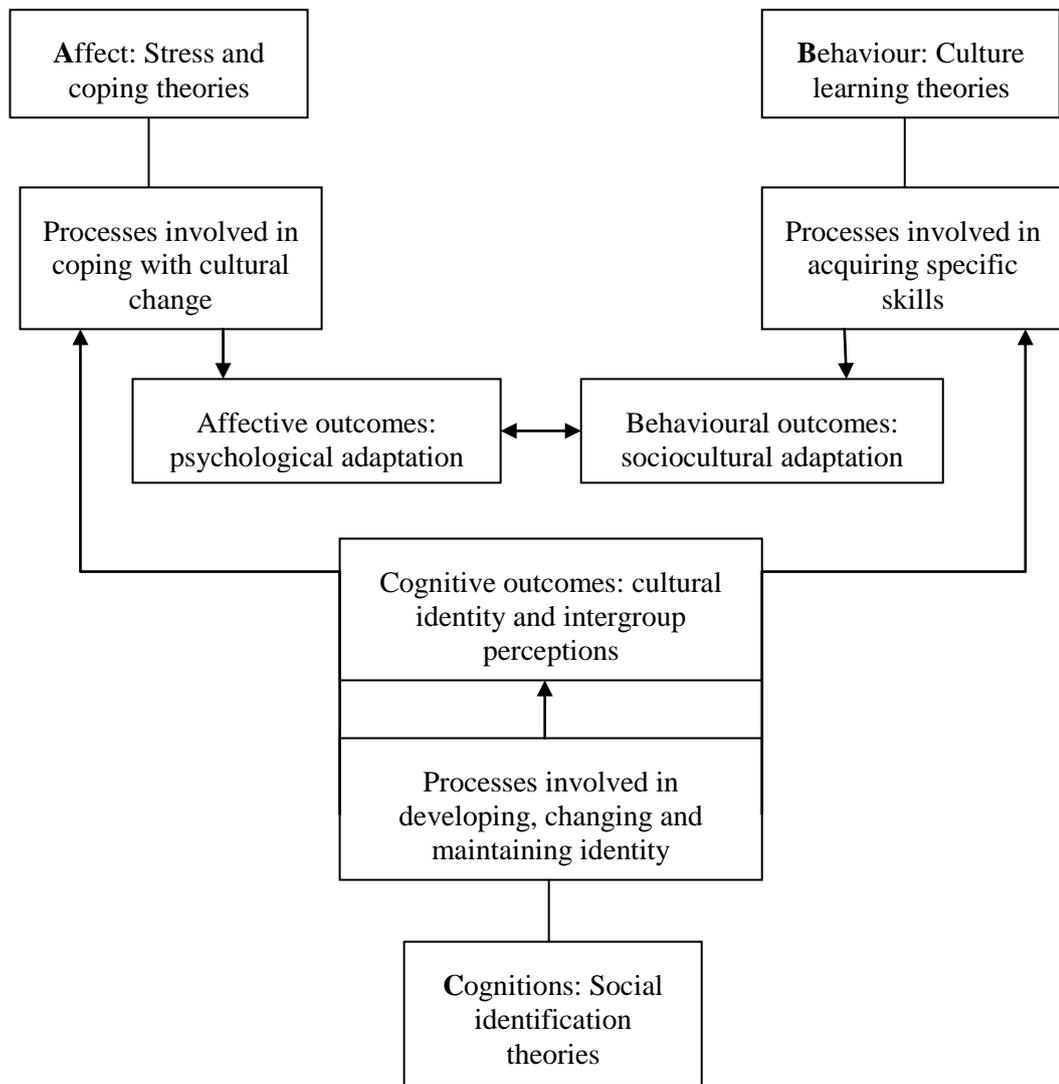


Figure 2.2 The ABC Model of Culture Shock¹⁵

Major influences have been drawn from scholarly work in stress and coping (e.g. Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), social learning theory (e.g. Argyle, 1980), and social cognition and inter-group perceptions (e.g. Kosmitzki, 1996; Kunda, 1999). As a result, three theoretical approaches to the study of cross-cultural transition, which portray sojourners as more actively responding individuals rather than victims of culture shock have become more firmly established in recent years:

1. Stress and coping approaches, representing the affective component of cross-cultural transition
2. Culture-learning and social skills perspectives, reflecting the behavioural element

¹⁵ Reproduced from Ward et al., 2001

3. Social identification theories, reflecting cognitive processes

Stress and coping frameworks (e.g. Berry, 1997) highlight the significance of life changes for the sojourner during cross-cultural transition and subsequent ‘acculturative stress’ (Berry, 1970). It is suggested that cognitive appraisal of the situation and coping strategies are required to deal with this acculturative stress (Ward et al., 2001).

Advocates of stress and coping models hold that if adequate coping strategies are employed on the part of the sojourner, the acculturative stress experienced may be low; whereas if the coping strategies or resources are not sufficient, the acculturative stress experienced may be high and can result, in severe cases, in depression and anxiety (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Both, characteristics of the individual and situational variables, have previously been identified as influential (Ward et al., 2001), including personality (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1992; Ward and Chang, 1997), social support (e.g. Adelman, 1988; Hayes and Lin, 1994), coping styles (e.g. Zheng and Berry, 1991; Ward and Kennedy, 2001), cultural distance (Berry, 1997), and degree and quality of social relationships (Furnham and Alibhai, 1985; Young et al., 2013).

The concept of ‘acculturative stress’ was first proposed by Berry (1970) and is similar to the notion of ‘culture shock’ (Oberg, 1960). However, for this research acculturative stress is preferred to culture shock for two reasons. First, as Berry (2006) points out, the term ‘shock’ is in its essence a negative one and implies that only difficulties will occur as a result of cross-cultural transition. Secondly, the term ‘culture’ may suggest that a single culture is the source of difficulty. By using the term ‘acculturative’ instead, Berry (ibid.) suggests that stressful experiences might occur as a result of interactions between cultures, rather than due to exposure to one particular culture.

In contrast to stress and coping approaches which emphasise the affective components of sojourner adjustment, culture learning and social skills perspectives focus on behavioural elements. Culture learning theory has been heavily influenced by M. Argyle’s (1980) work on social skills and interpersonal behaviours, and implies that upon arrival in the host country sojourners experience difficulties in managing everyday social encounters. Thus, culture-learning perspectives emphasise the importance of learning the salient characteristics of the new environment (Furnham & Bochner, 1982, 1986), and conceptualise cross-cultural transition as a growth-facilitating experience, where initial adjustment difficulties are followed by steady improvement, resembling an ascending learning curve, as the sojourner acquires the ‘culture-specific skills’ required

to function effectively in the new environment (Ward et al., 2001). This includes the acquisition of culturally relevant verbal and non-verbal communication skills (Gardner, 1952; Ruben and Kealey, 1979), as well as the learning of social behaviours (Triandis, 1977; 1980). Variables which have been identified as crucial for sojourner adjustment in this approach include general knowledge about the host culture, length of residence in the host society, language and communication competence, quantity and quality of contact with host nationals and social ties in general, cultural distance, and cross-cultural training (see Ward et al., 2001 for a review). Since the 1970s, Stephen Bochner and Adrian Furnham have been the main advocates of the culture-learning approach (see e.g. Bochner, 1986; Furnham and Bochner, 1982, 1986).

The third major conceptual approach to the study of cross-cultural transition, social identification theories, complements stress and coping, and culture-learning perspectives (Ward et al., 2001). Drawing on works on social cognition (e.g. Kunda, 1999) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), social identification theories are concerned with the way in which people view themselves and how they perceive in-group and out-group members (Ward et al., 2001). This approach therefore investigates the cognitive element of sojourner adjustment such as pre-sojourn expectations (e.g. Pitts, 2009), stereotypes and intergroup attitudes (e.g. Gudykunst, 1983), cultural identity (e.g. Kim, 2001), or value changes as a result of cross-cultural transition (e.g. Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006).

Although Ward and colleagues have previously integrated all three approaches, their acculturation model was not specifically tailored to the academic student sojourn (see Ward et al., 2001). It seems clear that stress and coping, and culture-learning perspectives in particular are highly relevant for the study of student sojourners' academic adjustment and adaptation: in order to function effectively in the new academic environment (i.e. meet the demands of their degree programme), students must employ coping strategies to deal with adjustive stress triggered by the transition from academic home to host 'culture', and must also learn unfamiliar academic conventions and practices specific to the host university settings. In the case of one-year postgraduate programmes like those under study here, this process must happen swiftly and it is important that students adapt to the new 'academic culture' quickly so as to function effectively (Lewthwaite, 1997) as students are expected to manage a 'condensed' workload within a relatively short timeframe (Scudamore, 2013). Table 2.1

below provides an overview of the three contemporary approaches to the study of sojourner transition.

Theory	Theoretical Origin	Conceptual Premise	Factors affecting Adjustment	Possible Intervention
Stress and coping (affect)	Social psychology – stress, appraisal and coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984)	Cross-cultural sojourners need to develop coping strategies to deal with acculturative stress	Personal (e.g. life change, personality) and situational (e.g. social support) factors	Training people to develop stress-management skills
Culture learning (behaviour)	Social and experimental psychology – social skills and interpersonal behaviour (Argyle, 1969)	Cross-cultural sojourners need to learn culturally relevant knowledge and social skills to thrive in their new settings	Culture-specific variables such as knowledge about the host culture, language or communication competence, cultural distance	Preparation, orientation and culture learning
Social identification (cognition)	Ethnic, cross-cultural and social psychology – Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978)	Cross-cultural transition may involve changes in cultural identity and inter-group relations	Cognitive variables such as knowledge of the host culture, mutual attitude between hosts and sojourners, cultural similarity, cultural identity	Enhancing self-esteem, emphasising inter-group similarities

Table 2.1 Contemporary Approaches to the Study of Sojourner Transition¹⁶

¹⁶ Adapted from Zhou et al., 2008

2.2 The Adaptation and Adjustment of Student Sojourners

This section reviews literature regarding student sojourners' adjustment and adaptation, including academic (2.2.1), and psychological and sociocultural (2.2.2) adjustment domains. The degree to which ISs are able to adjust is crucial to their success and adaptation over time (Misra and Castillo, 2004). But what constitutes a 'successful' educational sojourn abroad and what are areas of salience to student sojourners' adjustment and adaptation? Several domains of enquiry have been suggested in the wider sojourner literature, pointing to the multi-faceted nature of sojourner transition (Berry, 2006).

In order to be able to study adjustment and adaptation of ISs it is important to clearly define key criteria for a 'successful' international student sojourn. In previous research on international business sojourners, Kealy and Ruben (1983) discern three domains in which the sojourner should be successful. The first dimension is *professional competence*, defined as skills and knowledge needed to carry out the daily tasks and responsibilities in the work environment. Next, they distinguish *psychological adjustment* which refers to the ability to feel happy and satisfied in the new environment. Finally, they distinguish *intercultural interaction*, defined as being interested in and being able to interact with people of other cultures. In a similar conceptualisation, Black and Stephens (1989), whose studies focus on intercultural adjustment in the management field, discern the following spheres of sojourner adjustment:

1. General adjustment (managing daily life)
2. Work adjustment (accomplishing work-related objectives)
3. Interaction adjustment (interacting effectively with host nationals)

Another frequently cited conceptualisation of sojourner adjustment is Ward et al.'s (2001) distinction between *psychological* and *sociocultural* adjustment. Here, psychological adjustment refers to affective responses to the new environment, including psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life. Sociocultural adjustment, on the other hand, refers to cognitive and behavioural factors associated with effective performance in the host country such as the ability to 'fit in' and interact successfully with others in the new environment.

Ward et al.'s (ibid.) notion of *sociocultural adjustment* corresponds closely to Kealy and Ruben's (1983) notion of *intercultural interaction* and Black and Stephens's

(1989) concept of *interaction adjustment*, although ISs' social contact is not limited to host nationals but involves contact with co-nationals and other non-co-national ISs as well (cf. Bochner et al., 1977). If we replace *professional competence* or *work adjustment* with academic achievement, the criteria above provide a suitable framework for understanding adjustment domains which are central to a successful international student sojourn. Therefore, in the present study the focus is on academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation (Figure 2.3) – these are further discussed below, starting with the academic domain.

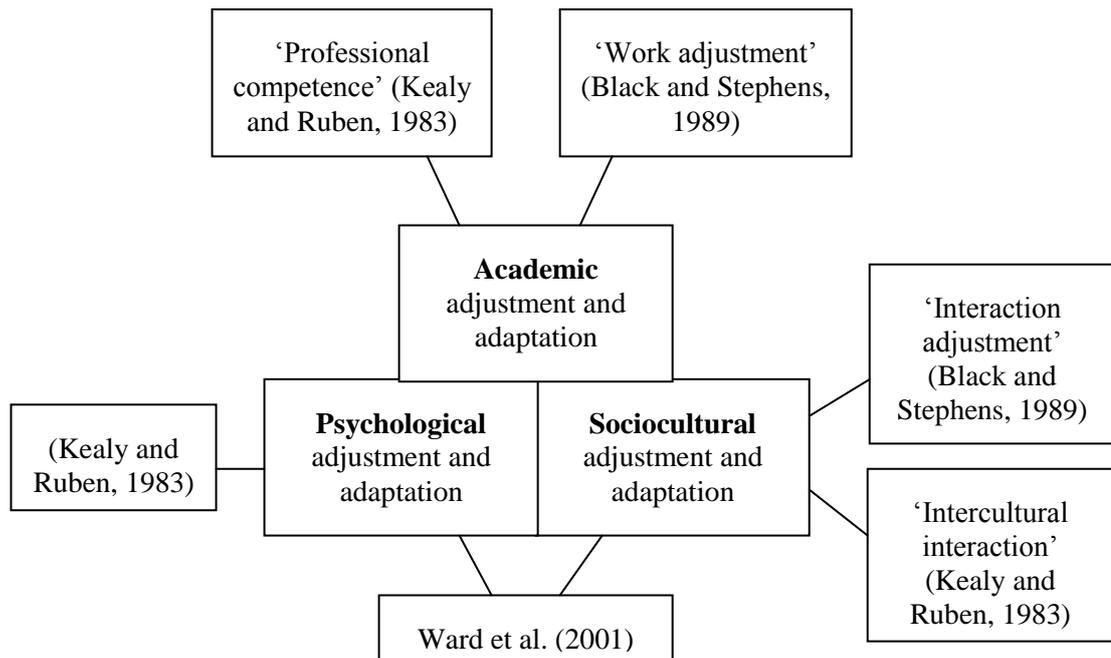


Figure 2.3 An Integrated Framework of Adjustment Domains of Salience to Student Sojourners

2.2.1 Academic adjustment and adaptation

Academic adjustment, defined here as adjustment to the specific demands of academic study including styles of teaching and learning at the host university such as lecture style, relationships between students and staff, and assessment procedures (Ballard, 1987; Ryan, 2005), and adaptation, measured here as academic achievement¹⁷, are at the centre of the international student sojourn. For student sojourners, academic adjustment is clearly one the main adjustment domains as specific and tested performance outcomes, in the form of assessment

¹⁷ According to Andrade (2006), academic achievement refers to evidence of learning, which may be measured by successful completion of course requirements and grade point averages (GPAs)

grades, distinguish them from other sojourner groups (Ward et al., 2001). Additionally, those studying abroad for a degree, such as the MA students in this study, are highly likely to see academic adaptation as an important outcome for themselves – academic achievement will thus be a central objective of their sojourn (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). Nonetheless, academic adjustment and adaptation do not feature prominently in conceptual models of sojourner adjustment as most theoretical models to date are not specific to the international student sojourn (see for example models by Berry, 2006; Ward et al., 2001).

A number of terms have been used in the literature to refer to the process ISs undergo when transitioning into an unfamiliar academic environment. The literature suggests that ISs may experience ‘academic shock’ (Ryan, 2005), ‘learning shock’ (Griffiths, Winstanley and Gabriel, 2004) or ‘education shock’ (Yamazaki, 2005) due to unfamiliar learning and teaching approaches encountered at the host university, including what counts as ‘knowledge’ (Scudamore, 2013). Gilbert (2000) claims that ‘academic culture shock’ is caused by “incongruent schemata about higher education in the students’ home country and in the host country” (p. 14). Learning and teaching approaches can differ between countries, and different nations might have different priorities in terms of their educational policies (Groom and Maunonen-Eskelinen, 2006). What is more, each university has its own practices and conventions. Thus, even ISs with previous academic experience, such as those studying abroad for a postgraduate degree, might be novices in the ‘academic culture’ of their host university due to a lack of familiarity with local learning and teaching practices (Garson, 2005; Luxon and Peelo, 2009).

Overall, research suggests that ISs are generally satisfied with their academic experiences in the host country (Lee and Wesche, 2000; Schutz and Richards, 2003), yet they have also been found to experience some academic anxiety and difficulties in the adjustment process (Lewthwaite, 1997). In fact, academic adjustment has been described in some literature as more difficult than other domains such as for example sociocultural adjustment, and researchers have pointed to the long-lasting nature of ‘academic shock’ (e.g. Ryan, 2005; Gu, Schweisfurth and Day, 2010). Nonetheless, Carroll (2005) claims that the early days of learning in the new academic culture are among the most stressful for student sojourners. Although ISs share some of their academic adjustment challenges with local peers who enter academia for the first time (Andrade, 2006), there are some adjustment matters which are more salient to the

international student group including learning while developing English language ability (Arkoudis, 2006). It is also believed that ISs are often under greater pressure from their families to succeed academically (Robertson et al., 2000). Because of the above factors and the high financial costs associated with failure it is important to explore which factors are associated with a ‘successful’ educational sojourn abroad (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002).

There has been a growing scholarly interest in exploring factors that influence ISs’ academic performance¹⁸ during their sojourn abroad, and a great deal of research has focused on the adjustment and academic behaviour of one particular national or ethnic group in one particular context, mainly Asian ISs in ‘Western’ HE institutions (Li et al., 2009). In their study of Chinese ISs in the UK, Li et al. (ibid.) found that perceived importance of learning success to family, English writing ability and social interaction with co-nationals were all significant predictors of academic achievement. Perhaps not surprisingly, proficiency in the language of instruction has been found to be of particular importance to academic achievement in a number of studies (see Andrade, 2006 for a review). In addition to language, other more culture-specific factors associated with academic achievement have been suggested in the literature. For example, a number of studies have suggested that cultural differences and different educational expectations can affect the academic performance of student sojourners (e.g. Jin and Cortazzi, 1998; Jin and Hill, 2001). In their review of 160 different sources on cultural diversity in HE, Ho et al. (2004) discuss the concepts of collectivist and individualist societies and its influence on students’ learning behaviour. These dimensions were first coined by Geert Hofstede and suggest that nations belong to either one of these two categories and that certain values are inherent to particular cultures. According to this conceptualisation, “individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose” while collectivism “as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups” (Hofstede, 1991: 51). Ho et al. (2004: ix) suggest that individualism and collectivism might influence international students’ learning. They note:

In collectivist cultures, students accept that they must cooperate and support the teacher at all times. They tend to avoid confrontation in class. In

¹⁸ *Academic performance*, *academic success* and *academic achievement* are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

individualist societies where face consciousness is weak, giving correct information is more important than saving one's face.

There are however problems with this conceptualisation as it implies that students from collectivist societies are less likely to challenge the teacher and express their opinion in class, disregarding the influence of other factors such as upbringing, age, gender, previous overseas experience and personality. Montgomery (2010) therefore cautions against using Hofstede's dimensions in research on student sojourners' academic adjustment and adaptation. She notes:

[...] it is likely that students from the same city might respond differently in a classroom as a result of variation in other crucial factors that make up their personal learning 'culture' (p. 30).

In light of this quote, it is important to acknowledge that ISs should not be considered a homogeneous group (Mestenhauser, 2002). Instead, they should be viewed as a diverse group of individuals with a range of personal experiences, backgrounds and motivations. Nonetheless, Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been used extensively in research on academic adjustment and adaptation of ISs. For example, differences in classroom participation have been attributed to cultural differences in power distance (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997) and face work (McLean and Ransom, 2005) as illustrated in the quote below:

The student is concerned about losing face because they have less than perfect knowledge and there is also the implication that the teacher didn't explain properly (and the student may therefore be concerned about the teacher losing face). (ibid, p. 6)

In sum, ISs are often spoken about as an entity with 'group problems' (Koehne, 2005), however research has also found that student sojourners experience varying types and levels of academic difficulties in the host environment, depending on their personal circumstances and their cultural and educational background. Stanton et al. (2007) go as far as saying that adjustment can be described only within the 'life context' of each individual (p. 207). This resonates with Kim's (2001) concept of 'preparedness for change' which refers to dispositional factors that ultimately determine the adaptation potential of the individual sojourner (see section 2.3 below).

Finally, it is important not to investigate academic adjustment and adaptation in a vacuum as psychological and sociocultural adjustment may significantly impact on students' academic achievement. Indeed, Zhou and Todman (2009) have called for studies investigating how psychological wellbeing and sociocultural adaptation might impact on academic achievement, and vice versa:

How the difficulties involved in their intercultural contact, such as difficulty in making host nation friends, lack of effective social communication, or even unhappiness with unfamiliar food, might influence the degree of difficulty experienced in academic adaptation should be further investigated. (p. 470)

Psychological and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation are discussed below.

2.2.2 Psychological vs. sociocultural adjustment and adaptation

In Ward et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation, psychological adaptation refers to affective responses to the new environment, including psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life. Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, refers to cognitive and behavioural factors associated with effective performance in the host country, such as the ability to 'fit in' and interact successfully with others in the new environment. From a theoretical viewpoint it is noteworthy that psychological and sociocultural adaptation were found to be interrelated, but that they are predicted by different variables and show different patterns over time (Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006). It has been found that psychological adaptation is influenced by personality variables, social support, and life change events (Berry, 2005), while sociocultural adaptation has been found to be more strongly affected by cultural knowledge and amount of contact with members of the host society (Ward et al., 1998).

Ward and colleagues argue that psychological adaptation is best understood within a stress and coping framework, with the greatest psychological difficulties expected to be encountered in the initial sojourn stage when the sojourner is faced with the most immediate life changes, and when coping resources and social support in the new environment are limited. Although a drop in psychological adjustment difficulties is generally expected over time, the longitudinal pattern of psychological distress is difficult to predict as it is likely to be influenced by a variety of environmental and transitional factors such as, for international students, changes in academic demands. Thus, hectic assignment and exam periods might impact on international students' wellbeing throughout the sojourn (Ward et al., 2001).

Although a small amount of research has explicitly focused on psychological adaptation, the majority of studies to date have focused on sociocultural adaptation (Coles and Swami, 2012). Within this latter body of work, 'successful' sociocultural adaptation is thought to be determined by a variety of factors, including previous cross-cultural experience, host language proficiency, social ties, and cultural distance (Li and

Gasser, 2005; Swami, 2009; Swami et al., 2010), with research suggesting that a larger perceived distance between the sojourners' 'home culture' and 'host culture' results in greater adjustment difficulties (Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Galchenko and van de Vijver, 2007). Sociocultural adjustment difficulties are expected to be at their peak in the initial sojourn stage when the sojourner has the least familiarity with and knowledge about the host society, and when meaningful relationships in the new environment are still limited (Ward et al., 1998). Situated within a culture-learning and social skills framework, sociocultural adjustment is typically described as a learning curve that increases rapidly during the first few months of the sojourn and subsequently levels off over time as students become increasingly familiar with the host society's norms and rules (Ward et al., 2001).

Studies on international students have previously found supportive evidence for this trajectory. One study conducted on Malaysian and Singaporean students in New Zealand, found that students experienced the greatest amount of sociocultural difficulties in the initial sojourn stage, but showed steady improvement over time (Ward and Kennedy, 1996a). However, more recent research has also shown that patterns for sociocultural adjustment are not uniform and that sociocultural adjustment may not progress at the same rate for all students (Coles and Swami, 2012). Studies have found that, although learning how to make friends and feelings of isolation and loneliness were particularly strong in the initial sojourn stage, awareness among students of the difficulty of making friends outside their co-national circles increased over time (Zhou and Todman, 2009). In a recent study conducted in the UK, Wright and Schartner (2013) found evidence for a more dynamic sociocultural adjustment pattern than is commonly suggested. Their mixed-method study tracked social interaction and sociocultural adjustment among 20 international postgraduates during a one-year master's programme. Findings showed that participants remained conflicted on a threshold of interaction throughout, reporting little engagement, but also reluctance to take up available opportunities for social interaction. The authors challenge linear models of sociocultural adjustment, and suggest that there may be greater individual variation along the sociocultural adjustment path than is commonly recognised.

In light of the empirical and theoretical literature above, the present study conceptualises student sojourners' cross-cultural adjustment as an interactive three-circle model (Figure 2.4). Rather than depicting academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment as three separate processes, and academic, psychological and

sociocultural adaptation as isolated outcomes, it conceptualises the three domains as interconnected facets of ISSs' cross-cultural transition with associations between the spheres. Thus, it is expected that the degree of psychological and sociocultural adjustment will impact on academic adjustment and vice versa.

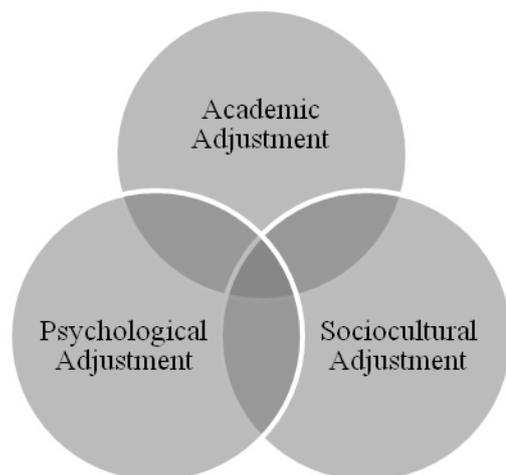


Figure 2.4 Three-Circle Model of Student Sojourners' Adjustment

In addition to the three domains of enquiry depicted in the model above, this study considers whether a sojourn abroad will ultimately lead to 'intercultural transformation' as suggested by Kim (2001), an outcome associated with the cognitive processes involved in cross-cultural transition (Ward et al., 2001). This notion is briefly discussed below.

2.2.3 Intercultural transformation

Intercultural transformation is described as a process of personal growth whereby an individual's identity shifts from one that is essentially bound to a single cultural identity to one that is more intercultural in nature (Pitts, 2009). This process occurs as a result of prolonged intercultural exposure and adjustments over time, a "complex and dynamic process that brings about a qualitative transformation of the individual" (Kim, 2001: 37) Kim (ibid.) coined the notion of 'intercultural personhood' to describe the outcome of this intercultural transformation. Thus, akin to concepts such as 'intercultural speaker' (Byram, 2009), and 'mediating person' (Bochner, 1981), intercultural personhood describes a rich and multifaceted identity that is based on a view of identity as a malleable and fluid concept (see Holliday et al., 2004). Individuals who have arrived at intercultural personhood avoid perceiving someone through a rigid single or national identity label (Byram, Gribkova and Starkey, 2002). Instead they recognise that people may have different facets to their sense of self. As Pitts (2010) states:

An intercultural person is able to step into other worldviews; this ability demonstrates a complex understanding of multiple ways of knowing and being. (p. 398)

In this sense, the notion of intercultural personhood also resonates with the concepts of ‘cosmopolitanism’ (Guilherme, 2007) and ‘intercultural citizenship’ (Byram, 2008). Studies have previously found evidence for the transformative potential of a student sojourn. For example, in an ethnographic investigation of international postgraduate students in the UK, Brown (2009) found that studying abroad gave students the opportunity for self-discovery, free from cultural and familial expectations, while the international study environment helped them improve their cross-cultural communication skills. However, while much of the academic literature highlights the idea that the intercultural experience of ‘living abroad’ has transformative potential (see also Kim, 2001; Cushner and Karim, 2004), very little empirical research to date has actually measured the effect of an academic sojourn abroad on students’ intercultural competence (IC). Thus, this study set out to investigate whether, and if so how, an extended period of study abroad affects student sojourners’ IC (see 2.3.1).

2.3 Contributory Factors to Student Sojourners’ Adjustment and Adaptation

As scholars have investigated sojourner adaptation and have searched for generalisable patterns of adjustment, they have found that there is considerable variation in adjustment patterns and adaptation across individuals (Kim, 2001; Masgoret and Ward, 2006). The next section therefore considers contributory factors, as identified in the literature, affecting student sojourners’ adaptation potential. In accordance with Berry (2006), we can distinguish between contributory factors that exist prior to the sojourn (i.e. dispositional factors) and those that arise during the process of cross-cultural transition (e.g. social ties and social support). Additionally, the acculturation literature generally distinguishes macro-level and micro-level factors (see Ward et al., 2001). Macro-level factors include characteristics of the society of origin, characteristics of the host society, and inter-group relations, while micro-level factors refer to characteristics of the individual sojourner (e.g. age, personality, language ability), and characteristics of the situation (e.g. length of residence in the host country, cultural distance). Understanding these macro-factors is crucial in order to establish the context in which cross-cultural transition takes place (Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006). As Kim (2001) states:

Strangers' communication and adaptation in a new cultural environment cannot be fully understood without taking into account the conditions of the environment [...] different conditions of the environment evoke different responses in strangers by serving as the cultural, social, and political forces in accordance to which they must strive to increase their chances for meeting personal and social goals. (p. 147)

While it is important to acknowledge that adjustment and adaptation are products of interactions between the individual sojourner and the wider conditions in the host society, a systematic investigation of social, political, and economic macro-factors in the UK is challenging and goes beyond the scope of the present study. The focus therefore is on individual-level analysis as is typically the case in socio-psychological studies on sojourner adjustment (Ward et al., 2001). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the importance of macro-level factors in cross-cultural transition - various empirical studies have confirmed the crucial role of macro-level variables in the adjustment process of sojourners, albeit mainly focused on immigrants. For example, in a study among Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands, Ait-Quarasse and Van de Vijver (2004) found that the degree of tolerance towards immigrants in Dutch society exerted an influence on work success, school success, and mental health of immigrants. With regard to international students, researchers have previously investigated the role of perceived discrimination in the adjustment process. Feelings and experiences of discrimination in the host country have been linked to poor psychological wellbeing and depression (Atri, Sharma and Cottrell, 2006; Wei et al., 2007), increased levels of homesickness (Poyrazli and Lopez, 2007), and fewer contacts with members of the host society (Mori, 2000). It is noteworthy that international students from Asia, Africa, India, Latin America, and the Middle East sojourning in the 'West' tend to report perceived discrimination more frequently than their European counterparts (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). This suggests that host society attitudes may vary considerably in relation to the sojourner's place of origin (Ward et al., 2001), and that therefore conditions for student sojourners in the same host country can differ significantly depending on the students' place of origin.

Research has also shown that macro-level factors can affect student sojourners' pre-departure wellbeing. For example, in a recent qualitative study, Brown and Aktas (2011) found indications that fear of Islamophobia was a major concern for Turkish exchange students about to embark on a sojourn in 'Western' countries. Other research has confirmed this fear and detected evidence of faith-based discrimination of Muslim

student sojourners (Appleton, 2005; Brown, 2009). Moreover, statistics have suggested a rise in verbal and physical harassment of Muslims in Britain since the 9/11 attacks (Brown, 2008a). Brown and Aktas (2011) point out that the impact of world politics on student sojourners and the link between the international student experience and the wider societal context remains under-researched and provides a fruitful and important area for future research.

Relative to macro-level variables, the role of micro-level factors in cross-cultural transition has attracted considerable attention from researchers, in particular social psychologists whose primary focus is on the intra- and interpersonal experiences of individual sojourners (Kim, 2001). According to Ward et al.'s (2001) acculturation model, micro-level variables include personal characteristics of the individual sojourner (i.e. dispositions) as well as situational factors (e.g. social support in the host country). The approach to contributory factors of student sojourners adaptation in this study is illustrated below in Figure 2.7. In accordance with Berry (2006), this study distinguishes between pre-sojourn contributory factors and those that arise during the sojourn. The specific research interest was in a set of dispositional factors that form part of Kim's (2001) concept of 'preparedness for change', including host language ability, knowledge about the host country, prior overseas experience, and degree to which the move abroad was voluntary or influenced by external factors. Kim argues that the degree of sojourners' preparedness for change or 'readiness' impacts on their subsequent adaptation:

Strangers' adaptation potential is directly a function of the degree to which they are prepared for change – that is, their readiness for and understanding of the challenges of crossing cultures and of the particular host culture and its communication system. (p. 166)

In addition, the study was interested in intercultural competence as a potential contributory factor to student sojourners' adaptation (see Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002; Young et al., 2013). Finally, two situational variables that develop during the sojourn were investigated: social connectedness and social support. These contributory factors are further discussed below, starting with English language ability.

2.3.1 English language ability

The relationship between one particular pre-arrival variable, proficiency in the host language, and student sojourner adaptation has received considerable research attention

over the years (see Andrade, 2006 for a review). Studies have consistently shown that proficiency in the local language, or in a lingua franca such as English if this is the main language of instruction and assessment, is crucial to academic success (e.g. Robertson et al. 2000; Ramsay et al. 2007; Gu, Schweisfurth, and Day 2010). For example, studies by Stoynoff (1997) and Messner and Liu (1995) both found a relationship between ISs' pre-programme TOEFL¹⁹ scores and their subsequent academic achievement. Young et al. (2013) have recently reported a positive relationship between self-perceived English language ability of student sojourners in the UK and their subsequent academic achievement. Researchers have also repeatedly pointed out that language barriers can negatively impact upon a variety of academic aspects such as essay writing, understanding lectures, oral and written examinations, and the ability to contribute to classroom discussions (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

There are also some indications in the literature that language ability can influence student sojourners' adaptation beyond the purely academic. For example, Poyrazli and colleagues have found that lower levels of language proficiency may contribute to acculturative stress or even depression (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Duru and Poyrazli, 2007; Sumer, Poyrazli and Grahame, 2008). Research also suggests that poor language skills may impede ISs' sociocultural adjustment (e.g. Schutz and Richards, 2003; Yang et al., 2006), in particular their interactions with members of the local community (e.g. Poyrazli et al., 2002).

2.3.2 Knowledge about the host country

Relative to language ability, the role of pre-departure knowledge about the host environment remain under-explored in the international student context, although the importance of pre-departure preparation, including the acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge, for sojourner adjustment has been noted by various authors (e.g. Kim, 2001; Ward et al., 2001). Nonetheless, most studies on the effects of pre-departure preparation remain limited to international business settings (Littrell et al., 2006). There are, however, indications in the literature that student sojourners tend to prepare for their sojourn in largely superficial, organisational terms (e.g. Pitts, 2005), and that on the whole preparation rarely goes beyond the purely linguistic (Copland and Garton, 2011). The small body of research on the role of pre-departure knowledge points to a positive association between this variable and subsequent adaptation. For example, Chapman,

¹⁹ Test of English as a Foreign Language

Wan and Xu (1988) found that prior knowledge of the programme of study was a significant predictor of the academic achievement of an international postgraduate student sample in the US. In a more recent study, Tsang (2001) found a significant positive relationship between pre-departure knowledge and the general and interaction adjustment of students sojourning in Singapore.

2.3.3 Prior overseas experience

In theory, prior overseas experience should impact positively on student sojourners' cross-cultural adjustment (Furnham, 2004), and empirical evidence from the business sojourner literature has linked prior overseas experience positively with work adjustment (e.g. Black, 1988), general adjustment (e.g. Parker and McEvoy, 1993), and interaction adjustment (e.g. Yavas and Bodur, 1999). A common belief is that if an expatriate is successful in one overseas assignment, she/he is more likely to be successful in another (Takeuchi and Takeuchi, 2009). It is assumed that through prior experience abroad the sojourner will have gained experience in intercultural communication and the practical aspects of cross-cultural transition, thus allowing them to develop accurate expectations about subsequent overseas experience and easing their adjustment to a new location (Shaffer and Harrison, 1999; Selmer, 2002). Comparatively little is known about the impact of prior overseas experience on student sojourners' adjustment and adaptation.

2.3.4 Autonomy in the decision to study abroad

The reasons why people embark on a cross-cultural sojourn have mostly been studied within the concept of 'push/pull motivations' (Berry, 2006). 'Push' factors refer to conditions in the home country that initiate the decision to embark on a sojourn abroad, including economic, social, and political forces. 'Pull' factors are those that attract the sojourner to another country (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Much of the cross-cultural motivation research to date has focused on long-term immigrants (e.g. Boneva and Frieze, 2001) and the motivation of student sojourners remains an under-studied area (Li and Bray, 2007). Nevertheless, some studies have identified factors which influence the choice to study abroad in general or the selection of a particular destination country in particular, including perceived prestige and quality of education and tuition and living costs (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002), immigration prospects after graduation (e.g. Baas, 2006), degree

programmes not offered in the home country (e.g. Nyaupane, Paris and Teye, 2010), established social ties in the destination country (e.g. Nyaupane, Paris and Teye, 2011), environmental considerations such as climate and lifestyle (Bodycott, 2009), geographical proximity (Kemp, Madden and Simpson, 1998), and the influence of parents, relatives and peers (e.g. Lim, Yap and Lee, 2011; Pimpa, 2003). The latter is particularly interesting as it points to the role of others in the decision-making process, a phenomenon that is under-studied in research on student sojourners. Recent research by Chirkov and colleagues (2007, 2008) is an exception. Both studies identified autonomy in the decision to study abroad as a powerful factor in predicting student sojourners' adaptation. Chirkov et al.'s work is grounded in self-determination theory (SDT, Deci and Ryan, 2012) which assesses an individual's level of self-determined motivation by considering the degree to which her/his behaviour is autonomous or controlled by others. According to this theory, four types of behaviour regulation can be distinguished on a self-determination continuum (see Chirkov et al., 2007):

1. *Intrinsic motivation* occurs when people engage in an activity for its own sake because it meets their genuine interests and needs (e.g. students move abroad because they find this move challenging and exciting).
2. *Identified regulation* occurs when people internalise external outcomes (e.g. students study abroad because the move appears important to their career goals).
3. *Introjected regulation* occurs when people engage in an activity to gain social approval or avoid feeling guilty (e.g. students do not receive direct pressure but they feel they 'ought' to study abroad).
4. *External regulation* occurs when people perform an activity to avoid punishment or to obtain rewards (e.g. parents insist on studying abroad or promise a reward).

On this continuum, intrinsic motivation represents full autonomy in the decision to study abroad, whereas external regulation reflects a complete lack of self-determination. Chirkov et al.'s (2007, 2008) findings suggest that when international students' decision to study abroad is self-determined, the chances of succeeding in the new environment become higher compared to when the decision is influenced or controlled by others. In a sample of Chinese ISs in Belgium and

Canada, high degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad correlated positively with self-determination in academic activities, willingness to learn more about the host culture and overall psychological wellbeing (Chirkov et al., 2007). In a follow-up study of ISs in Canada, Chirkov et al. (2008) found that the degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad was a predictor of several adaptation outcomes, including overall wellbeing and social difficulties during the sojourn.

In the present study, SDT was applied to explore the relationship between autonomy in the decision to study abroad and a range of adaptation indices. Chirkov et al.'s (2008) *Self-regulation Questionnaire for Study Abroad* (see Chapter 3) was used to measure students' degree of self-determination in the decision to study abroad. It was expected that the higher the degree of autonomy, the better students would adapt to life and study in the UK.

2.3.5 Intercultural competence

Literature on international student adjustment and adaptation has long speculated that student sojourners can capitalise on their personal and multicultural strengths as a way of optimising adjustment and alleviating acculturative stress (Yakunina et al., 2013). These multicultural strengths are conceptualised in a variety of ways but according to Kim (2001) refer to “those inner resources of personality that differentiate strangers who succumb to intercultural challenges from those who emerge victorious” (p. 172). In this study, the term *intercultural competence*, henceforth IC, is used to refer to individual abilities and predispositions contributing to student sojourners' cross-cultural adaptation potential. It is important to note that IC represents only one term among many. Other terms generally used across the literature include *intercultural communicative competence*, *cross-cultural awareness*, *intercultural sensitivity*, *multicultural effectiveness* and *global competencies* (see Fantini and Tirmizi, 2006 for a review). Fantini and Tirmizi's (ibid.) definition of IC seemed fitting for the present study. They define IC as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (p. 12). Similarly, the UK's *Higher Education Academy* (HEA) defines intercultural competencies as “those knowledge, skills and attitudes that comprise a person's ability to get along with, work and learn with people from diverse cultures” (HEA, 2013a).

There is empirical evidence in the sojourner adjustment literature that suggests a link between certain personal qualities and cross-cultural adaptation. Researchers who have previously explored the role of personality in cross-cultural transition have frequently used general personality questionnaires such as the *Big Five* (e.g. Ward, Leong and Low, 2004; Huang, Chi and Lawler, 2005). For example, Zhang, Mandl and Wang (2010) have investigated the effect of the Big Five personality dimensions – neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness – on the adaptation of Chinese student sojourners in Germany. They found that neuroticism and openness predicted sociocultural adaptation while conscientiousness was related to academic adaptation, and extraversion and openness were related to psychological adaptation. Swagler and Jome’s (2005) study on North Americans sojourning in Taiwan revealed that greater psychological adaptation was related to less neuroticism, greater agreeableness and greater conscientiousness. In a further study of the cross-cultural transition of American expatriates in 25 different countries, Caligiuri (2000) found that openness had a particularly positive influence on the formation of host national ties.

Although the Big Five has been widely used in sojourner adjustment research, some authors have argued that its personality dimensions may be too broad to precisely predict behaviour in specific situations such as cross-cultural encounters (McAdams, 1992; Ashton, Paunonen and Lee, 2014). In response to the prevalence of general personality scales such as the Big Five, Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) developed the *Multicultural Personality Questionnaire*, henceforth MPQ, an instrument designed to measure personality traits relevant to success in cross-cultural settings. It was felt that the MPQ would be a suitable instrument for this study as it is specifically tailored to intercultural encounters and thus a fitting measure of IC in this cross-cultural study. As Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002) state:

The MPQ questions refer to behaviour in multicultural situations [...] even the MPQ-scales that closely correspond with Big Five-scales are designed to cover more specifically those aspects that are of relevance to multicultural success. (p. 680)

The most recent 91-item English version²⁰ of the MPQ includes five distinct dimensions of IC:

²⁰ Please note that a new 40-item short form of the MPQ has recently been developed (Van der Zee et al., 2013) but was not yet available to the researcher at the time of data-collection.

1. *Cultural empathy* (CE) reflects the ability to “empathise with the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of members from different cultural groups” (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002: 680). This dimension is also often more broadly referred to as ‘sensitivity’ in the literature (e.g. Hawes and Kealy, 1981), and has been identified repeatedly as a dimension of IC by a range of scholars (e.g. Arthur and Bennett, 1995; Deardorff, 2006).
2. *Open mindedness* (OM) refers to an open and unprejudiced attitude towards others, and includes aspects such as ‘interest in the local people’ (Harris, 1973) and ‘freedom from prejudice’ (Ronen, 1989).
3. *Social initiative* (SI) refers to the ability to take initiative and approach social situations actively. With regard to cross-cultural transition, researchers have pointed to the importance of the ability to instigate and maintain contacts and to take initiative (e.g. Hawes and Kealy, 1981; Spreitzer, McCall and Mahoney, 1997).
4. *Emotional stability* (ES) reflects a tendency to remain calm in stressful situations. A sojourn abroad has been characterised as a stressful life event by various scholars (e.g. Berry, 2006), thus the ability to cope with psychological stress has repeatedly been identified as a key factor of IC (Church, 1982).
5. *Flexibility* (FL) refers to the ability to learn from experiences and adjust behaviour accordingly. As sojourners enter the host environment, familiar ways of handling things might no longer work (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002). Thus, flexibility is crucial in order to become effective in the new environment (Arthur and Bennet, 1995; Spreitzer et al., 1997).

The MPQ has been used repeatedly in research on sojourner adjustment and has demonstrated predictive validity for a range of adjustment outcomes in a number of studies on business sojourners (e.g. Van Oudenhoven, Mol and Van der Zee, 2003; Peltokorpi, 2008) and international student samples (e.g. Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002; Leong, 2007; Young et al., 2013). Internal consistencies for the five subscales among diverse international student samples are generally high, with Cronbach’s alpha ranging from 0.74 to 0.87 in Yakunina et al. (2012) and from 0.71 to 0.82 in Young et al. (2013). Table 2.2 below presents an overview of empirical studies of sojourner adjustment that have employed the MPQ. What is striking is that most studies to date have employed a cross-sectional/concurrent research design (i.e. the MPQ dimensions and adjustment outcome variables were measured at the same time).

Only one study to date (Young et al., 2013) has used the MPQ on students sojourning in the UK, and exclusively with postgraduates.

Although some of the sojourner adjustment studies utilising the MPQ have been longitudinal in design (Table 2.2), the question whether exposure to multicultural settings could lead to changes in the MPQ scores is under-explored (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002). There is some research into the effects of study abroad on students' IC using Bennett's (1993) *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (e.g. Engle and Engle, 2004; Jackson, 2010); however, this study is the first to utilise the MPQ to monitor possible changes in IC over time in a sample of students studying abroad for a degree.

	Authors	Sample	Research design	Variables predicted
1	Peltokorpi & Froese (2014)	Expatriates in Brazil and Japan (N = 199)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Job satisfaction (CE, ES)
2	Lee & Ciftci (2013)	International students in the US (N = 330)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Social support; academic self-efficacy; sociocultural adaptation
3	Young et al. (2013)	International students undertaking taught MA programmes in the UK (N = 102)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Academic achievement (CE, OM, SI); psychological wellbeing (ES, OM); satisfaction with life (ES)
4	Yakunina et al. (2012)	International students in the US (N = 341)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Psychological adjustment (ES, SI)
5	Peltokorpi & Froese (2012)	Expatriates in Japan (N = 181)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Interaction adjustment (OM); general adjustment (CE, ES); work adjustment (SI)
6	Peltokorpi (2008)	Expatriates in Japan (N = 110)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Interaction adjustment (CE); general adjustment (CE, ES); job satisfaction (ES)
7	Leong (2007)	Singaporean undergraduate students on a study abroad programme (N = 166)	Longitudinal	Psychological and sociocultural adaptation (SI)
8	Ali, Van der Zee & Sanders (2003)	Expatriate spouses in 29 countries (N = 247)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Satisfaction with life (OM, ES); intercultural interaction (OM); sociocultural adjustment (OM)
9	Van Oudenhoven, Mol & Van der Zee (2003)	Expatriates in Taiwan (N = 102)	Cross-sectional/concurrent	Physical health (ES); psychological wellbeing (ES, SI); life satisfaction (CE, ES), job satisfaction (FL); social support (CE, ES, FL)
10	Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee (2002)	International Business students in the Netherlands (N = 171, 47% 'international')	Longitudinal	Mental health (29% explained variance); subjective wellbeing (19%); social support (30%); academic achievement (7%)
11	Mol, Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee (2001)	International high school students in Taiwan (N = 205)	Longitudinal	Life satisfaction (OM, ES); physical health (ES); psychological wellbeing (ES); social support (OM, SI); participation in extra-curricular activities (OM, ES)

Note: Longitudinal studies on international student sample are highlighted

Table 2.2 Summary of Studies of Sojourner Adjustment utilising the MPQ

2.3.6 Social contact

A glance at the academic and wider educational literature reveals that references are often made to the transformative potential of an academic sojourn abroad, in terms of aiding personal growth and intercultural competence (e.g. Drews et al., 1996; Brown 2009). For example, a guide on studying in Europe published by the *International Scholarships Research Agency*, describes study abroad as an “exciting and life transforming” experience that “enriches your understanding of the world around you” (Kogei, 2008: 4-5). However, despite its often proclaimed benefits for students, a sojourn abroad also entails leaving one's comfort zone at home, and involves the temporary loss of social ties and familiar social support systems (Hayes and Lin, 1994). This may result in a lack of social connectedness for the individual student sojourner (Ward et al., 2001). As Neri and Ville (2008) note “international university students arrive in the host country generally denuded of social capital” (p. 1515). Consequently, the formation of new social ties becomes a paramount objective for the student sojourner (Ong and Ward, 2005). Overall, research has confirmed the importance of social connectedness for international students’ adjustment, suggesting that those with a strong social network report lower levels of stress and more positive effects from study abroad in general (Russell, Rosenthal and Thomson, 2010). In comparison to their domestic peers, international students need to make extra efforts to achieve social integration in the new environment as their familiar social networks are usually not within easy reach (Rienties et al., 2012).

A considerable body of research has highlighted the importance of social connectedness for student sojourners' subjective wellbeing, and their academic and sociocultural adjustment (see Ward et al. 2001 for a review), and studies have recently used degree of social contact as a predictor for academic and psycho-social adaptation (Young et al., 2013). Studies on the patterns and quality of student sojourners’ social contact are burgeoning. However, few systematic attempts have been made to monitor the trajectories of international students’ social ties over time using qualitative methods of inquiry (for an exception see Montgomery and McDowell, 2009). Most studies to date have employed a cross-sectional quantitative design and have typically counted the number of friends students had in the host country (e.g. Bochner, Hutnik and Furnham, 1985; Furnham and Alibhai, 1985; Neri and Ville, 2008; Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune, 2011). Therefore, one aim of this study was to delve deeper into the social experience of

student sojourners by tracking a specific group of students longitudinally throughout their sojourn in the UK. The study looked to explore social contact not only as a contributory variable for adaptation, but also the trajectories of students' social ties over time and the functions of different social groups, including ties with co-nationals, with host nationals, and with non-co-national international students (cf. Young et al., 2013). The aim was to subject Bochner et al.'s (1977) *Functional Model of Friendship Networks* (FMFN) to investigation. The FMFN emerged from a study of 30 international students sojourning in Hawaii. The researchers asked participants to identify their five 'best friends' and the five people with whom they spend most of their time. Based on their findings, the authors concluded that student sojourners tend to develop three distinct friendship networks, each with a different function (Table 2.3). The FMFN depicts ties with co-nationals as students' primary network, followed by a secondary network of host national ties, and a tertiary network of non-co-national international ties.

Network	Members	Typical Function
Primary <i>Co-National</i>	Contacts with other sojourning compatriots	Close friendships; express & rehearse the culture of origin
Secondary <i>Host nationals</i>	Bonds with significant host nationals (e.g. academics, officials)	Instrumental; support with language and academic difficulties
Tertiary <i>Non-co-nationals</i>	Non-conationals, including fellow international students	Recreational; share common experiences based on shared 'foreignness'

Table 2.3 Bochner et al.'s (1977) Functional Model of Friendship Networks

Furnham and Alibhai (1985) replicated Bochner et al.'s (ibid.) study with a larger and more diverse sample of 140 student sojourners in the UK. Although conducted on a larger scale and in a different host country, the results from Furnham and Alibhai's study corresponded largely to those of Bochner et al. (ibid.). However, a more recent study by Hendrickson et al. (2011) found that student sojourners in Hawaii reported higher ratios of host nationals in their social network than co-nationals. The authors posit that this might be due to the study design which asked students to provide an exhaustive list of their friends as opposed to earlier studies which limited the list to a specific number of best friends (cf. Bochner et al. 1977; Furnham and Alibhai 1985), thus making it more likely that students would include more casual ties or 'weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) with host nationals.

Although Bochner et al.'s (1977) FMFN is somewhat outdated, it is still frequently cited in the student sojourner literature (cf. Ward et al. 2001; Hendrickson et al. 2011). However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no study has investigated the FMFN from a qualitative perspective, nor has its applicability to the UK HE context been tested since Furnham and Alibhai's 1985 study. In light of the surge in international student numbers in the last two decades it is likely that the conditions for the formation of social ties may have changed substantially since then. Therefore, one aim of the present study was to develop a more current model of student sojourners' social contact patterns.

Overall, three key trends with regard to social contact patterns can be discerned in the wider international student literature. First, and in line with the FMFN, a number of studies have identified ties with co-nationals as the primary social network of student sojourners (e.g. Furnham and Alibhai, 1985; Maundeni, 2001; Neri and Ville, 2008). Co-national ties are thought to fulfil an important support function among individuals going through the sojourn experience by buffering acculturative stress (Kim, 2001; Woolf, 2007). It is also believed that co-national friendships have the potential to increase student sojourners' self-esteem (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998). However, researchers also caution against the reliance on co-national friendships and point to the potentially adverse effects of co-national contact on language development and adjustment to the host environment (Maundeni, 2001). Kim (2001) postulates that although co-national contact offers short-term support, it may be detrimental to long-term adaptation and intercultural transformation. It is also believed that strong co-national ties may negatively affect overall student satisfaction and feelings of social connectedness (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Indeed, Kashima and Loh (2006) found psychological adjustment of student sojourners in Australia to be explained by both host and international ties, but not by co-national ties. It has also been suggested that high degrees of co-national contact may inhibit ISs from forming meaningful bonds with members of the host society (Church, 1982).

Although many aspects of the international student sojourn require interactions with members of the host society, both on and off campus (Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998), a recurrent trend in empirical studies is a lack of integration of student sojourners with the host society. Research across different locations has shown that while ISs generally desire and expect to form relationships with members of the host community (Sakurai, McCall-Wolf and Kashima, 2010), they consistently report a lack of meaningful contact

with host nationals (e.g. Merrick, 2004; Brown, 2008). For example in a large-scale survey by UKCOSA (2004), 70 per cent of surveyed taught postgraduate students in the UK stated that they had no British friends at all. Despite this paucity of host ties, the literature points to the benefits of host national contact, including its ability to evoke 'host communicative competence' (Kim, 2001) in the student sojourner. Although there is some evidence that contact with host nationals can be intimidating and distressing in some circumstances (Greenland and Brown, 2005), research has found that, on the whole, host national contact relates positively to international students' adjustment and adaptation, including overall sojourn satisfaction and aspects of academic achievement (e.g. Ward and Masgoret, 2004, Young et al., 2013), and host language development (e.g. Furnham and Erdmann, 1995; Gareis, Merkin and Goldman, 2011). Researchers have also suggested that contact with members of the host society allows the student sojourner to learn about local traditions and practices, and thereby acquire social and behavioural skills necessary to 'fit in' and function effectively in the host society (Li and Gasser, 2005; Bochner, 2006). However, host contact seems to be, by and large, instrumental rather than emotionally supportive (e.g. Rohrlich and Martin, 1991; Al-Sharideh and Goe, 1998; Chapdelaine and Alexitch, 2004; Wright and Schartner, 2013) as suggested in Bochner et al.'s (1977) FMFN.

Several authors have pointed to circumstances and contextual factors which might inhibit interactions with home students and the local community, including indifference on the part of the hosts (Montgomery, 2010) and skewed student intake (Merrick, 2004). Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002), Jacob and Greggo (2001) and Parks and Raymond (2004) all found that despite high motivation among ISs to interact with host students, relationships were hard to instigate and sustain because of a perceived lack of reciprocal interest from the latter. In a 2004 study by UKCOSA, international students reported wanting more opportunities to mix with British students and the wider local community, but found the latter particularly hard (Merrick, 2004). In a US-based study, Trice and Elliot (1993) found that Japanese undergraduate students in the US spent over 88 per cent of their study time and 82 per cent of their leisure time with fellow Japanese students. Speaking of the consequences of this lack of host contact, Gareis (2000) notes:

[...] social alienation from the host country can have different effects: It can lead to physical isolation and a retreat into the private world; it can cause an immersion into work and studies; or it can foster a bonding together with fellow nationals or students from other countries. (p. 70)

Many early studies have attributed social integration difficulties to international students' inability or unwillingness to adapt to the new environment (Montgomery, 2010). However, more recent research clearly indicates that ISs are generally highly motivated to interact with members of the host society, and that they often expect to have more host contact than they actually experience (Ward et al., 2001). Various reasons for this dynamic have been suggested – these are further discussed below.

It is believed that one reason for the lack of integration with host nationals might be related to English language ability. In their study on student sojourner in Canada, Schutz and Richards (2003) found that oral English language weaknesses might have affected the ability to form host national friendships. This corresponds to the observations of Harrison and Peacock (2008) in their study of UK-students' attitudes to HE internationalisation. UK-students interviewed as part of the study stated that they avoided working with ISs because of their perceived weak English language skills. This is also an indication that group projects and interactive in-class activities might not actually facilitate intercultural interaction as students often choose to work with co-nationals on assessed projects for fear that multicultural teamwork might impact negatively on their academic achievement (De Vita, 2002). Kudo and Simkin (2003) have identified classrooms as generally less effective arenas for friendship development as they provide fewer and shorter opportunities for interaction among students. This might be particularly the case for research-intensive postgraduate degrees where students are expected to work largely independently. Apart from language issues, other factors related to intercultural interaction such as differences in humour have also been identified as a barrier for social integration (Brown and Richards, 2012). Furthermore, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) point to the role of contextual factors such as skewed student intake. They argue:

The presence of a sufficient number of students from a common cultural background provides the potential of the formation of an ethnic community within the university. (p. 705)

This suggests that high numbers of ISs at popular receiving universities might impede the formation of host contact. In their study of friendship instigation among Japanese students at an Australian university, Kudo and Simkin (2003) highlight the role of accommodation arrangements and identify domiciliary proximity as a highly influential factor in friendship development, bringing about “continual contacts with minimum

efforts by international students” (p. 108). In their study, residence halls provided more opportunities for intercultural contact than off-campus accommodation. However, placement in same-country accommodation or ‘international’ halls of residence can also inhibit contact with members of the host society (Harrison and Peacock, 2008). Lee and Rice (2007), suggest that difficulties with host interaction on and off campus could also be due to negative attitudes of university staff, local students, and people in the wider community. However, scholars have observed a lack of literature on the host national perspective (e.g. Ward, 2001; Brown and Richards, 2012). Nonetheless, some studies have been conducted. In a recent US-study (Birnbaum et al., 2012) for example, student sojourners from Central America perceived a lack of interest among host students in interacting with newcomers. Brown and Richard’s (2012) UK-study yielded mixed results. They found some negative reactions among British postgraduate students who were asked to reflect on the high number of ISs on their degree programmes, while others appreciated this cultural diversity. Spencer-Rodgers’ (2001) US-study showed more conclusive results. She found evidence of social avoidance and prejudicial attitudes towards ISs among American host nationals who also regarded them as a fairly homogeneous outgroup.

In the UK-context, Harrison and Peacock (2008) found that UK students had more individualised conceptions of students from European, Anglophone and Latin American countries, compared to those from ‘the rest of the world’. Students in the latter group were for example categorised by wider geography (e.g. African) or religion (e.g. Muslim). In a US-study, Williams and Johnson (2011) explored how multicultural personality characteristics and intercultural attitudes of members of the host society relate to reports of friendships with international students. The results indicated that Americans with international friends showed a higher level of open-mindedness than those without such friendships. These findings are consistent with literature suggesting that open-mindedness is an important prerequisite for cross-cultural interaction (Arthur and Bennet, 1995; Hello, Scheepers and Slegers, 2006). Hence, without an open-minded outlook on behalf of the host society it might be very difficult for ISs to initiate and sustain relationships with host nationals.

Compared to co-national and host national ties, the role of contact between student sojourners of different nationalities, what Sovic (2009) terms 'cosmopolitan friendships', is under-explored (Marginson et al., 2010) but has recently attracted growing research attention. For example, in a study of social contact patterns among a

sample of 100 international students in Australia, Kashima and Loh (2006) found that respondents generally had more co-national and international ties than host national ties. Results also suggested that the more international ties students had, the better adjusted they were psychologically and the more they also identified with their Australian host university. Similarly, Montgomery and McDowell's (2009) longitudinal UK-based study found evidence for a closely-knit and highly supportive 'international community of practice', and Young et al. (2013) found that more international ties led to higher academic achievement of a sample of postgraduate students sojourning in the UK.

2.3.7 Social support

The quality of ISSs' social ties has also received considerable research attention, and is often measured through the variable of social support (SS). A great deal of research has shown that ISSs generally have a greater need for support than their domestic peers (Andrade, 2006). Ong and Ward (2005) argue that sojourners face unique problems salient to their status as temporary visitors (e.g. language difficulties, homesickness), and that the processes of obtaining SS differ significantly from those experienced by people who reside in their home country. They highlight the loss of familiar support systems as a result of cross-cultural transition:

Sojourning individuals necessarily experience a disruption or loss of social support systems and the familiar means by which support is socially communicated [...] they are also forced to evolve new ways of obtaining some of the required support, which includes maintaining regular long-distance communication with important sources of support at home and developing new support systems in the host country. (p. 638)

Literature on social networks suggests that social ties buffer stress by providing support (see Cohen and Wills, 1985 for an extensive discussion of the *Social Support Hypothesis*). According to Ong and Ward (2005), SS serves four core functions: (1) emotional support, including display of love, concern, and sympathy; (2) social companionship, including feelings of belongingness to a social group; (3) tangible assistance, for example in the form of financial aid or material resources; and (4) informational support, including advice and feedback. In their *Index for Sojourner Social Support (ISSS)*, Ong and Ward (ibid.) distinguish between socio-emotional support and instrumental support (Figure 2.5).

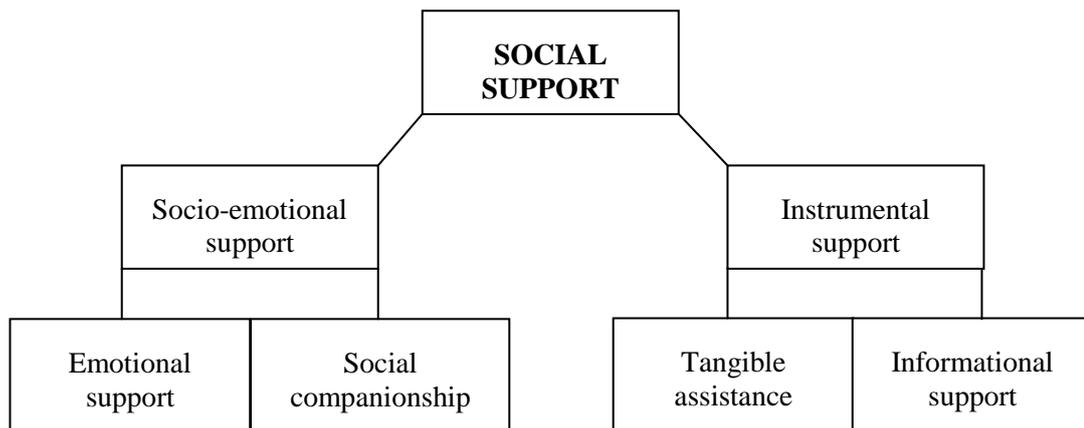


Figure 2.5 Components of Social Support

Empirical findings have revealed a buffering effect of SS on acculturative stress as well as depression (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Studies have also found a negative association between SS and psychological distress (see Zhang and Goodson, 2011 for a review). In a recent study of postgraduate students sojourning in the UK, Young et al. (2013) found a significant positive relationship between SS and students' psychological wellbeing, but no significant association between SS and academic achievement and satisfaction with life. The specific research interest in this study was on the predictive power of SS for a range of adjustment outcome variables. Additionally, the development of SS over time and its role in the adjustment process were explored.

2.4 Research Questions

In response to the review of the literature above, seven research questions were formulated:

1. How do English language ability, knowledge about the host country, prior overseas experience, autonomy in the decision to study abroad, intercultural competence, social contact and social support relate to different aspects of academic adaptation measured over the whole programme?
2. How do these contributory factors relate to psychological adaptation?
3. How do they relate to sociocultural adaptation?
4. What are the patterns and dynamics of student sojourners' academic adjustment over time?
5. What are the patterns and dynamics of student sojourners' psychological adjustment over time?

6. What are the patterns and dynamics of student sojourners' sociocultural adjustment over time?
7. How does study abroad affect student sojourners' intercultural competence over time?

2.5 Towards a Conceptual Model of Student Sojourner Adjustment

From the literature review above, a conceptual framework was developed for this study. With regard to the development of theoretical frameworks, Ward et al. (2001) issue a note of caution:

There is a tendency for the models to become exceedingly complex with every conceivable component included. When they are drawn with arrows that depict all of the possible interconnections, it becomes clear that such models are unlikely to be capable of being put to the empirical test. (p. 40)

Keeping this in mind, the proposed framework for this study will hopefully offer a comprehensive yet relatively compact model for the study of student sojourners' cross-cultural adjustment and adaptation, which can be put to the empirical test using both qualitative and quantitative methods. It adds a new perspective to existing theoretical models on sojourner transition, namely the unique experiences of student sojourners. Thus, what distinguishes this model from previous frameworks is its specific applicability to the international student sojourn. To avoid complexity and, most importantly, to facilitate empirical testing, the proposed model adopts a micro-level approach, with the individual student sojourner and her/his intra- and interpersonal experiences at the centre of enquiry (Kim, 2001). Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that broader macro-level factors (i.e. wider social, political and economic conditions) feature prominently in other conceptual models (e.g. Ward et al., 2001). However, an investigation of macro-level factors would go beyond the scope of this study.

The proposed integrated framework is detailed below in two parts. Figure 2.6 illustrates the broader conceptual framework, while Figure 2.7 illustrates the approach to contributory factors and outcome variables in this study. The model extends in scope that of Ward et al. (ibid.) by going beyond the purely psycho-social and adding a third adjustment domain of high salience to student sojourners: academic adjustment. As Figure 2.6 shows, cross-cultural transition is conceptualised here as a major life event (Berry, 2006) that involves the loss of familiar social support systems, and exposes student sojourners to an unfamiliar academic and sociocultural environment. In order to experience a successful sojourn, adjustment is needed – this involves coping strategies

to deal with acculturative stress and achieve psychological adaptation, as well as culture-learning to achieve academic and sociocultural adaptation as suggested by Ward et al. (2001).

Figure 2.7 illustrates the approach to contributory and outcome factors in this study. Students' adjustment, conceptualised as a process, is monitored longitudinally over a nine-month period through regular individual interviews. Students' adaptation, conceptualised as outcomes of these adjustive processes, is investigated quantitatively by measuring contributory factors and outcome variables in a self-report survey.

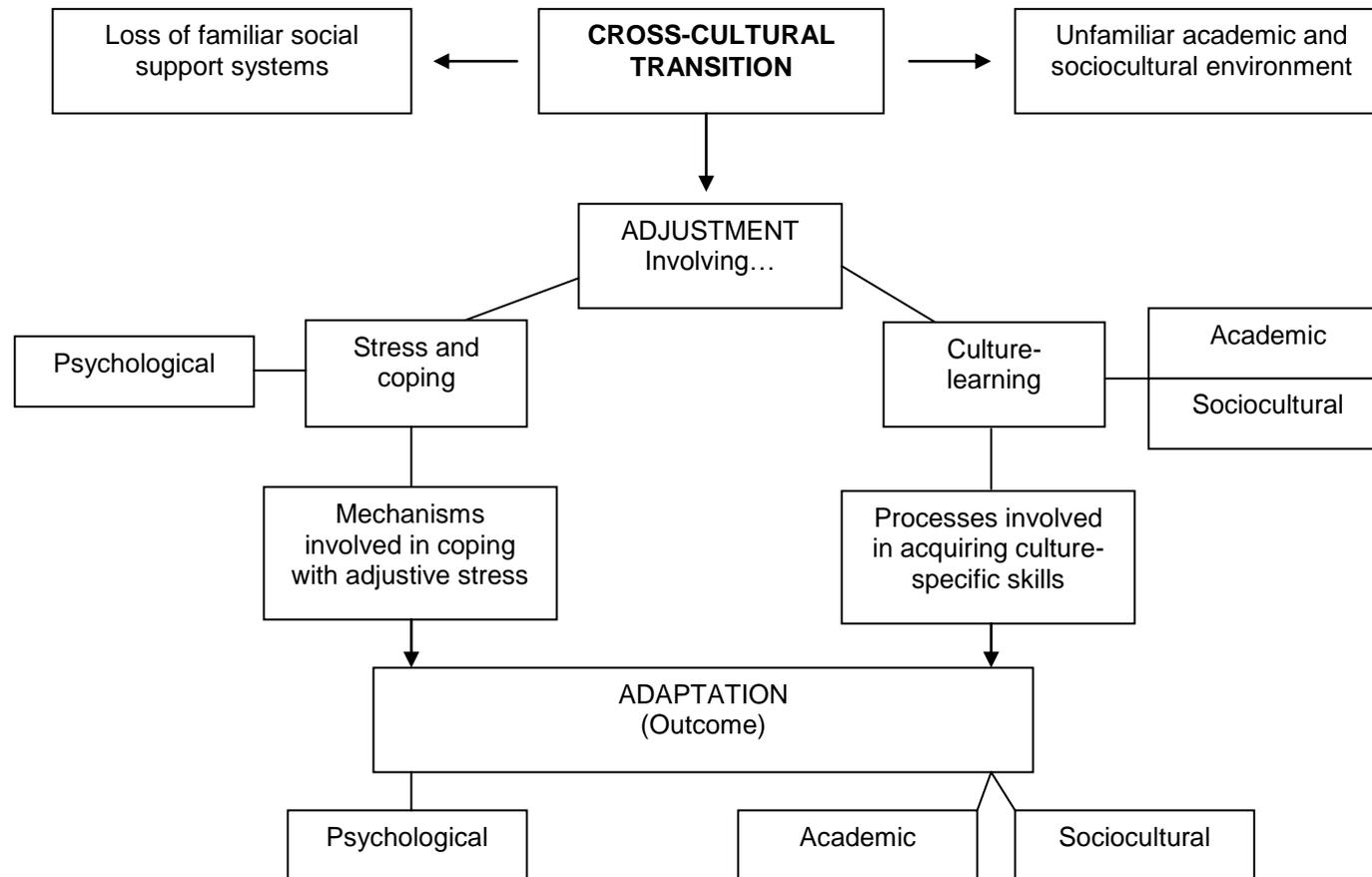


Figure 2.6 The Conceptual Framework for this Study

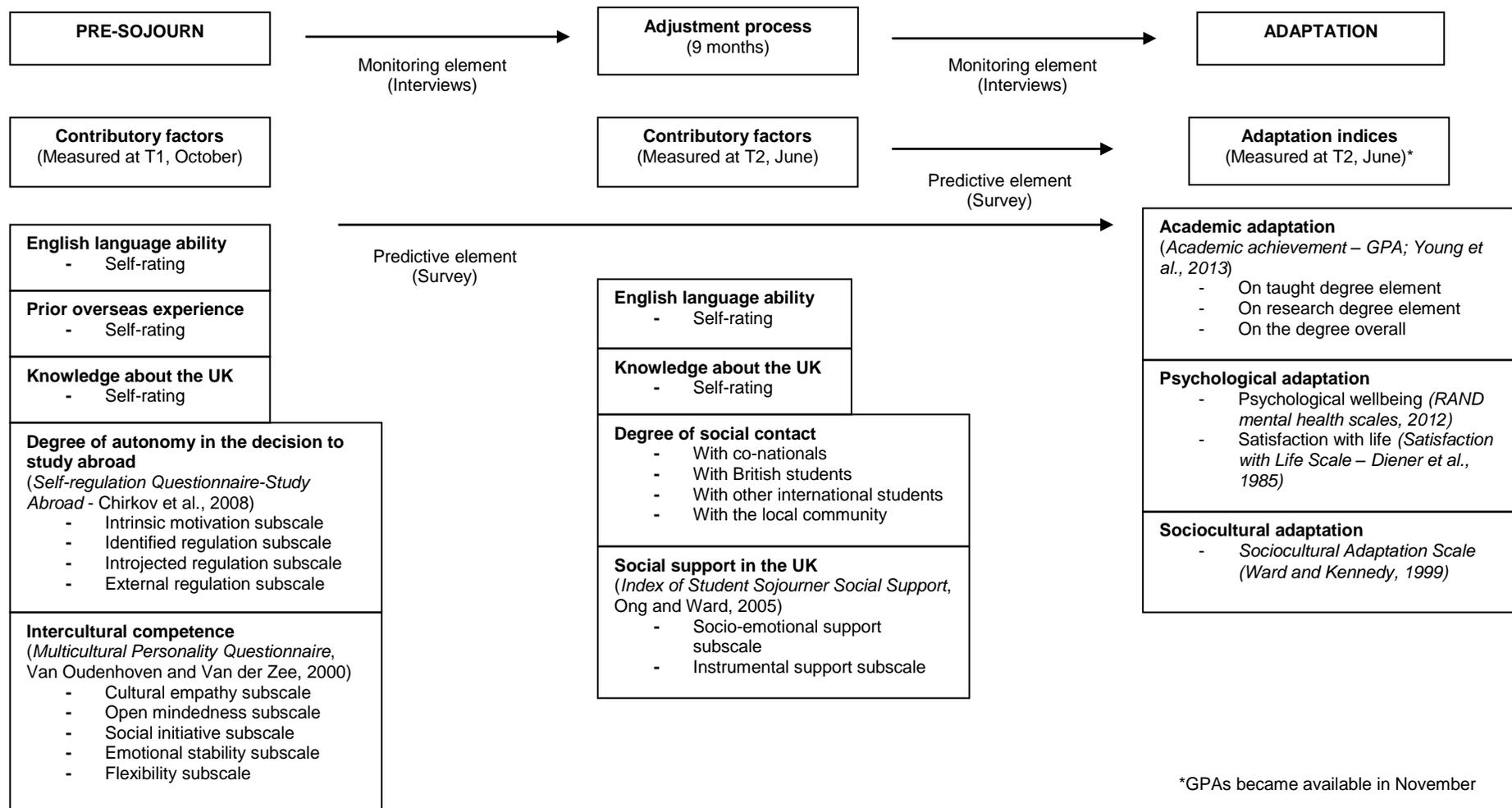


Figure 2.7 Approach to Contributory and Outcome Factors in the Adjustment and Adaptation of Student Sojourners in this Study

Chapter 3. Study Design and Research Methodology

Having presented the theoretical and empirical background of this project in Chapter 2, this chapter sheds light on the methodological approach adopted in this study. It includes a detailed account of the chosen research design, participant selection, the data-collection procedure and the analysis techniques, and will put forward the rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach.

3.1 Research Design

The setting for this study was a university in the North East of England (student population 20,660). The participants were all non-UK students undertaking one-year taught MA programmes. The chosen programmes of study were highly ‘international’ with around 90% of students being non-UK, reflecting the high concentration of non-UK students on taught postgraduate programmes reported in the national statistics (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, the chosen host university represented a particularly interesting case as it has a wide portfolio of international activities and pursues an active research agenda on learning and teaching developments and ‘internationalisation at home’ (Newcastle University, 2012).

The study followed a longitudinal research design - according to Goodwin (2010), a longitudinal research design studies a single group of participants over a period of time, adopting a “within-subjects or repeated-measures approach” (p. 224). A longitudinal design seemed reasonable for this study as it allowed for both monitoring and predictive elements to be included (as called for by Zhou and Todman, 2009). The research framework for this study is presented in Figure 3.1 below. The predictive element of the study aimed to explore which contributory factors predicted international students’ adaptation to life and study in the UK, while the monitoring element aimed to capture the patterns of the students’ academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment over time. The research was carried out over two consecutive academic years, with two cohorts of international postgraduate students undertaking taught MA degrees in the humanities and social sciences. Two types of data were collected as discussed below: (1) questionnaire data, constituting the predictive element of the study, and (2) interview data, constituting the monitoring element.

A total of 225 students took part in the study. A self-report survey was administered to participants in the academic years 2011/12 and 2012/13 at two time stages respectively: two weeks into the academic sojourn (T1, October) and nine

months into the sojourn (T2, June). One-to-one interviews were conducted with a smaller sub-sample of students (N=20)²¹. The interviews took place at three points in time: two weeks into the degree programme (T1, October), five months into the programme (T2, February), and nine months into the programme (T3, June). Additionally, the interviewees were sent a short follow-up survey via e-mail three months after the final interview round (T4, September) - of the 20 interviewees, 13 completed the follow-up survey. This mixed methods design seemed appropriate to fulfil both the predictive and monitoring aims of the study. What is more, the use of regular individual interviews responded to the observed lack of qualitative research on student sojourner adjustment and adaptation - despite growing qualitative research on the subject (see e.g. longitudinal ethnographic studies by Brown, 2008 and Pitts, 2009), researchers continue to call for more qualitative investigations to fully explore the ‘lived experiences’ of student sojourners (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

Before the data-collection procedure and research instruments are discussed in more detail, the section below (3.2) provides a much needed discussion of the processes involved in mixed-method research.

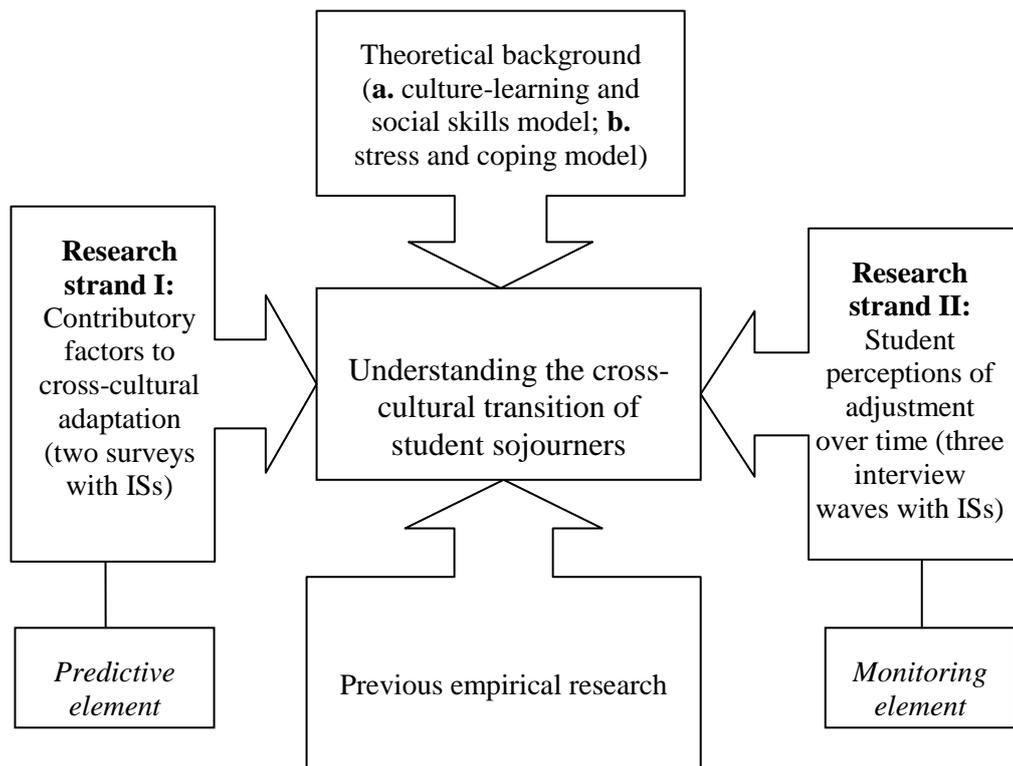


Figure 3.1 Research Framework for this Study

²¹ Due to an administrative error, two interviewees did not complete the self-report questionnaire

3.2 A Mixed Methods Approach

A mixed methods design was chosen for this study in an attempt to fully understand the complex and multifaceted phenomenon that is the international student sojourn (Jackson, 2005). Researchers have recently called for a move away from the traditional understanding of quantitative and qualitative approaches as two separate research paradigms, and have argued that rather than being antithetical to one another, the two approaches have the potential to complement one another and answer different research questions (Mason, 2002; Greene and Caracelli, 2003; Onwuegbuzie, 2003). Indeed, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in the same study is desirable in order to do justice to the complexity and multifaceted nature of many social phenomena under investigation in academic research. As Pashaeizad (2010) states:

The complexity of our research problems calls for answers beyond simple numbers in a quantitative sense or words in a qualitative sense. A combination of both forms of data can provide the most complete analysis of problems. Researchers can situate numbers in the contexts and words of participants, and they can frame the words of participants with numbers, trends and statistical results. Both forms of data are necessary today (p. 14).

In fact, some researchers go as far as to call for mixed methods to be recognised as a third research paradigm. For example, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) posit:

Mixed methods research sits in a new third chair, with qualitative research sitting on the left side and quantitative research sitting on the right side (p.15).

The purpose of this section is not to echo the widespread debate between quantitative and qualitative research, but to offer a rationale for integrating the two approaches in one research study. However, before mixed methods designs can be discussed further it is reasonable to provide a working definition. For the purpose of this study, Tashakkori and Teddlie's (1998) fairly basic definition of mixed methods research is adopted:

Mixed methods studies are those that combine the qualitative and the quantitative approaches into the research methodology of a single study or multiphased study (p. 17-18).

We must also distinguish *mixed methods* research from *multi-method* research. In multi-method studies, the research questions are answered by using two data-collection methods from within the same research paradigm (i.e. either quantitative or qualitative). Mixed methods designs, on the other hand, combine quantitative as well as qualitative

data collection procedures and analysis techniques (Spratt, Walker and Robinson, 2004; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003).

Before we can go on to discuss the processes involved in mixed methods studies, we first need to briefly remind ourselves of the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Within the quantitative paradigm, research is generally conducted deductively, that is in relation to hypotheses drawn from theory - numerical measures are emphasised when collecting and analysing data (Figure 3.2). Although quantitative approaches are very effective for assessing relationships between variables and making predictions, they generally fail to take into account the context within which these associations occur, i.e. questions of ‘why’ and ‘how’ certain relationships between variables exist are not answered (Rauscher and Greenfield, 2009).

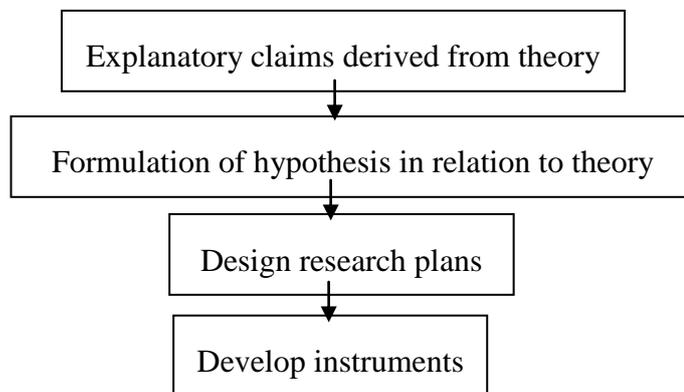


Figure 3.2 Steps in the Deductive Research Process²²

Qualitative research, on the other hand, commonly follows an inductive process, whereby meaning is sought to be understood and interpreted from the perspective of those being studied (ibid.). Theory is generated from interpretation of the evidence, albeit often against a theoretical background, i.e. iteratively (Figure 3.3). Thus, qualitative approaches allow the researcher to explore and understand the ‘lived experiences’ of individuals and how these experiences differ across contexts. However, qualitative research commonly includes fewer cases than quantitative research, making it difficult to generalise the findings to larger populations (ibid.).

²² Recreated from Spratt et al., 2004

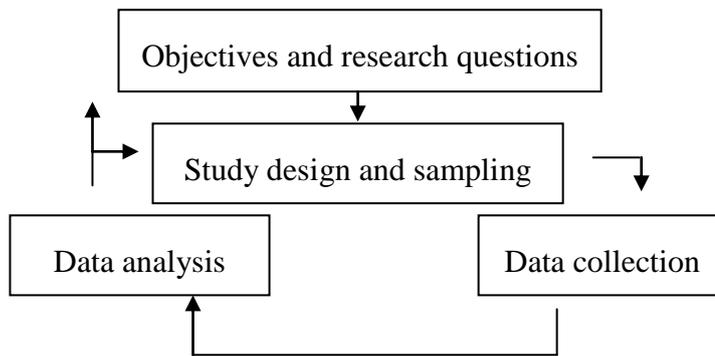


Figure 3.3 The Iterative Qualitative Research Process²³

From the above we can conclude that a mixed methods design was fitting for the present study. One aim of the study was to assess relationships between a set of contributory factors and international students' cross-cultural adaptation - a quantitative approach seemed reasonable here, using well-established, reliable close-ended measures and statistical procedures (Creswell and Plano, 2007; Rauscher and Greenfield, 2009). A second objective was to monitor individual students' adjustment processes from the perspective of the participants - here, a qualitative approach in the form of semi-structured interviews allowed for the exploration of these more detailed nuances, focussing on the individual sojourner and his/her construction of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998).

Having arrived at a rationale for adopting a mixed methods design, the focus then turns to its practical implementation. Here, the literature generally emphasises three key aspects (cf. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Rauscher and Greenfield, 2009):

1. The paradigm emphasis: whether to give the quantitative and qualitative elements of a study equal priority
2. The time sequence of data-collection: whether to collect data by using each method concurrently or sequentially
3. Integration: where/when integration of the methods should occur

In this study, both the quantitative and the qualitative approach were given equal priority because the monitoring and predictive nature of the study called for equal contributions from both components – the quantitative data addressed the predictive aim of the study, and the qualitative data addressed the monitoring aim (see Research Framework Figure 3.1 above). The time-sequence for data-collection was sequential and is illustrated below (Figure 3.4). Finally, the integration of methods is central to mixed

²³ Recreated from Crabtree and Miller, 1992

methods designs, yet it remains one of the biggest challenges for researchers and the literature does observe a trend towards non-integration (e.g. Bryman, 2007). In this study, the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods occurred at a number of points throughout the project as is suggested by Rauscher and Greenfield (2009). To a small extent it occurred during the data-collection stage as the self-report questionnaire included both quantitative and qualitative response options. Additionally, the interviewees completed quantitative measures for psychological wellbeing and satisfaction with life as part of each interview session²⁴. Next, integration occurred in the data-analysis stage when the interview transcripts were analysed both for frequency (quantitative) and intensity of comments (qualitative) - a detailed discussion of this follows below (3.6.2). The final, and perhaps most substantial, stage of integration occurred in the discussion where findings from both approaches were integrated.

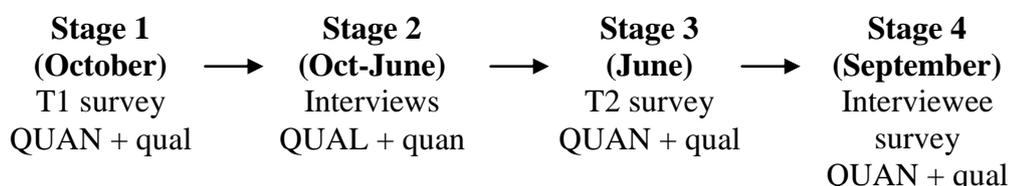


Figure 3.4 The Longitudinal Data Collection Procedure for this Study²⁵

3.3 The Participants

Before participants were recruited, the host university's postgraduate taught programmes were analysed to determine which programmes were similar in structure, content, assessment methods and in student cohort composition. Two programmes were found to be near identical in these terms: MA programmes in Cross-Cultural Communication (MA CCC), and Applied Linguistics and TESOL²⁶ (MA ALT) - analysis across a broad range of indices showed no significant differences between the compositions of student cohorts doing MA CCC and MA ALT over a five-year period (academic years 2007/08 to 2012/13, inclusive). This timeframe was used because 2007/08 was the first year that both programmes were running in their present forms, and 2012/13 was the year that the final data-collection took place. A total of 352 and

²⁴ Despite this integration during data-collection, it must be noted that the surveys were predominantly quantitative (i.e. only the last question was open-ended), and the interviews predominantly qualitative.

²⁵ Note: 'qual' stands for qualitative; 'quan' stands for quantitative; '+' stands for concurrent, indicating that both approaches are used simultaneously; capital letters denote high weight, indicating the dominance of one approach; lower case letters denote lower weight (Morse, 2003)

²⁶ Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

328 students had completed MA programmes in, respectively, CCC and ALT over this five year period, with cohort sizes on both programmes ranging from 44 to 97. Further analysis of the composition of each cohort found that both were predominantly ‘international’ (i.e. non-UK) in composition (between 85% and 95% in any given year), with English being a second language for the vast majority of students (around 90%), and entry-level IELTS²⁷ or equivalent scores at 6.5 for more than 90 per cent of entrants. Student cohorts on both degrees were very heterogeneous in terms of nationality, with typically 20+ nationalities being represented on each programme and most students coming from (in order of numbers) East Asia, West Asia, Europe and North America.

Each programme’s student age profiles were also very similar (typically between 21 and 28, with a rounded mean of 24) as were gender profiles (around 80% female on both programmes most years). In terms of prior academic achievement, all students on both programmes had an equivalent of a UK undergraduate degree of at least a higher 2nd class (‘2.1’), with a predominance of degrees being in the humanities or social sciences. Student-staff ratios across both programmes were consistently around one to twenty. Both programmes were taught by staff from the same faculty, and both degrees conformed to the same assessment procedures and standards. Additionally, the programmes had identical teaching and assessment structures, with a taught element running from October to June, and an independent student-led research project carried out over the summer months (June to August). In sum, as far as it was possible to discern, both degrees and degree participant profiles were closely matched in this study. It seemed reasonable to keep participation limited to this very specific cohort of students in order to maximise the homogeneity of the group in terms of teaching experience, academic demands, and social interaction on campus (cf. Wright and Schartner, 2013). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that a focus on this specific ‘microcosm’ of students means that generalisations can only be tentative, at best.

Across the 2011/12 and 2012/13 cohorts, a total of 239 MA CCC and MA ALT students completed the survey at T1 (October). After an initial analysis of respondents’ demographic data, 16 participants had to be excluded from further analysis as they had previously obtained undergraduate or postgraduate degrees from UK universities. It was

²⁷ International English Language Testing System

felt that the inclusion of this data in the analysis would have affected the authenticity of the findings due to the familiarity of these students with life and study in the UK. Of the remaining participants (N = 223), 128 students were studying for an MA CCC, and 95 students for an MA ALT.

Table 3.1 below presents participants' demographics at T1 and T2. On average, the sample as a whole was relatively young with a mean of around 24 at both times. The students ranged in age from 20 to 42 years. The vast majority of respondents were female, mirroring the gender bias in this group and previous cohorts (see above). Most respondents came from the People's Republic of China (PRC), the main sending country of international students to the UK (UKCISA, 2013). The remaining respondents came from a variety of countries or territories²⁸. Seventeen students were first language speakers (L1) of English, mainly from Canada and the US. All students who were second language (L2) English speakers had obtained the minimum English language entrance requirement for their programmes of study of IELTS 6.5 or equivalent. Nearly half (48%) of the students had attended pre-session English language training at the host university prior to the start of their degree programme²⁹. A majority of participants (59%) spoke Mandarin as their L1, followed by German (9%), and English (8%). Other first languages included (in order of frequency): Arabic, Bahasa Malay, Indonesian, Russian and Japanese.

Although none of the respondents had ever studied in the UK for a degree, previous overseas experience was not uncommon among the group. Many participants (41%) indicated that they had previously lived abroad for five months or more. Of these, most had lived abroad for a period of six months to two years (32%). Only five students had previously lived in the UK for a purpose other than studying. This included short-term internships and work placements. A large majority (80%) indicated that the UK was their preferred destination. Among those students for whom the UK was not the first choice, other Anglosaxon countries (the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), Singapore, Hong Kong, and some European countries (Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands)

²⁸ In some cases, students identified territories which are not officially recognised as nation states as their places of origin (e.g. Palestine, Kurdistan, Taiwan) – these places are included here as reported by the students, although their 'official' nationality may be different (e.g. a Kurdish student with an Iraqi passport)

²⁹ These courses varied in length between six and ten weeks

were mentioned as desired destinations. Of the 223 students who had completed the T1 survey, 143 also completed the T2 survey (64% response rate).

	Time 1 (N = 223)	Time 2 (N = 143)
1. Gender		
Female	200 (90%)	127 (89%)
Male	23 (10%)	16 (11%)
2. Age	M = 24.04	M = 24.22
	20-24: 155 students	20-24: 97 students
	25-29: 46 students	25-29: 32 students
	30-35: 9 students	30-35: 8 students
	35+: 2 students	35+: 2 students
3. Place of origin		
PRC	121 (55%)	63 (44%)
Europe	37	35
Americas/Caribbean	20	13
East Asia	30	24
Middle East	10	6
Africa	2	2
4. Subject area		
MA CCC	129 (58%)	109 (76%)
MA ALT	94 (42%)	34 (24%)
5. Cohort		
2011/12	99 (44%)	67 (47%)
2012/13	124 (56%)	76 (53%)
6. Overseas experience \geq 5 months	91 (41%)	67 (45%)
7. English foundation course	98 (48%)	52 (39%)

Table 3.1 Demographics of the Sample at T1 and T2

3.4 The Self-Report Surveys

Although self-report surveys have a potential for inaccurate self-portrayal and are therefore subject to social desirability (Coleman and Chafer, 2011), they are a suitable instrument to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from a large number of respondents. In this study, two sets of self-report surveys were completed by two consecutive cohorts of international postgraduate students undertaking MA degrees at the same university. The questionnaires were administered at two time stages: two weeks into the degree programme (October, T1), and approximately nine months into the programme (June, T2). Measures for the surveys were mostly taken directly or with slight modifications from existing scales, although some were specifically developed for this study (see below). Scales and survey items were selected based on the information needed to address the research questions (cf. Rosenthal, Russell and Thomson 2006). The relevant research literature was consulted before and in the process of questionnaire construction. A copy of both questionnaires is attached in appendices A and B. With the

exception of demographic items and a final open-ended question, all questions were answered on 5-point Likert scales. All participants received an English version of the surveys and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to collecting data.

The T1 and T2 surveys comprised of some identical measurements (Table 3.2), including scales measuring intercultural competence (IC), English language ability (ELA), satisfaction with life (SWL), psychological wellbeing (PWB) and knowledge about the UK (KNW). In the T1 survey (124 items) respondents were also asked to provide the following demographic background information: date of arrival in the UK, place of origin, age, gender, first language, previous overseas experience, and type of residence in the UK (e.g. private, university accommodation, home stay). One scale measured students' degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad. The T2 survey (178 items) comprised of scales measuring academic and sociocultural adaptation, and the degree of social contact and social support in the host environment. At both times, the questionnaire was administered at the end of a lecture³⁰ and it took respondents between 20 and 30 minutes to complete. The researcher was present throughout and therefore available to give instructions and deal with students' queries. In order to be able to track their responses, participants were asked to provide their student identity numbers in both surveys. A detailed discussion of the scales used to measure contributory factors and adjustment outcomes follows below, starting with the contributory factors.

³⁰ Some students did not attend the lectures and completed the questionnaire via e-mail.

Time 1	Time 2
1. Student identity number	Student identity number
2. Demographics	
a. Age	-
b. Gender	-
c. Place of origin	-
d. First language	-
e. Previous overseas experience	-
f. Type of residence	-
3. Measures	
IC	IC
ELA	ELA
SWL	SWL
PWB	PWB
KNW	KNW
Degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad	-
-	Sociocultural adaptation
-	Social contact
-	Social support

Table 3.2 List of Measurements Used in the T1 and T2 Surveys³¹

3.4.1 English language ability

As an indicator of English language ability (ELA), a self-report measure was included in both the T1 and T2 survey to assess students' own perceived competence in the English language. Initial analysis of students' pre-programme IELTS and TOEFL scores had shown very little variation, with the vast majority of students fulfilling the English language entrance requirement of IELTS 6.5 or equivalent. Thus, a self-report measure, relating ability to self-concept, seemed reasonable (cf. Young et al., 2013). A self-report measure could provide insights into students' self-confidence in their own abilities, which is not usually captured in standardised tests but has been found in some studies to be a more important predictor of adjustment outcomes than actual linguistic competence (e.g. MacIntyre, Noels and Clement, 1997; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels, 1998). A four-item scale asked 'At this point, how satisfied are you with your ability to communicate in the English language?' Following Ying and Liese (1991), respondents were asked to self-rate their abilities in four skill areas – reading, writing, listening and speaking – on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 [not at all satisfied] to 5 [very satisfied], with high mean scores representing high perceived competence in English.

³¹ Students' academic achievement scores were obtained from the university in November

3.4.2 Knowledge about the UK

In the T1 survey, one single item asked ‘How much, would you say, did you know about the UK before coming here?’ The T2 survey asked ‘At this point, how much do you feel you know about the UK?’ Students could rate their answer on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 [no knowledge at all] to 5 [a lot of knowledge]. This single-item measure aimed to gauge, broadly, students’ own perception of their pre and post-sojourn knowledge about the UK.

3.4.3 Autonomy in the decision to study abroad

To assess the degree of students’ autonomy in the decision to study abroad, the *Self-regulation Questionnaire-Study Abroad* (SRQ-SA, Chirkov et al., 2008) was used. This 10-item scale measures the degree of self-determination in the decision to study abroad and differentiates between four types of motivation on a self-determination continuum (see 2.3.4): intrinsic motivation (INTRI, 2 items), identified regulation (IDENT, 2 items), introjected regulation (INTRO, 4 items), and external regulation (EXTER, 2 items) -Table 3.3 shows example items. The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 [totally not applicable] to 5 [completely applicable]. From these items, a *Relative Autonomy Index* (RAI, cf. Chirkov et al., 2007) was computed by weighting the four subscales based on their intercorrelations [+2 = INTRI, +1 = IDENT, -1 = INTRO, -2 = EXTER]. A positive score symbolised the prevalence of autonomous motivation over controlled motivation, and a negative score represented the prevalence of controlled motivation over self-determined motivation.

SRQ-SA			
<i>I came to study abroad because...</i>			
INTRI	IDENT	INTRO	EXTER
<i>...I thought I would enjoy it</i>	<i>...it was one of my life goals</i>	<i>...I wanted other people to approve of me</i>	Example: <i>...I would have gotten into trouble if I did not</i>

Table 3.3 SRQ-SA Subscales and Example Items

3.4.4 Intercultural competence

In order to assess participants’ intercultural competence (IC), the most recent English-version of the *Multicultural Personality Questionnaire* (MPQ, Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002) was obtained. This instrument has been widely used in sojourner research, including with international student samples, and its statistical reliability has repeatedly been tested and confirmed in a number of studies (see Chapter 2, Table 2.2).

The MPQ included 91 items, each relating to one of five dimensions of IC: cultural empathy (CE, 18 items), open mindedness (OM, 18 items), social initiative (SI, 17 items), emotional stability (ES, 20 items), and flexibility (FL, 18 items). Respondents could give their answers on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 [totally not applicable] to 5 [completely applicable]. Table 3.4 shows example items for the MPQ subscales.

MPQ Subscales				
CE	OM	SI	ES	FL
Example: <i>Understands other peoples' feelings</i>	Example: <i>Finds other religions interesting</i>	Example: <i>Waits for others to initiate contact (-)</i>	Example: <i>Remains calm in misfortune</i>	Example: <i>Enjoys unfamiliar experiences</i>

Table 3.4 MPQ Subscales and Example Items

3.4.5 Social contact

Four single items in the T2 survey measured the degree of overall social contact students had with British students, co-nationals, non-co-national international students and other British people in the local community. Participants were asked to rate the degree of contact with these four groups on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 [almost never] to 5 [very often]. Conceptually these items were grounded in Bochner et al.'s (1977) typology of friendship networks for student sojourners (see Chapter 2). Additionally, three items in the sociocultural adaptation measure (3.4.9) asked students to rate the degree of difficulty experienced in making friends with British people, people of their own nationality and other ISs. .

3.4.6 Social support

In order to measure the degree of social support (SS) students received while sojourning in England, Ong and Ward's (2005) *Index of Sojourner Social Support* (ISSS) was included in the T2 survey. This 17-item scale was specifically developed to assess SS in an intercultural context and allowed for separate scores to be computed for socio-emotional SS and instrumental SS. Students were presented with a range of statements about people's behaviour towards them, and were asked to rate on a 5-point scale how often people displayed these behaviours during their stay in the UK – answers could range from 1 [almost never] to 5 [very often]. Example items included 'Listen and talk to you whenever you feel down' (socio-emotional SS), and 'Accompany you

somewhere' (instrumental SS). A description of the scales used to measure adjustment outcomes (i.e. adaptation) follows below, starting with academic adaptation

3.4.7 Academic adaptation

Academic adaptation was assessed in terms of academic achievement on the degree programme. Academic achievement here refers to evidence of learning, measured in the form of grade point averages (GPAs, Andrade, 2006). Students' grades were obtained from the host university with their permission. An unusually fine-grained measure of academic achievement was used in this study, reflecting the overall assessment structure of the degree programmes. Three aspects of academic achievement were included; an overall degree GPA (for the taught and research elements of the degree combined), and separate GPAs for the taught element and for the research element of the degree respectively. Separating the research and taught grades allowed for a more detailed analysis of aspects of academic achievement, with the measure of achievement on the taught element representing the more structured and guided element, and the measure of achievement on the research element reflecting achievement in more independent study (cf. Young et al., 2013).

In addition to these 'objective' measures of academic achievement, a 9-item self-report measure asked students to indicate the extent of difficulties experienced in various aspects of academic life at the host university, such as understanding lectures, reading academic texts, interacting with staff, and working in groups. Response options ranged from 1 [no difficulty] to 5 [extreme difficulty]. Scores on this scale were then mirrored, so that a higher score would reflect better academic adaptation. Finally, two single items asked participants to rate their level of satisfaction with their own academic achievement in written and oral assessed work. Response options ranged from 1 [not at all satisfied] to 5 [extremely satisfied] – an average score for overall satisfaction with academic achievement was calculated.

3.4.8 Psychological adaptation

Psychological adaptation was measured subjectively in this study and two indicators of psychological adaptation were included, measuring students' satisfactions and emotional responses to the host environment (cf. Rosenthal et al., 2006): psychological wellbeing (PWB) and satisfaction with life (SWL), a common distinction used to measure psychological responses to the host environment (Ward et al., 2001), with

SWL reflecting a more cognitive/judgemental dimension and PWB reflecting a more affective/emotional dimension of psychological adaptation (Sam, 2000).

To assess PWB, scales were obtained from the *RAND Mental Health Inventory* (2012). Eleven items asked students how they had been feeling over the past four weeks. Example items include: 'I have felt full of energy' (+) and 'I have been a very nervous person' (-). Answers could vary from 1 [none of the time] to 5 [all the time]. As a measure of SWL, Diener et al.'s (1985) 5-item *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) was used. Example items include: 'The conditions of my life are excellent' and 'If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing'. Answers could vary from 1 [totally not applicable] to 5 [completely applicable]. The SWLS has frequently been used as an indicator of the more cognitive aspects of subjective wellbeing (Chirkov et al., 2003). Both constructs were found to correlate significantly with each other in empirical studies but researchers have suggested that each construct needs to nonetheless be studied in its own right (Diener et al., 1999).

3.4.9 Sociocultural adaptation

To assess students' sociocultural adaptation, a 37-item scale was constructed based on Ward and Kenney's (1999) *Sociocultural Adaptation Scale* (SCAS), and Furnham and Bochner's (1982) *Social Situations Questionnaire* (SSQ). Ward and Kennedy's SCAS was originally based on the SSQ but included some additional adaptive skills such as 'dealing with the climate' and 'getting used to local food' (cf. Ward et al., 2001). In the T2 survey, students were asked to indicate how much difficulty they experienced in various social situations in the host country. Response options ranged from 1 [no difficulty] to 5 [extreme difficulty]. Scores were then mirrored so that a higher score on the SCAS would reflect better sociocultural adaptation. Example items included 'Finding food that you enjoy' and 'Understanding jokes and humour'.

3.4.10 Interviewee survey

A small scale follow-up survey was administered via e-mail to the interviewee sample (N=20) three months after the final interview round (Appendix G). At this point, most interviewees had returned to their countries of origin, thus a more complete picture of the students' sojourn could be captured at this point, rather than capturing snapshots of the sojourn in-progress (as had been the case in the one-to-one interviews). The aim was to capture some personal retrospective accounts from the interviewees, and to collect

some quantitative data on the interviewees' social ties and perceived learning outcomes of the sojourn.

Items on social ties were adapted from Coleman and Chafer (2011). Seven single-item measures aimed to elicit data on the students' links with home. This included questions about homesickness, home visits, and telephone/internet contact with home throughout the sojourn. Five further single-item measures assessed the frequency and quality of students' social contact in the UK. Finally, five items assessed the students' perceived outcomes of the sojourn in the UK. These items were adapted from Coleman and Chafer (2011) and based around Coleman's (2007, 2009) six categories of study abroad learning outcomes: academic, cultural, intercultural, linguistic, personal, and professional.

3.5 The Interviews

In addition to the self-report surveys outlined above, this study also included a qualitative element to allow the experiences of the participants to be voiced beyond measurable indices. Three waves of interviews were conducted over a nine-month period with a sample of 20 student volunteers (Figure 3.5). This allowed a longitudinal picture to be drawn of students' adjustment patterns, without over-relying on retrospective interpretation of experiences. Semi-structured individual interviews were chosen as the best method for accessing students' 'lived experiences' as it was felt that focus group situations might have inhibited students with lower English language proficiency and less confidence in public speaking (Brown, 2008).



Figure 3.5 The Interview Process for this Study

Student volunteers for the interviews were sought in lectures - compulsory modules and induction sessions early in Semester I made it possible to introduce the project to the entire cohort before the students were overwhelmed with assessed assignments. The students were informed that participation in the project would require them to take part in three one-to-one interview sessions over the course of their programme of study. The only inclusion criteria for selecting interviewees were that they should not hold any degrees from UK universities, and that they should vary in nationality. Motivation to

participate in the interviews was high and 60 students volunteered in total. All 60 volunteers were contacted via e-mail to confirm their initial expression of interest. Of those who replied, the first 20 were selected as participants. This sampling technique resulted in a fairly representative sample of the overall cohort as presented below (Table 3.5).

The 20 interviewees (six males and 14 females) were between the ages of 22 and 28, and together they represented 13 different countries, 17 cities and 13 first languages. Apart from two students, all participants had obtained their undergraduate degree in their country of origin, in a range of disciplines in the humanities or social sciences. However, previous experience abroad was not uncommon among the sample with eight students having spent time abroad as part of exchange semesters, internships, or summer courses. Nine students had previously been to the UK for short visits but none had ever attended a British university. Apart from the two US-students in the sample, all interviewees spoke English as a second language. Two students (both from China) had attended a pre-session English language course at the host university prior to the start of their degree programme. At T1, five students planned to return home after completion of their degree, while the rest were planning to either travel, pursue further study abroad, or work in the UK or other countries. Eventually, at the time this thesis was submitted, two students (Celik and Gediz) were pursuing a PhD in the UK, one (Kaari) was pursuing a PhD in Finland, while the rest was working or looking for jobs in other UK cities or at home.

	Pseudonym	Age	Country of Origin	Sex	Experience Abroad	Accommodation
1	Anna	22	Romania	F	N	University
2	Celik	23	Turkey	M	N	University
3	Esmā	22	Turkey	F	Y	Private
4	Elya	23	Malaysia	F	N	University
5	Ella	23	Italy	F	Y	Private
6	Flora	26	Germany	F	Y	Private
7	Gediz	24	Turkey	M	N	University
8	Gabriel	23	Lithuania	M	N	University
9	Indah	26	Indonesia	F	Y	University
10	Kaari	27	Finland	F	N	Private
11	Lydia	24	Romania	F	N	University
12	Mario	25	Mexico	M	Y	University
13	Mita	28	Indonesia	F	N	Private
14	Robin	23	USA	M	Y	University
15	Sarah	26	USA	F	N	University
16	Silvia	24	Slovakia	F	Y	Private
17	Ting	23	China	F	N	Private
18	Tao	23	China	M	N	University
19	Victoria	23	Latvia	F	Y	University
20	Ying	24	China	F	N	University

Table 3.5 Interviewee Profiles

Despite the initial enthusiasm on the part of the students, it was important to bear in mind that the availability of the interviewees might impose constraints upon data collection later on in the process (Mason, 2002). Fortunately, the interviewees remained committed throughout the study and enough rapport had been developed with the students by T2 that they were willing to make time to meet. Apart from one student (Mario), who only took part in an interview at T2, all interviewees attended three interview sessions³². The interviews were conducted individually in a location on campus, usually in an empty classroom or a quiet seating area in a university building. They varied in length, lasting between 20 minutes and one hour. While an interview guide was used as ‘scaffolding’ for all interviews, flexibility and spontaneity were preserved by using probing questions emerging from the students’ accounts (Mason, 2002). The aim of the interviews was to explore how the students themselves felt they were adjusting and how they experienced the various aspects of life and study in the UK. The interviewees were asked broadly about the areas covered in the survey, namely to talk about their experiences in daily life, their academic studies, their sense of wellbeing and their social interaction with others. Initial interview questions were open-

³² One interview had to be conducted online at T3 as the student had returned home.

ended (e.g. ‘How are things going for you at the moment?’). This technique allowed for themes to emerge from the students’ own accounts. These initial ‘grand-tour’ questions were followed by more directive ‘mini-tour’ questions (Spradley, 1979) probing more specific aspects depending on the interviewee’s initial response (Table 3.6).

In the first interview round, students were asked to recall their motivations for coming to the UK and their experiences during their first few days in the host environment. They were also asked about issues that could affect their adjustment such as their reasons for study abroad, factors affecting their choice of destination country and host university, and their prior knowledge of the UK. In the second interview session, participants were asked about their Christmas holiday, and about what had changed for them since the first interview five months earlier. In the third interview round, students were again asked about what had changed for them since the last interview, and were asked to recall their experiences during the second semester - see appendices D to F for the interview guides. All interviews were recorded, transcribed for analysis and then anonymised.

Two limitations need to be acknowledged with regard to the interviews. First, most participants did not speak their first language in the interviews³³ and may thus have been hindered from communicating in a fully flowing manner, although all students had fulfilled the host university’s English language entrance requirement. Secondly, the interviewees were self-selected volunteers and thus likely to be more confident, open-minded and linguistically skilled than the general cohort (cf. Young et al., 2013). Thus, it is possible that these students may have followed an adjustment trajectory different from those who did not volunteer to participate in the interviews (Coles and Swami, 2012).

<p><i>Grand tour questions</i> A broad question, designed to elicit rich descriptions and a broad picture of the participant’s world (Spradley, 1979)</p>	<p><i>Example</i> Could you tell me about your experiences in the first semester?</p>
<p><i>Mini tour questions</i> More specific questions, often stimulated by a response to a grand tour question, to investigate smaller aspects of experience (Spradley, 1979)</p>	<p><i>Examples</i> You said that the academic system in your home country is different to the one in the UK – could you tell me a little bit more about this? Could you tell me about your experience with group work?</p>

Table 3.6 Example Interview Questions

³³ The two US interviewees (Robin and Sarah) used their L1, English, in the interviews

The method chosen to analyse the interviews was ‘thematic analysis’ (Boyatzis, 1998). A detailed account of the data analysis procedure follows below.

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data was analysed both for descriptive information (percentages of responses and measures of central tendency) and for the relationships between variables. The *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS) was used for analysis. Pearson-product-moment correlation analyses were performed to investigate relationships between the contributory factors and outcome variables. Linear simple and multiple regression analyses using the enter method were conducted to assess the predictive validity of the contributory factors for the adaptation indices. Some contributory factors were measured at T1 and at T2 (i.e. IC, ELA, KNW) – for these, only the T1 measures were included in the analysis to answer the question whether they can really predict adaptation over a period of time.

Finally, independent-sample t-tests were performed to compare mean differences between groups, and paired-sample t-tests were performed to investigate changes in mean scores over time. An alpha-level of .05 was used for statistical tests unless otherwise indicated. Findings are illustrated visually in tables and graphs throughout this thesis. It is important to note that the word ‘predictor’ is used throughout the thesis in a statistical and not in a casual sense (cf. Rosenthal et al., 2006). Thus, the term ‘predictor’ is used when referring to variables that have been found to be statistically significant with regard to the variance explained in an outcome variable. ‘Contributory factors’ is used in a broader sense to refer to aspects which might play a role in students’ adaptation.

Before any analysis was conducted, the data was carefully screened to identify incomplete surveys and outliers, and determine whether it met the underlying assumptions of parametric tests (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2007). Normality of variables is generally assessed using statistical and/or graphical methods (Leimeister, 2009). It is important to stress that researchers have pointed out that exact normal distributions are rare (Micceri, 1989); nonetheless it was important to discern whether the data meet certain normality criteria. However, there may be problems associated with statistical normality-testing because variables in large data sets are likely to fail these tests even if the distribution only mildly deviates from a normal distribution (Motulsky, 2010; Kim,

2013). Thus, some scholars argue for the use of graphical analysis and ‘eyeball testing’ (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 1999, Hair et al., 2006; Kim, 2013). The shape of each distribution was therefore scrutinised visually using histograms, by superimposing a normal curve over the top, and by producing Q-Q plots for each variable. Apparent outliers³⁴ in the data were identified, assessed and, in some cases, omitted from the data set as is recommended for inferential statistics (Field, 2005)³⁵. After omitting outliers, these visual screens showed normal distributions for all variables.

3.6.2 Qualitative data analysis

Thematic content analysis (TCA; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Boyatzis, 1998) was employed on both the interview transcripts, and on responses to the final open survey question. The thematic focus in the analysis of both sets of qualitative data was students’ comments on their own broadly successful and unsuccessful adjustment to the new environment (cf. Young et al., 2013). Analysis involved careful scrutinising of each transcript and repeated listening of the audio recordings until recurring patterns or themes began to emerge (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). It is important to note that although theme identification is of central importance to TCA, the process of theme discovery is rarely made explicit in research studies (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). As Mann (2011) states:

Problematic aspects of data-collection, analysis, and representation are frequently left aside. Instead, selected ‘voices’ are arranged in what might be termed a journalistic tableau: there is something appealing, varied and often colourful in their deployment but they tend to be presented bereft of context and methodological detail (p. 6).

One of the biggest challenges of TCA is that there is no universal solution for theme identification - in qualitative data analysis we do not have measures such as Cronbach’s alpha at our disposal to assess reliability and validity. Therefore, we must maximise clarity and trustworthiness by making explicit to the reader the techniques used to generate themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). As Dey (1993) points out:

There is no single set of categories [themes] waiting to be discovered. There are as many ways of ‘seeing’ the data as one can invent (p. 110-11).

³⁴ An outlier can be described as a data point situated far outside the norm for a variable population, which can lead to distortions of parameters and statistic estimates (Osborne, 2008).

³⁵ Motulsky (2010) notes that outliers could reflect data entry mistakes or could simply be a result of natural variability.

Before a detailed outline of theme discovery can be provided, it is worthwhile to briefly address what exactly constitutes a ‘theme’. Ryan and Bernard (2003) describe themes as “abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs” (p. 87) that link expressions found in text or audio data. Boyatzis (1998) defines a theme as:

[...] a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon (p. 161).

Opler (1945) first emphasised the link between themes and what he called ‘expressions’ in the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) later referred to these expressions as ‘incidents’. In TCA, expressions or incidents occurring in the data corpus are classified as themes. In other words, a theme can be seen as an umbrella-term linking together similar occurrences in the data. For example, if several international students express difficulties with being far away from family and friends, these expressions can be classified under the theme ‘homesickness’. Other words used in the literature to describe themes include ‘codes’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994), ‘categories’ (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Meier and Daniels, 2011), or ‘labels’ (Dey, 1993).

As Ryan and Bernard (2003) state, themes can be derived from the data (i.e. inductively) and/or from the researcher’s prior theoretical and empirical understanding of the phenomenon under study (i.e. deductive or a priori approach). With regard to the latter approach, questions in the interview guide are often the basis for theme generation (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). However, even if a fixed set of questions is used, it is impossible to foresee all the themes which may arise (Dey, 1993). Thus, in order to fully explore the phenomenon under study, an inductive approach is paramount. Grounded theorists refer to this process as ‘open coding’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In the present study, both approaches were used in order to avoid the drawbacks of using only one approach as discussed below. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) highlight:

By examining the data from a more theoretical perspective, researchers must be careful not to find only what they are looking for. Assiduous theory avoidance, on the other hand, brings the risk of not making the connection between data and important research questions (p. 94).

Using NVivo 9, students’ comments were initially sorted into four broad analytical categories. The overall organising principle for this sorting process was students’ orientations towards life and study in the UK and their own adjustment. Thus, as a first analytical step responses were divided into ‘positive’, ‘negative’, ‘neutral’ and

‘problematizing’ comments. A comment was classified as ‘problematizing’ if the student identified an aspect of their sojourn as problematic while not overtly exhibiting a negative orientation or describing a negative experience. The fine line between some ‘negative’ and ‘problematizing’ comments was distinguished by looking at the students’ choice of words. For example, if the interviewee indicated a clear position (e.g. ‘I don’t like writing essays in English’), the statement was classified as a negative orientation. However if the student used more tentative language (e.g. ‘It can be difficult to write essays in English’), it was classified as ‘problematizing’ (see Table 3.7 below for example categorisations).

Analytical Category	Example Comments
Positive <i>Positive orientation/experience</i>	‘I like it [the programme] because it's very international.’ (Anna, T2) ‘It was nice working with other people as opposed to just yourself going to the library.’ (Sarah, T1)
Negative <i>Negative orientation/experience</i>	‘I am not happy with the dissertation part because there are too many students.’ (Celik, T2) ‘Sometimes I felt I had to teach my course mates and that I didn't expect. I came here to learn.’ (Kaari, T2)
Problematizing <i>Discussing the problematic/complex nature of an issue</i>	‘It is a little bit more challenging to work in a group with more Chinese students.’ (Veronika, T2) ‘It takes lots of time to analyse literature, to read it, because, you know, I'm, like, translating at the same time while reading.’ (Gabriel, T2)
Neutral <i>An impartial statement</i>	‘I'm kind of surprised because there aren't that many British students taking the master's degree.’ (Lydia, T1) ‘The classroom environment here is very different from Malaysia.’ (Elya, T1)

Table 3.7 Analytical Categories and Example Comments

In a second analytical step, every statement in the four broad categories was further analysed for content and placed under an appropriate heading or thematic ‘node’, along with any others which were sufficiently similar (Hannan, 2007). Here, the interest was in the general adjustment trajectory as well as individual nuances. It is important to note that the importance of a theme might not necessarily be reflected merely by its frequency (Hesse-Biber, 2010), thus analysis focused on frequency as well as intensity of comments. In practice this meant that responses were coded by frequency, specificity and emotionality in order to discern the importance of a theme across the data set and for each participant. On an ‘inter-respondent level’ (Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie, 2003), it

was possible to discern how many interviewees contributed to each theme across the whole data set. On an ‘intra-respondent level’ (ibid.) it was possible to discern how often an interviewee commented on a theme (frequency), how extensively they spoke about it (specificity) and what kind of language they used in the process (emotionality). This inductive process generated a collection of emerging (sub)themes (Figure 3.6).

Throughout this thesis, themes will be supported by verbatim quotations from the students in order to establish a clear link with the raw data. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. With regard to the generalizability of the findings, it is acknowledged that a small interviewee sample makes it difficult to draw general conclusions (Brown and Holloway, 2008). Nevertheless, the interviews provided valuable insights into the subjective ‘lived’ experiences of individual student sojourners.

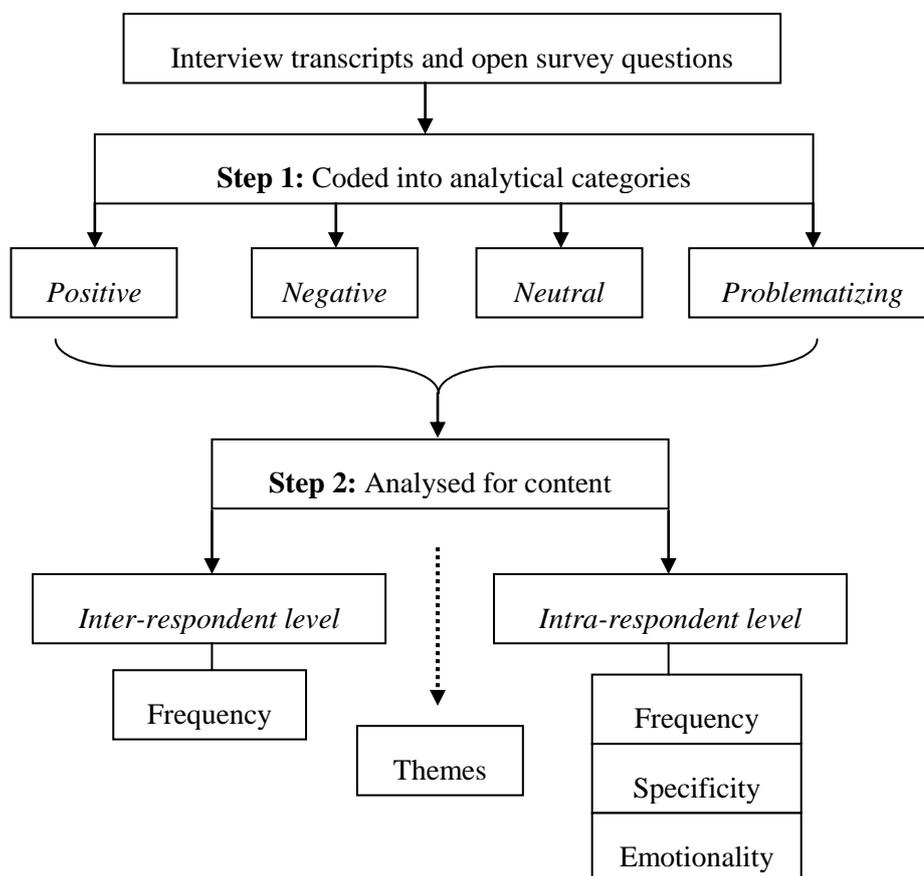


Figure 3.6 Analytical Procedure for the Qualitative Data Analysis

The decision to use NVivo for analysis was made on the grounds that it was available free of charge to the researcher, and for its potential to organise large volumes of data. For example, NVivo’s word query function provided a swift way of counting who said

what and when. The time required to become familiar with the software also played an important role in the decision making process (cf. Welsh, 2002). The availability of training courses at the university and readily accessible online tutorials allowed the researcher to quickly become skilful in the use of the software. CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) is the abbreviation commonly used to refer to software packages such as NVivo which assist the researcher with the organisation and analysis of data that requires human interpretation (Clare, 2012). The use of CAQDAS has been heavily debated by qualitative researchers - some authors have expressed concern that computer assisted methods might steer the researcher in a certain direction (e.g. Seidel, 1991). Welsh (2002) however, puts forward that CAQDAS aids the researcher “in her or his search for an accurate and transparent picture” (p. 1). Nonetheless, it has been suggested that automated search functions should be combined with manual techniques to guarantee that the data was in fact thoroughly explored (e.g. Ryan and Bernard, 2003). As Brown et al. (1990) suggest, automated word queries do not take into account “the existence of multiple synonyms” and may therefore lead to “partial retrieval of information” (p. 136). Thus, both automated search queries and manual line-by-line coding were used in this study. Theme charts are used throughout the thesis to illustrate the main essences of students’ accounts.

Chapter 4. Descriptive Statistics

Before quantitative and qualitative findings regarding students' academic (Chapter 5), psychological (Chapter 6) and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation (Chapter 7), and friendship networks (Chapter 8) are presented, this chapter presents results from the descriptive and comparative analysis of the contributory factors and outcome variables, including measures of central tendency and measures of internal consistency (Cronbach's α). A series of independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare differences between groups (i.e. course type, pre-sessional English training, prior overseas experience, extra-curricular activities). Differences between students of different nationalities were not investigated as the sample was too diverse to allow for cross-country comparisons. A priori categorisations along regional or 'cultural' lines (i.e. 'East Asians', 'Europeans', 'North Americans' etc.) were deemed too broad to accurately reflect any real differences although this approach has been employed in prior research (e.g. Hofstede, 2003; Thomson et al., 2006). Furthermore, the gender bias in the sample was too great to allow for gender comparisons.

Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to investigate changes over time in those variables that were measured at both T1 and T2 (i.e. ELA, IC, KNW, SWL, PWB). Results are presented first for the contributory factors, followed by the outcome variables.

4.1 English Language Ability

Students' TOEFL scores were converted into their IELTS equivalent (cf. ETS, 2013). The overall mean IELTS score for the sample ($N = 173$)³⁶ was 6.73 ($SD = .63$). Self-rated ELA was measured at entry-point (T1, October) and at exit-point (T2, June) in order to monitor whether and, if so how, it was affected by study abroad. Reliability for the ELA scale was satisfactory with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 on the T1-measure and 0.87 on the T2-measure. The overall mean response for ELA was 3.22 at T1 ($SD = .70$, $Min = 1.25$, $Max = 5.00$), and 3.41 at T2 ($SD = .77$, $Min = 1.50$, $Max = 5.00$). A paired-samples t-test revealed that this difference was statistically significant, $t(129) = -2.34$, $p = .021$. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not able to communicate at all to their own satisfaction in the English language, and 5 being a great deal, 52 per cent of participants

³⁶ Some students did not submit IELTS scores to the host university as they were either first language speaker of English or were exempt from the examination.

rated themselves positively (i.e. above the midpoint of the scale) at T1. The remainder (48%) self-rated at the midpoint or below (i.e. 3-1). At T2, 58 per cent of respondents self-rated above the midpoint of the scale and 42 per cent self-rated at the midpoint or below.

Table 4.1 displays measures of central tendency for the four skill areas measured in the ELA scale (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking). A paired-samples t-test revealed that nine months into their degree programme, students self-rated significantly higher on reading ability; $t(129) = -3.49, p < .01$; and writing ability; $t(128) = -5.33, p < .01$.

	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking
Time 1				
M	3.38	2.75	3.55	3.13
SD	.94	.88	.98	1.04
Time 2				
M	3.64**	3.18**	3.60	3.23
SD	.84	.93	.90	1.00

**significant at $p < .01$

Table 4.1 Measures of Central Tendency for ELA Subscales at T1 and T2

In the follow-up survey, the majority of interviewees (7 students) felt that their English had improved ‘a bit’; three interviewees felt that it had improved ‘a lot’; one interviewee felt that it ‘got worse’. Box 4.1 presents demographic variables that had a significant impact on students’ ELA.

Box 4.1 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on ELA

- **Pre-sessional English training:** Students who undertook English language foundation courses reported significantly lower ELA at T1 ($M = 3.07, SD = .64$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.36, SD = .74$) in an independent-samples t-test adjusted for inequality of variances, $t(196.21) = -2.98, p = .003$. Students who undertook English language foundation courses also reported significantly lower ELA at T2 ($M = 3.01, SD = .57$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.65, SD = .78$) in an independent-samples t-test adjusted for inequality of variances, $t(128.78) = -5.46, p < .001$.
- **Overseas experience (> 5 months):** Students with previous overseas experience reported significantly higher ELA at T1 ($M = 3.36, SD = .67$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.13, SD = .67$), $t(197) = -2.25, p = .026$.
- **Extra-curricular activities:** Students who participated in extra-curricular activities scored significantly higher on ELA T1 ($M = 3.41, SD = .71$) than those who did not undertake these activities ($M = 3.10, SD = .73$), $t(125) = 2.23, p = .027$.

The results indicate that an academic sojourn abroad may have positive effects on student sojourners' English language development. Paired-samples t-tests showed that respondents self-rated their ELA significantly higher at T2 than at T1. Of the four skill areas, reading and writing ability were rated significantly higher nine months into the degree programme, suggesting that these skills may have improved as a direct consequence of academic study in an environment where independent reading and essay writing were the norm. Moreover, students with prior overseas experience scored significantly higher on ELA T1 than those without such experiences, further pointing to a positive relationship between time spent abroad and English language development. Finally, students who took part in extra-curricular activities scored significantly higher on ELA T1 than those who did not undertake such activities, suggesting that those with more confidence in their language abilities were perhaps more inclined to engage in such activities.

4.2 Knowledge about the UK

One survey measure asked students to self-rate how knowledgeable they felt about the UK at entry and at exit point. The overall mean response at T1 was 3.00 ($SD = .80$, $Min = 1.00$, $Max = 5.00$) and 3.20 at T2 ($SD = .77$, $Min = 1$, $Max = 5$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(137) = -3.89$, $p < .001$. Overall, most respondents self-rated at 3 ('moderate knowledge') at T1 (53%) as well as at T2 (57%). At T1, a total of 25 per cent of respondents self-rated at 2 ('hardly any knowledge') or 1 ('no knowledge'), and 24 per cent self-rated at 4 ('good knowledge') or 5 ('a lot of knowledge'). At T2 these numbers stood at 13 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively. Box 4.2 shows demographic variables with a significant impact on KNW.

Box 4.2 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on KNW

- **Pre-sessional English training:** Students who undertook English language foundation courses at the host university reported significantly lower levels of KNW ($M = 2.88$, $SD = .72$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .85$), $t(202) = -1.96$, $p = .051$.

A paired-samples t-test showed that students rated their knowledge about the UK significantly higher at T2, indicating that prolonged exposure to the host environment resulted in increased knowledge about the host country. Interestingly, students who undertook pre-sessional English courses reported significantly lower KNW at T1 than those who did not undertake such courses. This indicates that pre-sessional English courses may not have the desired effect of helping students to acquire 'culture-specific' knowledge about the UK (INTO, 2013).

4.3 Autonomy in the Decision to Study Abroad

In order to measure the degree of students' autonomy in the decision to study abroad, a *Relative Autonomy Index* (RAI, cf. Chirkov et al., 2007) was computed from the self-regulation subscales with a positive score reflecting the prevalence of autonomous motivation over controlled motivation (see Chapter 3). Table 4.2 presents descriptive statistics for the RAI and the four self-regulation subscales. Scale means for intrinsic motivation and identified regulation were above the midpoint of the scale, and below that midpoint for introjected motivation and external regulation. The SD for the subscales varied between .71 and .81.

	RAI	INTRI	IDENT	INTRO	EXTER
M	6.84	4.20	4.03	2.45	1.56
SD	3.12	.80	.80	.81	.71
Min	-2.50	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00
Max	12.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	3.50
α	-	.83	.60	.69	.55

Note: INTRI = intrinsic motivation, IDENT = identified regulation, INTRO = introjected regulation, EXTER = external regulation

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics for the RAI and the Self-regulation Subscales

A reliability analysis of the self-regulation subscales yielded a sufficiently high reliability coefficient for intrinsic motivation and introjected regulation, whereas it was lower for identified regulation and external regulation. The lower Cronbach alpha value of external regulation can be interpreted in light of its distribution. As a measure that deviates more from a normal distribution, it is more likely to have a low reliability estimate relative to scales that deviate less from a normal distribution (Brown, 2002). Researchers have also pointed out that Cronbach's alpha can be sensitive to the number of items in a scale (Wilson, Magarey and Mastersson, 2008). In fact, Pallant (2004) argues that Cronbach alpha values below .70 are common in scales with less than ten items. The self-regulation scales consisted of less than ten items which could explain lower alpha values. In light of the above, it might be valuable to consider the correlations between the items representing each subscale in order to gauge their relatedness rather than relying solely on Cronbach's alpha (as recommended by John and Benet-Martinez, 2000). The two items representing identified motivation correlated significantly with each other ($r_s = .44$), as did the two items representing external regulation ($r_s = .51$). Box 4.3 presents demographic variables with a significant impact on the RAI.

Box 4.3 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on the RAI:

- **Course type:** The MA CCC students scored significantly higher on the RAI ($M = 7.47, SD = 2.99$) than MA ALT students ($M = 5.99, SD = 3.09$), $t(219) = 3.59$, $p < .001$.
- **Pre-sessional English training:** Students who undertook English language foundation courses at the host university scored significantly lower on the RAI ($M = 5.83, SD = 2.95$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 7.27, SD = 3.08$), $t(201) = -3.39$, $p = .001$.

The mean score for the RAI was 6.84, indicating that autonomous motivation prevailed over controlled motivation in the sample. This is also reflected in the scale means for the self-regulation subscales, with intrinsic and identified motivation showing higher means than the introjected and external regulation subscales. This shows that most students in the sample made their decision to study abroad independently of external factors. Next, an independent-samples t-test revealed that the MA CCC students scored significantly higher on the RAI than their peers on the MA ALT (Box 4.3). Further research into this course type effect is necessary to determine the underlying reasons for this difference. It may be that something in the disposition of students studying cross-cultural communication may make them more inclined to the idea of study abroad. Finally, students who undertook pre-session English training scored significantly lower on the RAI than those who did not undertake such courses. It may be that students with lower ELA (i.e. those attending English courses) are less inclined to embark on a sojourn abroad, whereas those with confidence in their ELA may be more likely to make the decision to study abroad independently from others.

4.4 Intercultural Competence

As with ELA, IC was assessed at entry and exit-point to investigate possible effects of study abroad. First, scale means were computed for the five MPQ subscales. Table 4.3 presents the means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations for the five MPQ subscales measured at T1. A close look at the correlations reveals that the five subscales were not independent with Pearson's r ranging from .22 to .65, although the correlations were not high enough to create concern for multicollinearity (cf. Yakumina et al., 2012). At T1, respondents scored above the midpoint of the 5-point scale on cultural empathy (CE), open mindedness (OM), social initiative (SI) and flexibility (FL), and nearer to the midpoint on emotional stability (ES). SD varied between .38 and .45. Particularly high means were found for CE and OM. Cronbach's alpha (α) was sufficiently high for all five subscales at T1 and at T2³⁷.

³⁷ For a rule of thumb for interpreting Cronbach's alpha, see George and Mallery (2003): $\alpha > .9$ (excellent), $\alpha > .8$ (good), $\alpha > .7$ (acceptable), $\alpha > .6$ (questionable), $\alpha > .5$ (poor), $\alpha < .5$ (unacceptable)

	Subscales	2	3	4	5	M	SD	α
1	Cultural empathy	.60**	.47**	.09	.22**	3.78	.41	.81
2	Open mindedness		.65**	.30**	.31**	3.66	.41	.81
3	Social initiative			.35**	.37**	3.34	.45	.85
4	Emotional stability				.23**	3.08	.39	.76
5	Flexibility				-	3.19	.38	.75

**significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Table 4.3 Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics MPQ Subscales at T1

Table 4.4 presents descriptive statistics for the five MPQ subscales measured at T2.

Again, the subscales correlated significantly with each other, with Pearson's r ranging from .26 to .74. At T2, participants scored above the scale midpoint on all subscales and SD varied between .40 and .48. Similar to T1, the highest means were found for CE and OM.

	Subscales	2	3	4	5	M	SD	α
1	Cultural empathy	.74**	.56**	.26**	.34**	3.76	.45	.88
2	Open mindedness		.67**	.36**	.43**	3.59	.46	.86
3	Social initiative			.35**	.52**	3.35	.48	.85
4	Emotional stability				.32**	3.12	.42	.82
5	Flexibility				-	3.24	.40	.77

**significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Table 4.4 Bivariate Correlations and Descriptive Statistics MPQ Subscales at T2

A paired-samples t-test indicated that mean scores for CE were significantly higher at T1 ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .40$) than at T2 ($M = 3.76$, $SD = .45$), $t(143) = 2.51$, $p = .013$.

Similarly, mean scores for OM were significantly higher at T1 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .42$) than at T2 ($M = 3.59$, $SD = .46$), $t(143) = 2.92$, $p = .004$. However, ES was lower at T1 ($M = 3.07$, $SD = .39$) than at T2 ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .42$). This difference was significant at the 90% level, $t(143) = -1.86$, $p = .065$. In light of these statistically significant differences, a number of group comparisons (between cohorts and subject-areas) were performed to explore possible underlying reasons for this difference. The results are presented below.

4.4.1 Comparison across Cohorts

Firstly, as data was collected from two consecutive cohorts of CCC and ALT students, the question emerged whether cohort type could impact on IC. Thus, as a first analytical step mean scores for IC were compared between cohorts. An independent-samples t-test revealed that the mean scores for IC at T1 and T2 did not differ significantly between the 2011/12 and the 2012/13 cohorts (Table 4.5)

	Cohort	M	SD		Cohort	M	SD
CE T1	2011	3.80	.43	CE T2	2011	3.77	.47
	2012	3.77	.40		2012	3.75	.45
OM T1	2011	3.65	.41	OM T2	2011	3.54	.48
	2012	3.67	.40		2012	3.62	.43
SI T1	2011	3.34	.44	SI T2	2011	3.39	.49
	2012	3.33	.46		2012	3.32	.47
ES T1	2011	3.06	.38	ES T2	2011	3.08	.40
	2012	3.10	.40		2012	3.15	.45
FL T1	2011	3.17	.39	FL T2	2011	3.22	.44
	2012	3.21	.43		2012	3.26	.37

Table 4.5 Differences in IC Mean Scores between Cohorts

In a second analytical step, each cohort was analysed separately for changes in IC scores between T1 and T2. Paired-samples t-tests revealed a significant decrease in mean scores for CE and OM in both cohorts (Table 4.6), providing further evidence for similar dynamics in both cohorts.

	2011	M	SD	t(67)	2012	M	SD	t(75)
CE	T1	3.84	.43		T1	3.83	.38	
	T2	3.77	.47	1.74^	T2	3.75	.45	1.80^
OM	T1	3.64	.43		T1	3.70	.41	
	T2	3.54	.48	2.44*	T2	3.62	.43	1.76^
SI	T1	3.39	.46		T1	3.37	.47	
	T2	3.39	.49	.16	T2	3.32	.47	1.12
ES	T1	3.04	.37		T1	3.09	.41	
	T2	3.08	.40	-1.10	T2	3.15	.45	-1.50
FL	T1	3.20	.42		T1	3.27	.38	
	T2	3.22	.44	-.69	T2	3.26	.45	.33

*significant at the 95% level, ^significant at the 90% level

Table 4.6 Intra-cohort Changes in IC Scores between T1 and T2

4.4.2 Comparison across Subject Areas

Next, the data was analysed for differences between subject areas. First, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to test for differences in the IC scores between the CCC group and the ALT group at T1 and T2. The test showed that the CCC students scored significantly higher than the ALT group on CE, OM, SI and FL at T1 and T2, respectively (Table 4.7).

	Subject	M	SD	t	df	Sig.
CE T1	CCC (N = 128)	3.87	.41			
	ALT (N = 95)	3.67	.39	3.60	221	< .001
OM T1	CCC	3.75	.40			
	ALT	3.54	.39	3.98	221	< .001
SI T1	CCC	3.42	.47			
	ALT	3.22	.39	3.59	217.29	.001
ES T1	CCC	3.09	.40			
	ALT	3.08	.39	.19	221	n.s
FL T1	CCC	3.29	.38			
	ALT	3.05	.33	5.05	221	< .001
CE T2	CCC (N = 108)	3.82	.46			
	ALT (N = 36)	3.57	.39	2.95	142	.004
OM T2	CCC	3.67	.44			
	ALT	3.34	.44	3.98	142	< .001
SI T2	CCC	3.42	.51			
	ALT	3.16	.33	3.60	93.98	.004
ES T2	CCC	3.12	.44			
	ALT	3.12	.37	-.11	142	n.s.
FL T2	CCC	3.31	.40			
	ALT	3.02	.31	3.90	142	< .001

Table 4.7 Differences in IC Mean Scores between Subject Areas

As the sample sizes differed greatly in size at T2, a second independent-samples t-test was conducted. This time, a randomly selected sub-sample of CCC students (N = 36) was compared to the ALT students. It was found that the CCC group scored significantly higher than the ALT group on OM, SI and FL (Table 4.8).

	Subject	M	SD	t
CE T2	CCC (N = 36)	3.73	.42	
	ALT (N = 36)	3.57	.39	1.64
OM T2	CCC	3.58	.48	
	ALT	3.34	.44	2.30*
SI T2	CCC	3.40	.54	
	ALT	3.16	.33	2.32*
ES T2	CCC	3.05	.42	
	ALT	3.12	.37	-.75
FL T2	CCC	3.21	.38	
	ALT	3.02	.31	2.19*

*significant at the 95% level

Table 4.8 Differences in IC Scores between CCC and ALT students at T2

The CCC and ALT groups were then analysed separately for differences in IC scores between T1 and T2. For the ALT group, a paired-samples t-test revealed that the mean score for OM was significantly lower at T2 ($M = 3.34$, $SD = .44$) than at T1 ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .40$), $t(35) = 2.33$, $p < .05$. For the CCC group, the same test showed that mean

scores for CE were significantly lower at T2 ($M = 3.82, SD = .46$) than at T1 ($M = 3.90, SD = .39$), $t(107) = 2.16, p < .05$. Scores for OM were also significantly lower at T2 ($M = 3.67, SD = .44$) than at T1 ($M = 3.74, SD = .40$), $t(107) = 2.08, p < .05$. This suggests that although the ALT students scored significantly lower on dimensions of IC than the CCC students, at T1 and T2, significant changes in CE and OM scores still exist for the CCC sample if the 36 ALT-students are removed from the data file. Also, both subject groups showed a significant decrease of mean scores on some IC-dimensions, thus suggesting similar dynamics in both subject-groups.

Box 4.4 below presents other demographic variables with a significant impact on IC scores.

Box 4.4 Other Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on IC measured at T1

- **Pre-sessional English training:** Students who undertook English language foundation courses at the host university scored significantly lower on:
 - CE ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .39$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .40$), $t(203) = -2.62$, $p = .009$.
 - OM ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .40$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .39$), $t(203) = -2.38$, $p = .018$.
 - SI ($M = 3.20$, $SD = .38$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.38$, $SD = .45$), $t(201.02) = -3.18$, $p = .002$.
 - FL ($M = 3.11$, $SD = .33$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .42$), $t(203) = -2.82$, $p = .005$.
- **Overseas experience (> 5 months):** Students with previous overseas experience scored significantly higher on:
 - OM ($M = 3.76$, $SD = .39$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.59$, $SD = .40$), $t(219) = -3.08$, $p = .002$.
 - SI ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .45$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.26$, $SD = .43$), $t(219) = -3.00$, $p = .003$.
 - FL ($M = 3.28$, $SD = .37$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .38$), $t(219) = -2.98$, $p = .003$.
- **Extra-curricular activities:** Students who undertook extra-curricular activities scored significantly higher on:
 - SI ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .45$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .47$), $t(139) = 2.38$, $p = .019$.
 - FL ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .38$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .37$), $t(139) = 2.71$, $p = .008$.

4.4.3 Discussion of Changes in IC over Time

The findings showed significant changes in IC over time: after nine months of study in the UK, mean scores for cultural empathy (CE) and open mindedness (OM) had dropped significantly whereas the mean score for ES showed a significant increase – there are various possible explanations as discussed below.

Firstly, an explanation for the significantly lower ES score at entry point could be the timing of the T1 survey – students had only recently arrived in the UK and probably experienced early acculturative stress as a result of cross-cultural transition (Berry, 2006). Not surprisingly therefore, students reported lower ES at the beginning of their sojourn. This corresponds closely to findings from recent empirical studies which depict the initial sojourn stage as a time of particular stress and nervousness (e.g. Brown and Holloway, 2008), and is supported by Ward et al. (2001) who claim that psychological distress is likely to be highest early in the sojourn when coping resources (e.g. social support) are at their lowest while the number of life changes is high. After nine months in the UK, students had become more familiar and settled in the new environment and were thus likely to feel more emotionally stable, possibly resulting in a significantly higher mean score for ES.

In light of the significant drop in mean scores for CE and OM, it is tempting to conclude that a sojourn abroad can have a negative bearing on students' IC. However, it would be unreasonable to draw final conclusions about the development of IC, and the effects of a sojourn abroad, based on a snapshot of a nine-month period. As the development of IC is widely seen as an ongoing and lengthy process (Deardorff, 2009), the assessment of IC can only be longitudinal in nature. As Deardorff (2006) asserts, IC needs to be assessed throughout time – not solely at one or two points in time. The observed changes might simply be part of the dynamic and continual process that characterises IC development, a process which may include moments of stagnation or even regression (Fantini, 2005). As Deardorff (2009: xiii) states, there is “no pinnacle at which someone becomes interculturally competent”. Thus, while it is important to acknowledge that a sojourn abroad and/or prolonged intercultural contact may provide excellent opportunities to develop IC (e.g. Hoffa, 2007; Hoffa and DePaul, 2010); measuring and quantifying IC development over time might not be a simple task. As Fantini (2000) posits:

“...once the process has begun, ICC development is an on-going and lengthy - often a lifelong - process. Occasionally, individuals experience moments of regression or stagnation, but normally there is no end point. One is always in the process of ‘becoming’, and one is never completely ‘interculturally competent’. (p. 29)

What is more, it is important to acknowledge that despite a statistically significant drop in CE and OM from T1 to T2, scale means for these two dimensions remained high relative to the other dimensions and were similar to the mean scores found in previous

studies: high means for CE and OM in relation to the other dimensions have been found among several international student samples (e.g. Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002; Leong, 2007; Young et al., 2013). Thus, we cannot conclude that CE and OM became 'low' as a result of study abroad – further research measuring IC at various points in time is needed to chart the path of IC development in student sojourners. To date, several longitudinal studies have investigated changes in IC of high school students in international schools (e.g. Straffon, 2003) and of university students on study abroad programmes (e.g. Engle and Engle, 2004; Jackson, 2010), however studies of international postgraduate students studying for a degree abroad are scarce. International doctoral students would perhaps be a more suitable participant group than students on one-year programmes as this group could be measured over a number of years in the host environment.

A further tentative explanation for the drop in CE and OM over time could perhaps be that initial high CE and OM could leave students more vulnerable to disappointed expectations associated with their intercultural experiences in the host country (Herrera, 2012), resulting in lower self-ratings at T2. Thus, it might be possible that negative experiences, or disappointed expectations, related to intercultural encounters could have impacted on self-ratings at T2. There are, for example, studies that suggest that interpersonal differences and communication difficulties as part of multicultural group work may have negative effects on students' motivation, progression and retention (e.g. Appelbaum, Elbaz and Shapiro, 1998). Could it not be, then, that challenges associated with intercultural encounters might also have a bearing on students' IC, at least temporarily? Further longitudinal research is needed to ascertain this claim but it seems that, based on the evidence from this study, prolonged exposure to multicultural settings alone does not automatically lead to increased IC. Another possible explanation could be that students may have overestimated their CE and OM at the start of the sojourn and that, nine months later, they were able to more accurately report on their actual behaviour, relating it to their first-hand 'lived' experiences during the sojourn. Social psychologists have previously pointed to the tendency of people to overestimate their competence: a series of studies by Dunning and colleagues has shown that, when it comes to self-judgement, people often overestimate their abilities when presented with hypothetical choices (Kruger and Dunning, 1999; Epley and Dunning, 2000; Dunning and Ehrlinger, 2003). A study by Altshuler, Sussman and Kachur (2003) comparing two intercultural sensitivity elements, showed a

gap between participants' perceived and actual worldview, further pointing to a tendency of respondents to overestimate their IC. Researchers have also expressed concern about the use of self-report instruments to assess IC. Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005), for instance, have questioned the ability of respondents who have little intercultural experience to accurately assess their behaviour and tendencies in multicultural settings. It could thus be that the IC scores obtained at T2 are a more accurate reflection of students' applied IC as opposed to the more hypothetical pre-sojourn T1 measure.

A further reason for lower CE and OM self-ratings at T2 could be underestimation – it has been suggested that 'culture' may impact on MPQ scale scores (cf. Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002). Rating-behaviour has been widely discussed in the literature, and cross-cultural comparisons indicate that respondents from East Asian countries tend to underestimate their abilities - the assumption is that the need for positive self-regard differs across cultures (Heine et al., 1999) and that thus East Asian survey respondents may be less inclined to describe themselves in a self-enhancing way, which in turn results in lower survey scores (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). As this study used a culturally heterogeneous sample of ISs, the small number of participants from each country (with the exception of the PRC) did not allow for detailed statistical comparisons based on place of origin. Further cross-cultural research could very usefully include more detailed considerations of demographic factors (e.g. country of origin) and how these impact on IC.

To sum up, while it is difficult to draw definite conclusions about the effects of study abroad on IC, findings from this study do confirm the assumed malleability of IC and, while admittedly limited in scope, the effort to monitor changes in MPQ scores over time constitutes, at the very least, a beginning for further longitudinal research on the development of IC among international student samples.

Finally, several demographical variables seemed to impact on students' IC scores. Firstly, students who undertook pre-sessional English courses, scored significantly lower on CE, OM, SI, and FL than their peers who did not undertake such courses, suggesting that students with lower ELA also show lower IC. This finding points to the intercultural dimension in foreign language learning (e.g. Byram, 1997) and suggests that English language competence may go hand in hand with development of IC. Secondly, students with prior overseas experience scored significantly higher on OM, SI, and FL than their peers without this experience. This finding points to a link

between prolonged periods spent abroad and IC development (e.g. Hoffa, 2007; Hoffa and DePaul, 2010). Thirdly, students who undertook extra-curricular activities scored significantly higher on SI and FL than their peers who did not undertake such activities. This indicates that proactive and flexible students may be more inclined to seek out opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities.

4.5 Social Contact

Table 4.9 presents a summary of students' responses to items concerning their degree of social contact with various groups. The highest means were found for contact with co-nationals and contact with non-co-national international students. Moreover, the percentages, using each of the five points of the rating scale, show that students reported most contact with people of their own nationality (75% recorded 'often' or 'very often'), followed by contact with non-co-national international students (63%), and contact with British people in the wider local community (25%). Contact with British students was least prevalent (10%). Sixty-two percent of respondents reported to have had contact with British students 'very occasionally' or 'almost never'.

Groups	Percentage ratings						
	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
BS	2.31	.96	19.4	43.1	27.8	6.9	2.8
CN	3.99	1.32	9.0	8.3	7.6	25.0	50.0
IS	3.95	.98	0.0	6.9	29.9	24.3	38.9
LC	2.65	1.19	21.5	23.6	29.9	18.8	6.3

Note: BS = British students, CN = co-nationals, IS = non-co-national international students, LC = members of the local community, 1 = 'almost never', 2 = 'very occasionally', 3 = 'occasionally', 4 = 'often', 5 = 'very often'

Table 4.9 Descriptive Statistics for Degree of Social Contact

Significant intercorrelations were found between the four social contact items. Contact with local students was positively related to contact with the wider local community ($r = .40, p < .01$). Contact with non-co-national international students was negatively associated with contact with co-nationals ($r = -.31, p < .01$), and positively related to contact with British students ($r = .19, p < .05$) and people in the wider community ($r = .21, p < .05$).

Table 4.10 shows interviewees' social contact patterns as indicated in the follow-up survey ($N = 12$). Contact with non-co-nationals was the most frequent form of social contact, both in the early sojourn stages and later on.

Type of social contact	Early stages	Later on
Mostly people from my own country	3	1
Mostly other non-British people	8	10
Mostly British people	1	1

Table 4.10 Interviewees' Social Contact Patterns

The quality of interviewees' social ties is illustrated in Table 4.11 ($N = 13$). It shows that while 'a friend with whom you socialised' was equally prevalent among the three social contact groups, 'a close friend with whom you could discuss private issues' was least prevalent with regard to contact with British people.

	Co-nationals	Internationals	British
A friend with whom you socialised	12	12	12
A close friend with whom you could discuss private issues	7	9	3
A partner	-	1	1

Table 4.11 Quality of Interviewees' Friendships

One way to form social ties is through extra-curricular activities. Overall, 98 students (69.5%) undertook some form of extra-curricular activity during their sojourn in the UK. This included, in order of frequency, joining sports clubs/gyms (39 students), joining Student Union societies (37), volunteering (33), attending religious gatherings (31), acting as student representative (11), and undertaking paid part-time work (6). Box 4.5 below shows demographic variables with a significant impact on social contact patterns.

Box 4.5 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on Degree of SC

- **Course type:**

- The MA ALT students reported higher levels of SC with co-nationals ($M = 4.53, SD = .84$) than MA CCC students ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.40$). This difference was statistically significant, $t(100.60) = -3.71, p < .001$.
- The MA CCC students reported higher levels of social mixing with non-co-national international students ($M = 4.07, SD = .98$) than the MA ALT students ($M = 3.58, SD = .91$). This difference was also statistically significant, $t(142) = 2.64, p = .009$, although these results need to be interpreted with care due to unequal sample sizes.

- **Overseas experience (> 5 months):**

- Students with previous overseas experience reported more contact with British students ($M = 2.46, SD = 1.13$) than those without this experience ($M = 2.16, SD = .75$). This difference was significant at the 90% level in an independent-samples t-test adjusted for inequality of variances, $t(112.08) = -1.87, p = .064$.
- Students with previous overseas experience also reported more contact with non-co-national international students ($M = 4.12, SD = .91$) than those without this experience ($M = 3.82, SD = 1.03$). This difference was significant at the 90% level, $t(141) = -1.86, p = .066$.
- Finally, students with previous overseas experience reported lower levels of contact with co-nationals ($M = 3.76, SD = 1.38$) than those without this experience ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.24$). This difference was also significant at the 90% level, $t(141) = 1.87, p = .063$.

- **Pre-sessional English training:**

- Students who undertook English language foundation courses at the host university reported significantly more social contact with co-nationals ($M = 4.33, SD = .83$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.85, SD = 1.47$) in an independent-samples t-test adjusted for inequality of variances, $t(130.68) = 2.38, p = .019$.
- Students who undertook foundation courses mixed significantly less with non-co-national international students ($M = 3.42, SD = .98$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 4.21, SD = .84$), $t(132) = -4.93, p < .001$.

Box 4.5 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on Degree of SC (cont'd)

▪ **Extra-curricular activities:**

- Students who did not undertake extra-curricular activities reported significantly more contact with co-nationals ($M = 4.53, SD = .91$) than those who did participate in these activities ($M = 3.72, SD = 1.41$), $t(139) = -3.47, p = .001$.
- Students who undertook extra-curricular activities reported significantly more contact with people in the local community ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.17$) than those who did not participate in these activities ($M = 2.33, SD = 1.23$), $t(139) = 2.17, p = .032$.
- Students who undertook extra-curricular activities reported more contact with British students ($M = 2.41, SD = 1.00$) than those who did not participate in these activities ($M = 2.12, SD = .79$). This difference was significant at the 90% level, $t(139) = 1.69, p = .093$.

Findings indicate that contact with co-nationals was most prevalent, closely followed by contact with other non-co-national international students. Overall, degree of contact with British people was low. The findings further suggest that students with high levels of co-national contact were less likely to associate extensively with non-co-national international students, suggesting that co-national contact may be detrimental to cross-cultural friendship formation. Moreover, those with high levels of contact with fellow international students were also likely to have high levels of contact with British people, indicating that those with a desire to form intercultural friendships were also more inclined to interact with host nationals.

A number of group differences with regard to degree of SC emerged from the analysis. Firstly, independent-samples t-tests revealed that the MA CCC students reported a greater degree of social mixing with non-co-national international students and less mixing with co-nationals than the MA ALT students. As the student cohort compositions were very similar between the two programmes (Chapter 3), it might be that dispositional factors of the students studying CCC may have made them more inclined to seek out intercultural friendships – further research is needed to ascertain this. Secondly, students with prior overseas experience reported greater levels of contact with non-co-national international students and with British students, indicating that

previous experience abroad may make students more inclined to seek out intercultural friendships. Thirdly, students who had undertaken pre-sessional English courses reported greater levels of social mixing with co-nationals and lower levels of mixing with non-co-national international students. This is most likely a direct consequence of skewed student intake on pre-sessional courses (i.e. most participants who undertook these courses were Chinese), where students had the opportunity to form close friendships with compatriots prior to the start of their programme of study which subsequently may have made them less inclined to seek out friendships beyond these circles. Finally, students who undertook extra-curricular activities reported greater degrees of contact with British people and lower levels of contact with compatriots. This suggests that participation in extra-curricular activities such as Student Union societies, volunteering, and part-time work facilitates greater integration of international students with the local community and encourages friendships beyond co-national circles.

4.6 Social Support

Reliability for the *Index of Sojourner Social Support* (ISSS) was high ($\alpha = .93$). The overall mean for SS was 3.25 ($SD = .77$, $Min = 1.20$, $Max = 5.00$). A majority (59%) of participants scored above the midpoint of the 5-point scale. The mean score for socio-emotional SS was 3.26 ($SD = .87$, $Min = 1.00$, $Max = 5.00$), and the mean score for instrumental SS was 3.23 ($SD = .79$, $Min = 1.44$, $Max = 5.00$). Among a similar sample of student sojourners in the UK, Young et al. (2013) previously found lower levels of SS ($M = 2.9$), with the majority of participants reporting low or medium levels of SS.

4.7 Academic adaptation

This section presents results regarding students' academic achievement. Little has been written about the academic outcomes of a sojourn abroad such as grades achieved on degrees (Morrison et al., 2005). An unusually fine-grained measure of academic achievement was used in this study, including grade point averages (GPAs) for the taught element of the degree programme, for the research element, and for the degree as a whole (cf. Young et al., 2013). Table 4.12 presents measures of central tendency for the academic achievement indicators. It shows that mean GPAs for all three indicators were within the UK degree classification 'pass with merit' which typically refers to GPAs between 60% and 69%. While there was considerable spread in the academic

achievement scores, the mean scores indicate that students generally performed well in their assessed work.

	Taught GPA (N = 142)	Research GPA (N = 140)	Degree GPA (N = 140)
M	63.18	63.10	63.20
SD	5.83	7.84	6.08
Min	41.2	35.0	42.9
Max	76.7	78.0	77.1

Table 4.12 Measures of Central Tendency Academic Achievement

Table 4.13 illustrates the interviewee's academic performance in relation to the rest of the cohort. A comparison of mean scores shows that the interviewees scored slightly higher on all three academic achievement indicators than the rest of the cohort.

However, an analysis of the differences in academic achievement of this sub-group relative to the performance of their whole cohort was found to be non-significant in an independent-samples t-test. Thus, in terms of academic adaptation the interviewees seem to be largely representative of their wider cohort.

		N	M	SD	Min	Max
Taught GPA	Interviewees	20	65.26	4.59	54.3	69.7
	Cohort	126	62.84	5.93	41.2	76.7
Research GPA	Interviewees	20	65.55	6.64	53.0	75.0
	Cohort	124	62.81	7.98	35.0	78.0
Degree GPA	Interviewees	20	65.48	4.72	53.9	70.3
	Cohort	124	62.88	6.18	42.9	77.1

Table 4.13 Interviewee's Academic Performance

In addition to academic achievement scores, measured as GPAs, two further, more subjective, measures of student experience were included in the T2 survey: self-rated academic adaptation (SRAA), and satisfaction with academic achievement (SWAA). The mean scale score for SRAA was 3.92 ($SD = .63$, $Min = 2.22$, $Max = 5.00$), indicating that students generally felt well-adjusted to the academic host environment nine months into the sojourn. Analysis showed that the items 'Dealing with academic staff' ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .80$) and 'Dealing with administrative staff' ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .77$) were rated highest. 'Writing academic essays' ($M = 3.41$, $SD = .91$, 54% self-rated at the midpoint or below) and 'Reading academic texts' ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .96$, 38%) had the lowest mean scores. Table 4.14 shows all the SRAA scale items ranked by the largest number of respondents who reported having experienced either 'extreme difficulty' or 'great difficulty' for a given item.

Rank	Items	Percentage of respondents reporting 'extreme difficulty' or 'great difficulty'
1	Writing academic essays	14.6%
2	Reading academic texts	11.8%
3	Expressing your ideas in class	13.2%
4	Referencing and citations	9%
5	Working in groups	7.6%
6	Understanding what is required of you	3.5%
7	Studying in English	2.8%
8	Dealing with administrative staff	2.1%
9	Dealing with academic staff	1.4%

Table 4.14 SRAA Items Rated as Most Difficult

The mean score for SWAA was 3.26 ($SD = .71$, $Min = 1.00$, $Max = 5.00$). Forty-eight students (34%) indicated that they were 'moderately satisfied' (i.e. 3) with their academic achievement. Forty-eight percent of respondents self-rated above the mid-point of the scale (i.e. 4-5). This indicates that students were overall satisfied with their academic achievement, albeit with some individual variation.

Box 4.6 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on Academic Achievement

▪ Course type:

- The MA CCC students had a significantly higher taught GPA mean score (63.83, $SD = 5.99$) than the MA ALT students ($M = 61.16$, $SD = 4.75$), $t(47.40) = 2.74$, $p = .016$.
- The MA CCC students had a significantly higher overall degree GPA mean score (63.85, $SD = 6.28$) than the MA ALT students ($M = 61.24$, $SD = 4.78$), $t(71.48) = 2.58$, $p = .012$.

▪ Pre-sessional English training:

- Students who attended pre-sessional English courses had a significantly lower taught GPA mean score (59.76, $SD = 4.96$) than those who did not attend such courses ($M = 65.10$, $SD = 5.58$), $t(135) = -5.68$, $p < .001$.
- Students who attended pre-sessional English courses had a significantly lower research GPA mean score (58.12, $SD = 7.41$) than those who did not attend such courses ($M = 65.48$, $SD = 6.55$), $t(133) = -6.04$, $p < .001$.
- Students who attended pre-sessional English courses had a significantly lower overall degree GPA mean score (59.20, $SD = 5.18$) than those who did not attend such courses ($M = 65.32$, $SD = 5.46$), $t(133) = -6.47$, $p < .001$.

▪ Previous overseas experience:

- Students with prior overseas experience had a significantly higher taught GPA mean score (64.25, $SD = 5.38$) than those without this experience ($M = 62.20$, $SD = 6.09$), $t(143) = -2.14$, $p = .034$.
- Students with prior overseas experience had a significantly higher research GPA mean score (65.03, $SD = 7.01$) than those without this experience ($M = 62.06$, $SD = 6.25$), $t(141) = -2.67$, $p = .009$.
- Students with prior overseas experience had a significantly higher degree GPA mean score (64.57, $SD = 5.60$) than those without this experience ($M = 62.06$, $SD = 6.25$), $t(141) = -2.53$, $p = .013$.

The findings suggest that, overall, the MA CCC students performed better academically than the MA ALT students. Further comparative research on these subject areas is needed to ascertain whether there might be something in the disposition of those studying CCC that might ease their adjustment to unfamiliar academic environments (cf. Young and Schartner, forthcoming 2014). Students who undertook pre-sessional English language courses performed significantly lower on all aspects of the degree programme than their peers who did not attend such courses. This points to a close link between ELA and academic performance. There are also indications in the data that prior overseas experience might impact on students' academic adaptation potential.

4.8 Psychological adaptation

Psychological adaptation was measured in terms of psychological wellbeing (PWB) and satisfaction with life (SWL). As with ELA, IC and KNW, these two measures were included in both the T1 and T2 surveys in an attempt to monitor changes over time. Table 4.15 displays descriptive statistics for PWB and SWL – no statistically significant differences were found for the mean scores between T1 and T2.

Variables	M	SD	Min	Max	α
PWB T1	3.60	.61	1.55	5.00	.86
PWB T2	3.54	.55	1.82	4.91	.86
SWL T1	3.46	.66	1.80	5.00	.87
SWL T2	3.48	.77	1.60	5.00	.87

Table 4.15 Descriptive Statistics for PWB and SWL at T1 and T2

Scores from Diener et al.'s (1985) *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS) can range from 5 to 25. The distribution of scores for the respondents is shown in Table 4.16. As can be seen, the majority of students were either 'satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' with their life in the host environment at T2, indicating that "life is enjoyable and the major domains of life are going well" (Diener, 2006).

Score on the SWLS	Frequency	Percentage
21-25 (extremely satisfied)	30	21.4%
16-20 (satisfied)	67	46.5%
15 (average)	7	4.9%
10-14 (dissatisfied)	36	25.1%
5-9 (extremely dissatisfied)	3	2.1%

Table 4.16 Distribution of Respondents' Scores on the SWLS

The interviewees completed measures for PWB and SWL at all three interview rounds. Table 4.17 shows descriptive statistics. Paired-sample t-tests showed that differences in

mean scores over time were not statistically significant, indicating that PWB and SWL remained relatively stable over time although the interview findings provided a more nuanced view on this (Chapter 6).

	N	M	SD	Min	Max
PWB T1	16	3.57	.51	2.73	4.45
PWB T2	20	3.61	.55	2.63	4.81
PWB T3	20	3.59	.53	2.55	4.27
SWL T1	16	3.59	.45	2.60	4.20
SWL T2	20	3.77	.71	1.80	4.80
SWL T3	20	3.69	.60	2.20	4.80

Table 4.17 Interviewees' PWB and SWL Scores over Time

There was a significant correlation between SWL and PWB ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) which is not uncommon (cf. Lewthwaite, 1996). This correlation suggests that students who feel happy are also likely to exhibit greater life satisfaction.

Box 4.7 presents demographic variables that had a significant impact on psychological adaptation.

Box 4.7 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on Psychological Adaptation:

- **Course type:** The MA ALT students reported lower SWL scores ($M = 3.25$, $SD = .71$) than the MA CCC students ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .77$), $t(141) = 2.01$, $p = .046$.
- **Pre-sessional English training:** Students who undertook English language foundation courses at the host university reported lower SWL scores ($M = 3.27$, $SD = .72$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 3.55$, $SD = .78$), $t(132) = -2.04$, $p = .043$.

In sum, scores for PWB and SWL at T2 were generally high, indicating that, overall, students were happy and satisfied with life in the host environment. Mean scores were slightly higher than in a comparable previous sample of student sojourners in the UK (cf. Young et al., 2013), although Young et al. (ibid) took the measure mid-sojourn when students were perhaps less well adjusted. Independent-samples t-tests showed that the MA ALT students reported lower SWL scores than the MA CCC students (Box 4.7). It may be possible that the implicit intercultural training the CCC students received might have aided their adjustment to life and study in the UK (cf. Young and Schartner, 2014, forthcoming) and could have resulted in higher SWL scores. Finally, students

who had undertaken pre-sessional English courses reported significantly lower SWL scores, indicating that those students with better language ability (i.e. those who did not need English language support) were more satisfied with their life in the host environment.

4.9 Sociocultural adaptation

The overall mean score for the *Sociocultural Adaptation Scale* (SCAS) was high at 4.05 ($SD = .45$, $Min = 2.61$, $Max = 5$), indicating that the majority of participants felt well-adjusted to the new sociocultural environment. Of the individual items, ‘Making British friends’ ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.05$) and ‘Understanding the local accent’ ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.00$) had the lowest mean scores, indicating that students experienced the greatest difficulties in these areas. A majority of students (65%) self-rated at the mid-point or below for ‘Making British friends’ and for understanding the local ‘Geordie’ accent (66%). ‘Making friends with people from your own country’ ($M = 4.62$, $SD = .80$) and ‘Going into restaurants and cafes’ ($M = 4.69$, $SD = .63$) were rated highest. Tables 4.18 and 4.19 below show the SCAS items that were rated as most difficult and least difficult. They were identified as follows: the percentage of respondents indicating that they experienced ‘extreme difficulty’ or ‘great difficulty’ for a given item (scale rating of 4-5), or ‘no difficulty’ and ‘slight difficulty’ (scale rating of 1-2); then the top nine (upper quartile) and the bottom nine (lower quartile) were selected (cf. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). As can be seen from the tables, a number of the items students rated as difficult were concerned with interactions with British people.

Rank	Items	Percentage of respondents reporting ‘extreme difficulty’ or ‘great difficulty’
1	Understanding the local accent	27.4%
2	Making British friends	26.4%
3	Seeing things from a British person’s point of view	20.4%
4	Meeting people from the local community	20.2%
5	Dealing with the climate	16.1%
6	Understanding jokes and humour	15.4%
7	Getting to know people in depth	15.3%
8	Seeing a doctor	13.8%
9	Understanding the UK political system	11.9%

Table 4.18 SCAS Items Rated as Most Difficult

Rank	Items	Percentage of respondents reporting 'no difficulty' or 'slight difficulty'
1	Going shopping	96.5%
2	Going into restaurants or cafes	95.2%
3	Following rules and regulations	94.4%
4	Making friends with people from your own country	92.2%
5	Being introduced to new people	91.6%
6	Talking about yourself with others	90.2%
7	Using the transport system	88.7%
8	Getting used to the pace of life	87.4%
9	Making friends with other international students	85.4%

Table 4.19 SCAS Items Rated as Least Difficult

Box 4.8 shows demographic variables with a significant impact on sociocultural adaptation.

Box 4.8 Demographic Variables with a Significant Impact on Sociocultural adaptation:

- **Pre-sessional English training:** Students who undertook English language foundation courses at the host university scored significantly lower on the SCAS ($M = 3.94, SD = .48$) than students who did not undertake foundation courses ($M = 4.07, SD = .41$). This difference was significant at the 90% level $t(132) = -1.78, p = .077$. This indicates that there might be a link between ELA and degree of sociocultural adaptation, although overall both groups scored highly on the SCAS.

Chapter 5. Academic Adjustment and Adaptation

This chapter presents findings regarding the first adjustment domain from the conceptual framework for this study: academic adjustment. Findings regarding the psychological and sociocultural adjustment domains are presented in the following chapters (Figure 5.1).

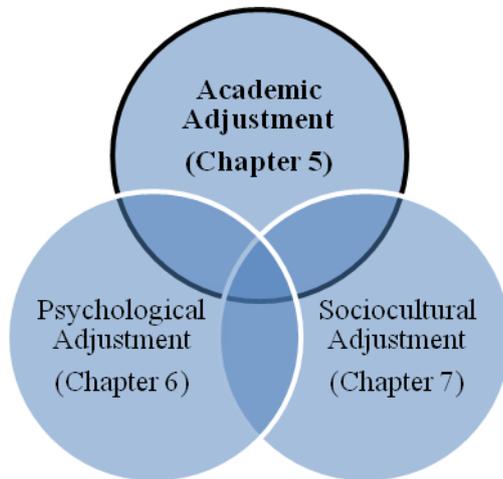


Figure 5.1 The Conceptual Focus of Chapter 5

As outlined in Chapter 2, academic adjustment is defined in this study as adjustment to the demands of academic life including styles of learning and teaching at the host university, and academic adaptation was measured as academic achievement. The focus on adjustment led to an exploration of the experiential academic adjustment over time from the perspective of the students themselves, as they were going through the experience. The focus on adaptation led to an evaluation of how well, or badly, students performed on their degree programmes and which factors contributed to their academic achievement. It was hoped that relating findings from both foci would provide a uniquely fine-grained perspective on the process and the outcomes of an academic sojourn (Figure 5.2).

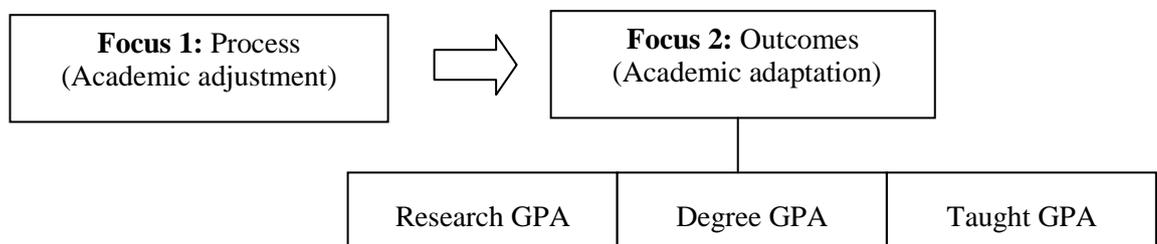


Figure 5.2 Investigating Academic Adjustment and Adaptation

The following research questions are addressed in this chapter:

1. How do English language ability, knowledge about the host country, prior overseas experience, autonomy in the decision to study abroad, intercultural competence, social contact and social support relate to different aspects of academic achievement?
2. What are the dynamics and patterns of student sojourners' academic adjustment over time?

Findings are presented below in the following order: Firstly, qualitative findings and representative data from each interview stage and the responses to the open survey question are presented and summarised (5.1). Secondly, the questionnaire results are presented, including descriptive statistics on academic adaptation, and associations between the contributory factors and the outcome variables (5.2). The chapter concludes with a summary and discussion of the findings (5.3).

5.1 Qualitative Findings

5.1.1 T1: Early teaching weeks

By the first interview round, participants had all undergone an induction to their programme of study but had only limited, initial first-hand experience with the conventions at the host university. Thus, students' comments were largely anticipatory in nature, often related to comparisons between previous experiences in their home countries and expectations for academic study in the UK. Across the sample as a whole, a majority of students' comments at T1 were either negative or problematizing, reflecting a great deal of doubt and initial insecurities about their own abilities. However, there was also a fair amount of positive comments on students' own academic adjustment – generally students seemed highly motivated, upbeat and optimistic about their academic adjustment as illustrated below:

I think if I carry that same work ethic that I had in undergrad into here I think I'll do just fine. (Sarah)

I'm thinking that I will put a lot of time into the study so I shouldn't have actual problems. (Lydia)

A majority commented on the highly 'international' make-up of their degree programme, and all who did so were positive about it. Students appeared particularly enthusiastic about opportunities for intercultural interaction:

I love being involved with international students [...] it's very exciting. I love that I can interact with so many people from different cultures. (Flora)

Our course is CCC and I think it's amazing that when you study a programme like that and also you study in the environment, so I think this is really enriching. (Gabriel)

However, some interviewees also commented on a perceived lack of British students:

I really like that it's an international environment but also I would like that more British people would be in the programme. (Anna)

Problematizing comments about their own English language abilities and 'new' academic practices such as independent learning and essay-writing featured prominently in the students' comments. Concerns about academic performance were often directly related to English language difficulties and a lack of confidence in language ability. For example, Mita felt that studying in a second language meant she had to work "extra-hard":

When I sit in a class and listen to lectures I have to listen to them and then have to translate it in my brain to my language and kind of just twice as hard as studying in my country.

Similarly, Ting pointed to the impact of language difficulties on academic achievement:

I'm not sure I will get an excellent score because of the limited language ability.

Others spoke about challenges associated with academic reading as illustrated in this exchange with Ying:

Y: [...] in this course we should read a lot of books but we all feel it's very hard to read book because we should look up the words all the time and then translate into Chinese and to think in Chinese but maybe it will have a difference in English way maybe, so maybe there are some differences.

I: Like a different meaning?

Y: Yeah, maybe we will have some misunderstanding, maybe. And it always take a long time for us to read even one page, and maybe we will spend one hour in reading just one page.

Concerns about English language ability were also associated with academic writing, and the prospect of regular assessed essays caused students to feel "worried" and "nervous":

I'm worried that I might not have this good level of academic writing. (Victoria)

Some interviewees felt inadequately prepared for the essay-based nature of their degree programme and comparisons between experiences in the home and host country were drawn to explain expected difficulty in adjusting to 'new' conventions:

I'm not really good in academic writing, so I'm just worried about that, and because back home it's very exam-oriented in a way that everything relies on exams. (Elya)

We just read, read, read and then we take the exam orally. We don't really write since we leave school, so academically speaking if I think about this year ahead I'm really worried about writing essays and that's it. (Ella)

On the whole, concerns about academic writing were mainly associated with limited previous experience, not having “the right vocabulary”, and engaging critically with academic texts:

I may not necessarily have all the vocabulary and that's why I wanna take some courses, academic writing. (Kaari)

Another aspect of the degree programmes, the emphasis on self-directed learning, was new to students from academic backgrounds where a more teacher-directed learning model was the norm. Robin described independent learning as:

[...] almost like I have to make class for myself in the library or in my room with reading.

Independent study was anticipated by some interviewees as “difficult” and “hard”.

The first day I feel a little difficult because I don't know where to ask [...] I'm used to be supported. This is very different [...] everything you should do by yourself. (Tao)

Here we should think independently and read or learn by ourselves most of the time so I found this a little hard. (Ying)

Others felt that limited classroom time could impact negatively on social contact, commenting on limited opportunities for friendship formation:

We don't have many courses in MA, so we cannot have a chance to know many people. We cannot see each other very frequently, so we cannot be close friends. (Celik)

People are much on their own [...] I haven't had any occasions yet to become friends with someone maybe because of that thing that all the system is based on the individual. (Ella)

However, students also commented positively on aspects of the new academic environment, including the benefits of self-directed learning and teaching styles.

Comparisons between conventions in the home and host county were frequent:

I like this system because before you come to lecture you just read and you just know something, so when teacher is speaking you know you can ask him, discuss. In Lithuania we don't do that. (Gabriel)

In Latvia it's more accepted that the teacher will explain you things and they are universal, you don't question them and it's also here your professors ask

you for your opinion and you can say whatever you want [...] I like the system here more. I feel more comfortable here. (Victoria)

The academic environment in UK universities is quite democratic and free. Self-respect is fully valued here. (Chinese student, female, T1 survey)

A number of interviewees also commented positively on initial staff-student interactions. Lecturers were described as approachable and friendly, although some practices, such as addressing professors by their first name, created some confusion and initial surprise among students as is illustrated in the exchange with Anna below:

A: [...] I think the professors are more reachable.

I: In what sense?

A: You can talk to them very freely [...] when I came here I expressed myself as 'sir' I think or 'mister' to Richard³⁸, yeah because back in Romania we say 'mister', 'professor' or...yeah and here "No, you just call me Richard". Ok you see, so I think they are more informal and this is way better.

To sum up, students' comments at T1 remained largely anticipatory or limited to initial experiences of academic conventions in the host environment as students could not yet comment on more specific aspects of their degree programme such as assessed work. Overall, a fair amount of doubt and insecurity about academic performance and 'succeeding' was evident across the sample, generally related to English language difficulties and a lack of confidence in language ability. Unfamiliar academic practices such as self-directed learning and academic writing caused concern for many students, although some did also comment positively on the benefits of these 'new' academic practices. Despite a fair deal of doubt, on the whole, students seemed optimistic about their own academic adjustment over time and showed a particularly positive orientation towards some specific aspects of their degree programmes, especially the international make-up of their courses.

5.1.2 T2: Mid-programme

The second interview round took place in mid-February when students had completed half of the taught element of their course but before they had received detailed feedback on assessed work (cf. Young et al., 2013). Overall, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this second interview round yielded more comments on academic adjustment than the first. This was to be expected as students were now five months into their programme and

³⁸ Names of members of staff were changed to pseudonyms for this thesis.

could therefore comment on their adjustment and specific aspects of their degree programme. Analysis showed that the overwhelming amount of comments was either positive or, less usually, neutral related to the analytic framework – all interviewees reported feeling more familiar with academic conventions at the host university, and most expressed more confidence in their academic and linguistic abilities, and satisfaction with their academic adjustment:

I think I've adjusted quite well. (Anna)

I feel I adjusted well and I'm doing the right things, I'm fitting in. (Lydia)

This semester I know how to deal with it, I'm familiar with it now. (Tao)

As time goes by I think I found it much easier than before because I can understand most of the knowledge teacher told us. (Ying)

However, some students still seemed to struggle to cope with academic English language difficulties:

I just have to push myself harder, to work harder because basically academic language is still an obstacle maybe. (Indah)

Sometimes when I want to say something I get confused and lost, I just keep thinking "Well how do I say this in English?" (Mita)

At T2, students commented on several more specific aspects of academic study, in particular assessed work. Several interviewees pointed to the value of regular written essays and, on the whole, students seemed to cope well with academic writing although it was experienced as a time-consuming and stressful process:

The assignments were not bad. It took much time but it was ok. (Gabriel)

There was like two or three days when I couldn't go out of the house because I was writing non-stop and spending my nights doing this. (Lydia)

Some students struggled with conventions specific to academic writing such as critical reading, referencing and an emphasis on avoiding plagiarism:

It was difficult because they tell you, you have to reflect and put your own ideas but at the same time you have to quote all the things you put. (Mario)

They say that you are expected to critically analyse a topic [...] I'm a bit confused what they are expecting from me. (Gediz)

I forgot to put page number and quotation mark, so they said my assignment is what it's called irregularity [...] I didn't do that intentionally. (Indah)

In addition to essays, students were required to undertake various forms of group work. Multicultural group work was seen very differently by different participants, with

comments ranging from the positive to the highly negative (Figure 5.3). On one hand, a majority of students seemed to enjoy this type of learning and recognised its benefits and described it as “beneficial”, “productive” and “enjoyable”:

I worked well with all my friends in the group assignments. (Elya)

It was nice working with other people as opposed to just yourself going to the library, so I enjoyed it. (Sarah)

That was such an amazing opportunity to work with the Chinese students. (Robin)

In contrast, difficulties in collaboration and distribution of workload, compounded by communication problems, were identified as obstacles for successful multicultural group work by some.

Communication was a big problem because they didn't speak [...] maybe this is a system in China. (Esma)

Some groups seemed to experience communication problems, in particular when two or more group members communicated in a common first language which resulted in other students feeling “left out”. Others struggled with the distribution of workload and feelings of having to take responsibility for perceived “free riders” resulted in frustration:

When you cannot communicate and also you think there are free riders in your group it is very difficult and you feel it is not fair. (Anna)

Sometimes I feel like a teacher in those groups because they don't know any basic situations with terms so it wasn't good for me. (Celik)

Sometimes I felt I had to teach my course mates and that I didn't expect. I came here to learn. (Kaari)

We Chinese girls and the American girl have different opinions about the cooperation problem and about the equal problem so the cooperation have broken. It's a pity I think because it's my first group study in the UK but not a very happy ending. (Ting)

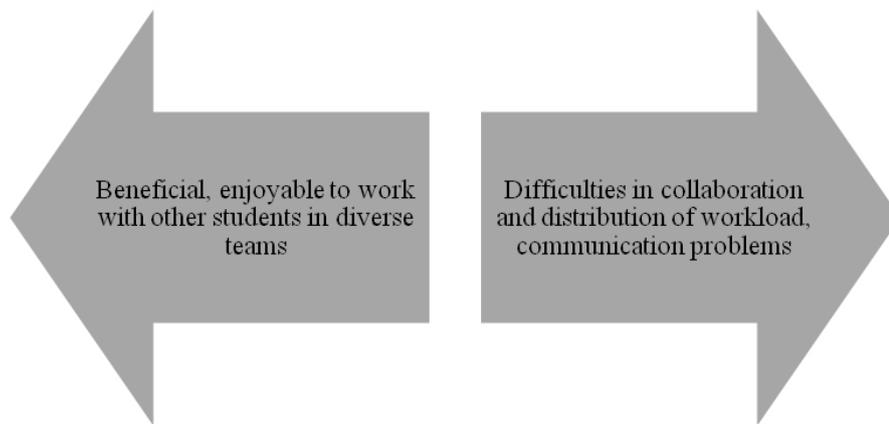


Figure 5.3 The Contested Nature of Group Work

Comments on general classroom interaction were overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the discussion-based nature of many classes and the involvement of the lecturers:

It's interesting and it's good to go beyond the books which is something that I missed before. (Ella)

It's like a discussion [...] you never feel that you can't ask a question or participate at any time throughout the lecture. (Robin)

Everyone seems to really want to be there, everyone seems really passionate about what they are talking about. (Sarah)

On the whole, students seemed willing and motivated to take part in classroom discussions:

It's very interactive, everybody speaks up, so sometimes that motivates me to do the same thing because I think "Ok, if they can do it then I can do it." (Mita)

However, some described this experience as “overwhelming”. Ting felt “a little afraid of expressing something in the classroom” and Indah stated “I never raise my hand and speak”. Other problematizing or negative comments about classroom interaction related to crowdedness and repetitiveness in lectures:

The courses are too crowded. We have 60 people, 100 people modules. They are like open lectures, you can't discuss in small groups. (Gediz)

Sometimes I hate when people ask same questions though you asked it [...] I found them sometimes time consuming [...] (Esma)

I think we lose a lot of time explaining the same things, like for the papers we dedicated a lot of lectures for the same thing, for the same purpose. (Mario)

Some negative and problematizing comments related to the emphasis on self-directed learning. For example, Ella struggled with the “very individualistic approach” of study at the host university:

A lot of things that people have to do are like on their own, so reading and writing [...] I haven't had much chance to like create groups to work together.

Others acknowledged the benefits of this approach:

It is very, very beneficial environment if you are self-motivated to study.
(Gabriel)

I like how the lecturers make the students study independently. (Mita)

Comments on academic and administrative staff were uniformly positive and often related to “differences” between home and host countries. For example, Ying highlighted the “close” relationship between lecturers and students at the host university:

Teachers are very kind. This is different from China. In China we should do everything, follow the teacher and follow their command [...] here we can have our own thoughts and our own ideas [...] teachers are more like friends. I think it's very good.

In sum, most students gave accounts of feeling well adjusted to the academic environment five months into the programme – they generally reported feeling more confident with their academic and linguistic abilities, and expressed satisfaction with their academic adjustment progress. Nonetheless, some students experienced difficulties with specific demands of their degree programme such as participation in classroom discussions and independent learning. Evaluations of assessed work remained limited as students had not yet received feedback from assessors, but overall students seemed to feel that they were coping well with academic writing even if the time before submission was experienced as stressful. Reactions to group work were varied and the benefits of this aspect of study were highly contested – commonly mentioned difficulties were associated with the division of workload and cross-cultural communication.

5.1.3 T3: End of taught-element

By the third interview round students were nine months into their sojourn and had completed the taught element of their programme. Overall, participants commented overwhelmingly positively on their academic adjustment and several interviewees reported an improvement from the beginning of semester one to the end of semester two. Keeping up with coursework and dealing with assignments was perceived as “easier” and students reported feeling “confident” and “settled” into the academic routine of the host university:

I'd say I felt a lot more confident because I kind of already knew how the things work here and I didn't worry as much about the assignments.
(Victoria)

I've managed to adapt myself here better than the first semester. The first semester I was still like in shock [...] it was too much going on for me for the first semester but this time it's better and I'm having so much fun with the classes. (Mita)

I feel that I really progressed academically this semester. I feel my papers are a lot better and I kind of grasped how exactly UK writing is and what exactly they are looking for. (Robin)

I feel better than the first semester because I am more familiar with how to study, how to write my assignment. (Ying)

I felt the second semester was quite easier and less demanding academically.
(Brazilian student, female, T2 survey)

As students were approaching the end of their programme, the interview focus shifted from academic adjustment to outcomes of study abroad. Students overwhelmingly described their experience of study abroad as positive, and many recognised the transformative nature of the academic sojourn both, in terms of personal development and acquisition of specific professional and academic skills (Figure 5.4). Many students reported that exposure to a multicultural study environment and subsequent interactions with peers from different backgrounds had led to increased cultural awareness, and to a sense of greater understanding of others and of open-mindedness.

I think I'm more interculturally sensitive and I have heightened my awareness of other peoples from different backgrounds and cultures, their emotions, their kind of expressions [...] (Sarah)

Definitely the stereotyping, prejudices, this changed so much. I'm more aware and more conscious of what am I doing and what am I saying, especially about religion things and especially about Muslim people [...] this I'm really glad about. [...] (Silvia)

Tao felt “more confident” and “more willing to communicate with others”. Similarly, Ying pointed to “the skill to make friends with foreigner”. She explained that the international study environment helped her to develop confidence and poise in intercultural encounters:

Before I come here I'm very nervous, I don't dare to speak to strangers, to people I'm not familiar with but now I can find a topic or I can speak with them.

Through intercultural peer-interaction students felt they were now able to better deconstruct stereotypes and minimise the idea of ‘cultural difference’:

You can't help it, you have some stereotype in your head although you learn at school and everywhere you shouldn't have it, but you still have it, and I'd like to think I got rid of a few of them. (Flora)

Don't try to judge, criticise, because you understand that it's different and they are people just like you. (Gabriel)

Lydia felt she learned “not to associate people with their countries” and explained:

I have learned how similar people are coming from so different cultures [...] it went hand in hand with the CCC-studies, my own experience here. (Lydia)

Similarly, Silvia explained:

There are so many different British accents and so many different people. I mean after all this I try not to put like people in a box. I try to not to have any prejudices or judgements or anything of that sort.

For many, the experience of ‘living abroad’ went hand in hand with their studies.

Looking back on her programme, and relating it to the experience of ‘living cross-culturally’ Anna described one class as “a great introduction to cultural awareness and cultural understanding”. On the whole, knowledge acquired in class was perceived as transferable into real-life encounters:

Writing and reading like studies and learning different theories and different models, I think you can really take them and apply them [...] dealing with like you know living in an international accommodation or being in an international programme. (Robin)

We study cross-cultural communication and people here are all over the world so even when we don't literally study, just go out with our friends or something, you still practice your skills. (Victoria)

Even experiences which, for some, had proved problematic during the programme, such as group work, were now viewed more favourably by some students. Dealing with communication difficulties in multicultural group work was one way students honed their cross-cultural communication skills, and retrospectively they recognised the benefits of these experiences:

I have discovered more than ever that I am meant to work with international people, in co-operation with individuals with differing cultural backgrounds. (Kaari)

Students also reported an improvement of academic English language ability, although this referred mainly to reading and writing skills:

I'm proud that my reading speed has increased a lot, and assignments don't feel so difficult to write anymore. (Kaari)

I learned some academic words and I always read, search the literature review. I think writing has improved but for speaking I think almost the same. (Tao)

Some interviewees also reported an increased confidence in public speaking. Referring to interactive classroom discussions, Elya stated “I guess I speak my mind a lot more”. Similarly, some students reported an increased confidence in presentation skills:

Back in Romania I had no presentation skills, I hated it, I tried to run from oral speaking but here I think now I am able to do a presentation. (Anna)

For the second semester I had to present a couple of times and I thought that I did better compared to the first semester. I wasn't as nervous. (Mita)

Responsibility and personal control over their own learning meant that time management became important for some students, especially for those who were more used to more teacher-directed and regulated academic study:

Everybody is just giving so much time and everybody expects to do everything on your own. It's a bit different from our country, so I struggled with managing time. Maybe that's the basic thing I learned - I have to manage my time on my own without somebody else pushing me. (Gediz)

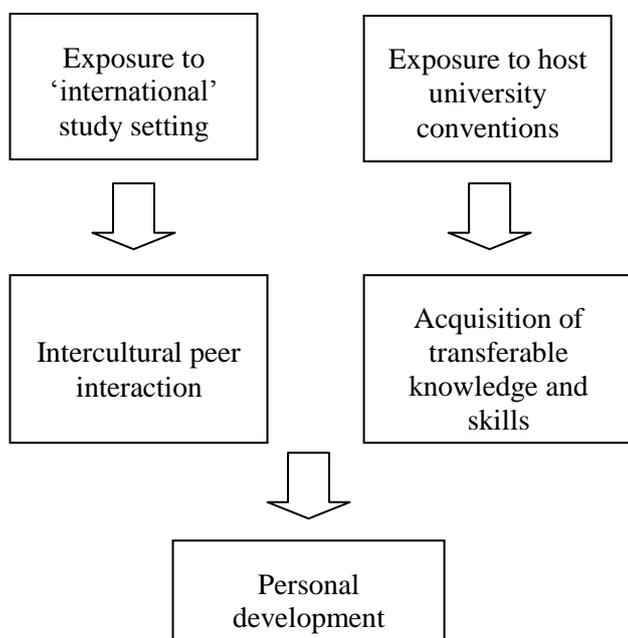


Figure 5.4 The Transformative Nature of an Academic Sojourn Abroad

In terms of overall academic achievement, some students exceeded their own expectations:

I was a little bit like having question marks in my mind but I was really happy. (Esma)

It was better than I expected really. I was kind of worried about being here and how different it is from Malaysia [...] but I think I did quite ok so I'm really glad about that. (Elya)

However, not all students felt equally satisfied with their overall academic performance. Victoria had “mixed feelings” about her academic performance and others felt disappointed with their overall achievement:

I expected myself can do better. I thought that I can have a good grade. I thought it's going to be easier but it's not that simple. (Indah)

I think I can do better but well it's ok but I just felt that I could have done better, yeah not really satisfied. (Mita)

Academically I was a bit surprised. I expected I can do much better but certainly I need to change things when I continue with PhD, so I had some problems with adjusting to academic life. (Gediz)

Actually I still not very satisfied with my academic performance. (Ying)

To sum up, nine months into the sojourn students generally felt satisfied with their academic achievement and reported a positive sense of adjustment from semester one to semester two. Nevertheless, some remained disappointed with their academic performance and did not meet their personal expectations. Students overwhelmingly described their experience of study in the UK as positive and commented on several outcomes, including increased independence and the acquisition of specific professional and academic skills such as time management and presentation skills. Most significantly, participants reported that exposure to a multicultural study environment and subsequent interactions with peers from different backgrounds had led to increased self-confidence, and to a sense of greater understanding of others and of open-mindedness.

5.2 Discussion of Academic Adjustment over Time

Given that an academic qualification is a key outcome of an international student sojourn (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006), relatively few studies have charted the academic adjustment process of student sojourners longitudinally. Before a discussion of the academic adjustment trajectory is provided, it is important to make two points related to the whole process of this investigation. Firstly, all interviewees had previously fulfilled the English language requirements set by their host university, and all had the same general levels of prior academic achievement (i.e. at least an upper second class degree from an internationally recognised HE institution). Secondly, all students were studying for degrees that were similar in terms of length, amount of contact with tutors, levels of administrative support, and assessment standards applied to their academic work (see Chapter 3). Despite this uniformity, the data showed that

students experienced academic study in distinct and nuanced ways and that there was some variation in participants' satisfaction with their own academic achievement. Nonetheless, a general pattern for academic adjustment could be teased apart from the data as discussed below.

Analysis of the qualitative data-set provided a picture of students' academic adjustment patterns over time. Overall, the findings suggest that students experienced most academic adjustment difficulties early in the sojourn when they were least familiar with conventions at the host university. This was reflected in the relatively large presence of 'problematizing' anticipatory comments in the first interview round (5.1.1) and an increase of 'positive' comments in the second (5.1.2) and third interview sessions (5.1.3). It seems that the more exposure students had to the host university settings, the more they were able to acquire and develop skills necessary to meet the demands of their degree programmes (Figure 5.5). This highlights the relevance of the culture-learning and social skills framework for the study of student sojourners' academic adjustment as discussed below.

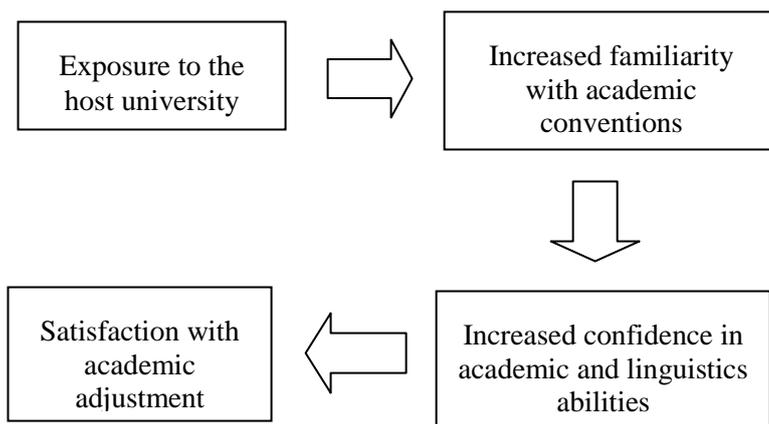


Figure 5.5 Progress in Academic Adjustment 5 Months into Sojourn

5.2.1 Culture-learning and social skills framework

Findings revealed that students were generally satisfied with the quality of their courses and their own performance, and that academic adjustment followed an ascending learning curve as conceptualised in social skills and cultural learning models of adjustment (e.g. Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Cultural learning models have in the past predominantly been used to conceptualise sociocultural rather than academic adjustment (cf. Ward et al., 2001), but evidence from this study suggests that learning the conventions and characteristics of the academic host culture was an important component of students' academic adjustment process. Although it has previously been

argued that academic adjustment forms part of the wider sociocultural adjustment that student sojourners undergo (Black and Stephens, 1989; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006), from a student perspective the centrality of academic adjustment as a distinct adjustment domain is clear – not least because it is linked to performance measures in the form of assessment grades.

The interview data suggests that students experienced most academic adjustment difficulties early in the sojourn when they were least familiar with conventions and practices at the host university. This corresponds to the notion that sojourners need to acquire knowledge and skills specific to the host culture in order to perform effectively in the new environment (Ward et al., 2001). In the case of academic adjustment, this refers to the ‘academic culture’ (Carroll, 2005) of the host university. It is believed that when international students arrive in the new academic setting, they are confronted with ‘incongruent schemata’ (Gilbert, 2000) about learning and teaching approaches. The findings confirm this idea. The students highlighted differences between academic approaches in the home and host country, especially in the early sojourn stage, and there was some evidence of initial insecurities and doubts about their own abilities to perform in the new environment. This state of mind is referred to in the literature as ‘academic shock’ (Ryan, 2005) or ‘education shock’ (Yamazaki, 2005). What made an investigation of academic adjustment of postgraduate students particularly interesting is the fact that they all brought prior academic experience to the host university. It seems that this previous academic experience did little to offset ‘learning shock’ (Griffiths et al., 2004), at least in the initial sojourn stage. This shows that even students with prior academic experience might be novices in the academic culture of their host university due to a lack of familiarity with local learning and teaching practices (Garson, 2005; Luxon and Peelo, 2009).

After some initial adjustment difficulties in the first semester, academic adjustment improved steadily. In accordance with the culture-learning and social skills framework, the longer students were exposed to the host university setting, the more they were able to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively on their degree programmes. This was manifested in interviewees reporting a ‘routine of doing things’ and an increased confidence in their own abilities over time. Similar findings were reported by Wong (2004) in his study of student sojourners in Australia which showed that the longer students studied at the host university, the more likely they were to adapt and embrace new approaches to learning. This supports the idea that

learners from different academic backgrounds are highly adaptive over time (e.g. Biggs, 1996; Volet and Renshaw, 1996). Thus, a close relationship between time and academic adjustment was evident in the data, reflected in students' gradual acquisition of 'new' learning approaches and their adjustment to unfamiliar teaching and assessment methods. As Brown (2008a) states, the role of time in the cross-cultural adjustment process of student sojourners must not be underestimated, however it seems that time as a contributory factor to adjustment has thus far not received due attention, although there is a tacit assumption in the culture-learning framework that time contributes positively to adjustment (Ward et al., 2001). However, given the tight timeframe of one-year postgraduate programmes in the UK, the time-factor might not be able to fully exert its positive influence as academic adjustment must happen rapidly if students are to succeed on these programmes (Lewthwaite, 1996).

One explanation why the academic adjustment trajectory of the students in this study seemed to follow an ascending learning-curve may be that 18 out of the 20 interviewees were studying for an MA in Cross-cultural Communication (CCC) – these students were exposed to an academic approach which encourages an interrogative and critical perspective on concepts such as culture, communication and identity (cf. Holliday et al., 2004), as opposed to cross-cultural education in other fields, most especially the training of business personnel, where reductive a-priori categorisations of culture of the type developed by Hofstede and colleagues (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) tend to be the norm, despite considerable criticism over the years (Bond, Žegarac and Spencer-Oatey, 2000; McSweeney, 2002; Young and Sercombe, 2010). The explicit exploration of theory and practice of communicating 'cross-culturally', combined with the experience of studying and living in an 'international' environment, seemed to induce a great deal of reflexivity which may have contributed positively to students' academic adjustment. Schachinger and Taylor (2000) believe that understanding 'the other' is at the heart of cross-cultural learning – reflective practices encouraged on the CCC programme may have helped students in this process. Indeed, Robinson (2006) reported some encouraging evidence that international students who received an introduction to working across cultures and dealing with difference, performed better in multicultural group work. This study found that students studying CCC had higher academic achievement scores than the MA ALT students (see Box 4.6). Similar findings were reported in a recent study by Young and Schartner (forthcoming 2014) who suggested that the experiential learning of the kind experienced

by the MA CCC students, and critically-focused academic input (Stavenga de Jong, Wierstra and Hermanussen, 2006) might be associated with better academic achievement. Further research is needed to ascertain this claim. It may be that other factors related to the predispositions of students choosing to study CCC may make them more inclined to embrace the experience more fully, and so help them to better acquire new knowledge and skills which contribute to academic adjustment. Further research could therefore very usefully use comparative data to explore possible predispositions and motivations of CCC students and others undertaking different programmes.

The fact that students were able to acquire and deploy new skills successfully over time could also reflect a more pragmatic choice. It seems that culture-learning was the only viable adjustment strategy for the students in the academic domain – by acquiring the skills and knowledge specific to the new ‘academic culture’, they would be able to function effectively in the new academic environment. It could be that students followed what J. Berry (2005) describes as ‘adjustment by way of assimilation’, where individuals choose to change to become more like their host environments.

5.2.2 Stress and coping framework

Apart from the applicability of the culture-learning and social skills framework, this study also found evidence for the importance of the stress and coping framework. It is widely acknowledged that the stress triggered by ‘academic culture shock’ (Gilbert, 2000) may impede student sojourners’ ability to fully participate in learning experiences (Twibell, Ryan and Limbird, 1995). Thus, the ability to appraise cross-cultural transition as challenging rather than threatening becomes important (Ward, 2004). Research has shown that although international students differ in their stress-coping strategies (e.g. Ward et al., 2001; Khawaja and Stallman, 2011), positive coping approaches and personality characteristics such as for example flexibility tend to have a positive effect on their adjustment (e.g. Wang, 2009). The students in this study generally showed positive orientations towards ‘new’ learning and teaching approaches, especially in the initial sojourn stage, which could be seen as crucial coping mechanisms employed by the students to deal with acculturative stress triggered by the transition into an unfamiliar academic environment. This shows that cognitive re-framing of stressors (Ward et al., 2001; Ward, 2004) or ‘optimistic coping’ (Ryan and Twibell, 2000) can aid students in their academic adjustment. Indeed, in a study by

Folkman and Lazarus (1985), Chinese students who engaged in positive thinking reported more satisfaction with their ability to cope with stressors. In the present study, it seems that the employment of coping mechanisms (i.e. positive ways of thinking) was a prerequisite for cultural learning to take place, and subsequently allowed for academic adjustment to occur (Figure 5.6). This points to the interrelatedness of the two frameworks (Ward et al., 2001).

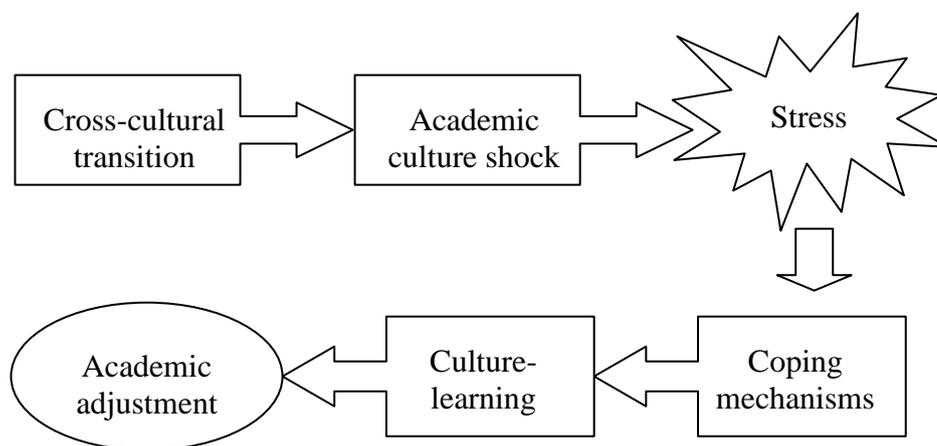


Figure 5.6 Stress Coping and Culture-learning in Academic Adjustment

Over the years, a number of researchers have called for stress management techniques to be incorporated into cross-cultural pre-arrival training for sojourners (e.g. Walton, 1990; Triandis, 1994; Fantini, 1995). In order for these techniques to be effective, we need to understand the nature of common academic stressors for student sojourners (Ryan and Twibell, 2000). Some of the academic adjustment issues teased apart in this study are discussed below.

The interviews were guided by broad open-ended questions, thus the interviewees largely set the thematic agenda themselves and so decided the salience of topics – overall, four key areas of interest and concern to the students, with regard to academic adjustment, were identified: (1) English language ability and its impact on academic performance (2) assessed work, including written assignments and group projects (3) challenges and benefits of independent study, and (4) the ‘international’ study environment. These concerns, to various degrees, confirm those of earlier studies (Andrade, 2006). A discussion of each factor is provided below, starting with English language ability.

5.2.3 English language ability

The interview data clearly highlights the importance of host language ability (or rather perceived competence in the language of instruction) for student sojourners' own sense of academic adjustment. Issues surrounding English language ability and its impact on academic achievement were a recurrent theme in many interviews, especially in the first and, to a lesser extent, the second interview rounds. This is largely in line with prior research on student sojourners at English-speaking universities (see Andrade 2006). Studies have shown that international students tend to be sensitive to their own language abilities (Robertson et al., 2000), fear making mistakes (Jacob and Greggo, 2001), and generally tend to lack confidence in using English (Senyshyn et al., 2000).

One frustration for the students, especially in the early sojourn stages, was that they felt a lack of confidence in their own English language abilities which prevented them from contributing to classroom discussions, although a strong motivation to do so existed (cf. Tompson and Tompson, 1996). This shows how central perceived communicative competence is to international students' sense of academic adjustment, and indicates that students might not be able to fully function in the new academic environment due to a feeling of 'perceived linguistic inadequacies' (Lewthwaite, 1996). The concept of 'language anxiety' can help explain these findings. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) define language anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (p. 284). It is likely that the need to communicate and perform in a foreign language challenges students' self-concept as competent communicators (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986), thus leading to the language anxiety described by MacIntyre and Gardner (ibid.).

Similar to previous research on student sojourners in the UK (e.g. Brown, 2008a), language anxiety seemed to be a particular deterrent to participation in classroom discussions, a common facet of study at the host university that students were largely unprepared for. While the students generally valued the interactive nature of most of their classes, some were reluctant to contribute, often explaining their behaviour by reference to different prior experiences in the home country, a finding that is common in the literature on the international classroom (e.g. Ballard and Clanchy, 1997; Thorstenson, 2001). It is important to note that non-participating students were predominantly, although not exclusively, from East and South East Asian countries, a finding that is not new (cf. Parks and Raymond, 2004; Brown, 2008a). Some literature

(e.g. Ho et al., 2004) holds the view that students' behaviour is predetermined by broader cultural dimensions such as power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1991). However, although comparisons between home and host academic systems were common, students in this study primarily identified language difficulties and language anxiety as a deterrent to involvement. Not finding 'the right words in English' seemed more problematic to students than cultural inhibitions, although the literature suggests that lack of classroom contribution tends to be seen as a cultural rather than a linguistic phenomenon by academic staff (Robertson et al., 2000).

Ward (2001) states that many studies on the non-participatory nature of Asian students fail to acknowledge the increase in contribution rates over time. The present study and some previous work (e.g. Brown, 2008a) addresses this gap and clearly shows that international students from Asia are far from static in their behaviour. The data clearly shows that students were able to overcome barriers to participation over time, and provides evidence of increased confidence and engagement in classroom discussions which seems directly related to an increase in language confidence. As international students from Asia, China in particular, represent the largest and fastest growing group of incoming students for UK universities (UKCISA, 2013), a deeper understanding of their experiences is key if these students are to be encouraged to fully take advantage of the interactive classroom.

Apart from classroom discussion, the interview data also showed that language anxiety was often directly related to concerns about academic achievement. The intensive assignment schedule, largely dominated by written assessment, as is typical of a British one-year taught MA programme (Durkin, 2004), caused students to doubt their ability to cope with writing essays in English. It seems that pre-programme English ability (as measured in standardised tests such as the IELTS) does not necessarily mitigate language anxiety and stress which may be caused by a lack of sociolinguistic knowledge specific to the host university (Lewthwaite, 1996) and habitus-informed practices (Bourdieu, 1990) such as for example independent study. For example, many students were used to exams but were unfamiliar with written assignments, an observation also made by Khawaja and Stallman (2011) in their qualitative study of student sojourners in Australia. This calls into questions the ability of standardised language tests to prepare students for study in an unfamiliar environment (Marginson et al., 2010).

High levels of doubt about the ability to perform academically are common in the early stages of the student sojourn as research has shown (e.g. Ballard and Clanchy, 1997; Brown and Holloway, 2008). However, as the sojourn progressed students became increasingly comfortable in the academic host setting and most coped well with written assessment, although ‘writing academic essays’ was rated as most difficult retrospectively in the exit survey (Chapter 4). This echoes previous findings that international students view writing skills as problematic (Lee, 1997), and lends support to calls for academic writing training for L2 speakers of English (cf. Boshier and Rowekamp, 1998; HEA, 2013b). English writing ability has also been identified as a significant predictor of academic achievement among student sojourners in the UK (e.g. Li et al., 2009).

One skill indispensable for the successful completion of written assignment is reading academic literature – this was among the items rated as most difficult by the students in the exit survey (Chapter 4). For most students in this study, reading academic texts took place in a foreign language, and English language difficulties were identified in the interviews as a hurdle for reading speed and comprehension. This finding is not new. Studies have previously shown that student sojourners who are L2 speakers of English tend to struggle with heavy reading loads (e.g. Mendelsohn, 2002). They have also been found to have little or no experience of reading academic texts (HEA, 2013b). However, the interviewees reported increased confidence in their language abilities over time, and a strong sense of improvement in academic vocabulary and reading speed. A comparison of scores on the entry and exit measures for self-perceived English ability provided further evidence for this sense of improvement: after nine months of study at the host university, students self-rated their own reading and writing ability significantly higher than at entry point (Chapter 4).

5.2.4 Group work

A further assessment component of the degree programmes under investigation was group projects and related oral presentations. The interview data showed that the benefits of mandatory group work were highly contested among the students. While some welcomed this type of collaborative learning, others experienced difficulties with intra-group communication and the division of workload (cf. Khawaja and Stallman, 2011). The first finding that students valued group work echoes findings from a study conducted by Wicaksono (2008) at a UK university. Wicaksono (ibid.) found that

international students generally enjoyed working in groups, but that they were less enthusiastic about working in multicultural teams. This is in line with research suggesting that students tend to prefer to work with co-nationals on assessed group projects for fear that multicultural teamwork might impact negatively on their academic achievement (De Vita, 2002). Wicaksono's (2008) latter finding of a lack of enthusiasm for multicultural group work could not be clearly discerned in the present study as several students experienced working with students of different backgrounds as an enriching experience. Nonetheless, there were indications in the data that 'surface-level diversity' (Harrison, Price and Bell, 1998) such as nationality was identified by the students as contributing to communication problems – this was manifested in comments on Chinese students whose national background was blamed for their perceived lack of contribution. These students expressed a somewhat reductionist viewpoint of the 'surface level characteristics' (Woods, Barker, Hibbins, 2010) of their Chinese peers, whereby they equated nationality (i.e. being Chinese) with behaviour (i.e. keeping quiet in group discussions), a perspective promulgated in the literature by Hofstede and colleagues (e.g. Hofstede et al., 2010).

There seems to be consensus in the literature that issues related to language ability can be a constraint to collaborative group work (Biggs, 1991). In a study of Chinese international students in Australia, Li, Remedios and Clark (2010) found that students tended to be less talkative in mixed-nationality groups, mainly because of a lack of confidence in their own language abilities. It is possible that the use of an L2 may hinder the fluent expression of more complex academic issues, thus some students may refrain from actively participating in group discussions (Nguyen, Terlouw and Pilot, 2008). In this study there were indications in the data that the Chinese interviewees perceived out-of-class group work as a positive experience, although one student reported a communication break-down with her American teammate, much to her own perceived detriment (5.1.2).

The literature investigating academic group work is substantial (e.g. Ramburuth and McCormick, 2001; Kapp, 2009), and suggests that, although problems can arise in any group setting, difficulties tend to be exacerbated in multicultural teams (Strauss and U, 2007). Students' interview accounts suggest that differing expectations arising from prior educational experiences may be problematic in multicultural student group work (cf. Barker, Troth and Mak, 2002; Zepke and Leach, 2007). It is generally believed that this type of learning brings with it benefits for both international and home students

such as preparing graduates for employability in a highly internationalised labour market (e.g. Brownlie, 2001, Johnston and Miles, 2004). However, research suggests that multicultural group work needs longer to become effective (e.g. Ledwith et al., 1998; Strauss and U, 2007), with one study suggesting a minimum of six months (Summers and Volet, 2008). Practice has been found to improve the chances of successful cross-cultural group work (Briguglio, 2006, cited in HEAc) by creating a sense of ‘cohesion’ (Beal et al., 2003) among the students. Thus, it might be worthwhile to include unassessed group work as part of lectures and seminars – time might be a crucial factor for the success of multicultural group work.

5.2.5 Self-guided study

Independent self-study was a further predominant conversation topic in many interviews, most especially in the first interview round. Many interviewees were surprised to discover that classroom contact time was very limited on their course and that they were expected to undertake up to 30 hours of self-guided study per week. Several students drew comparisons with prior experiences in their home countries, where input from teachers Monday to Friday was often the norm, a findings also reported in Brown’s (2008a) ethnographic study of international master’s students in the UK. Students’ surprise about the role of self-study begs the question whether enough information is provided to incoming students prior to their arrival. As Brown (ibid.) suggests, it might be that there is an ethnocentric assumption of the universality of the British student-centred approach to learning and teaching where students are expected to take charge of much of their own learning (Todd, 1997; Ryan, 2005). Perhaps, host universities need to be more explicit in their communication with international students, as called for by Carroll (2005). The implementation of a pre-arrival website could help to familiarise incoming students with ‘new’ methods such as self-study and might help ease students’ transition into the host academic environment. Students from academic systems where a more teacher-centred approach is the norm might also need more on-campus support with their independent learning. Informal study and reading groups, perhaps led by former students or postgraduate teaching assistants, could very usefully create a more structured setting in which self-guided study can take place. Indeed, the HEA (2013d) emphasises the value of “independent learning in the context of communities of learners” and recommends the development of study communities. In addition, a discussion of expectations for self-study could form part of orientation

sessions during induction week. The HEA (*ibid.*) notes that concepts such as independent learning can be highly ambiguous and can mean “different things to different people”. Thus ‘expectation management’ is crucial, as emphasised by the UK’s *Quality Assurance Agency* (QAA, 2012). In this study, students’ reaction to self-guided learning was initially reluctance and unease, but it is important to note that there was also appreciation of the independent approach to learning. This is similar to Brown’s (2008a) study which showed that students recognised a sense of self-reliance and responsibility for their learning. Likewise, Wong’s (2004) study of student sojourners in Australia has shown that students generally prefer a more student-centred learning style, including those who come from a more teacher-centred, or what he calls ‘spoon-feeding’, environment.

5.2.6 The ‘international’ study environment

Finally, one feature that was dominant throughout all three interview rounds was students’ enthusiasm for intercultural interaction in the ‘international’ study environment and, towards the end of the sojourn, the recognition of intercultural competence as an outcome of study abroad. Studies of other student sojourner samples have previously found similar results (e.g. Zorn, 1996; Brown, 2009; Rundstrom-Williams, 2005), pointing to the transformative potential of study abroad (Cushner and Karim, 2004; Brown and Holloway, 2008). Despite difficulties for some, particularly related to assessed group work, interaction with programme peers was embraced and commented on positively by all interviewees right across the sample, particularly in the final interview round, as an opportunity for personal growth and, together with knowledge acquired as part of their course, was identified as contributing to a sense of increased intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) at the end of the sojourn.

It is difficult to ascertain whether students had indeed arrived at a state of ‘intercultural personhood’ by the end of their sojourn as described by Kim (2001). However, it seems that some sort of ‘qualitative transformation’ (*ibid.*) had taken place, although this is less tangible than other more easily measurable outcomes of study abroad (i.e. academic achievement). Students’ accounts of their cross-cultural experiences showed that, over time, they felt better able to deconstruct stereotypes and minimise the idea of ‘difference’. This demonstrates an awareness of multiple ways of being and of a complex understanding of the world, both of which are thought to be

indicators of intercultural personhood (Byram et al., 2002; Pitts, 2010). However we want to label the transformation that had taken place among the students, it seems clear that concepts such as ‘cosmopolitanism’ (Guilherme, 2007), ‘intercultural citizenship’ (Byram, 2008), ‘intercultural speaker’ (Byram, 2009), and ‘mediating person’ (Bochner, 1981) are highly relevant for the study of student sojourners’ cross-cultural transition.

As Adler (1975) states:

In the encounter with another culture, the individual gains new experiential knowledge (...) by gaining new perspectives and outlooks on the nature of culture (...) the more one is capable of experiencing new and different dimensions of human diversity, the more one learns of oneself. (p. 22)

To sum up, international students differ from other sojourner groups in that they not only undergo the acculturative stress common to all cross-cultural sojourners, but must additionally cope with academic stressors (Zimmerman, 1995). International students on MA degrees must also cope with the transition to a new level of academic study (i.e. postgraduate) (Jindal-Snape and Ingram, 2013). The degree of ‘success’ in their adjustment is reflected in a distinct measurable outcome of their sojourn, their academic achievement. According to Ryan and Twibell (2000), ‘culture shock’ is the transition from a familiar to an unfamiliar environment where old behavior patterns are no longer effective. This study has shown that when students transition from one academic culture to another, they may experience ‘academic culture shock’ (Gilbert, 2000) and need to acquire culture-specific knowledge and skills in order to perform effectively in the new academic environment (Ward et al., 2001). However, in order for this process of ‘culture-learning’ (Bochner, 2006) to take place, students need to first overcome acculturative stress triggered by the transition into an unfamiliar academic culture by employing stress coping approaches (Berry, 1997). Thus, the combination of initial insecurities and adjustment difficulties early in the sojourn, and subsequent steady improvement throughout the academic year, supports the relevance of both the stress and coping framework, and the culture-learning and social skills framework for the study of international students’ academic adjustment (Figure 5.7).

Finally, despite some individual variations the academic adjustment trajectory of the students can be depicted as an ascending learning curve, with adjustment improving steadily over time as a result of culture-learning (Figure 5.8).

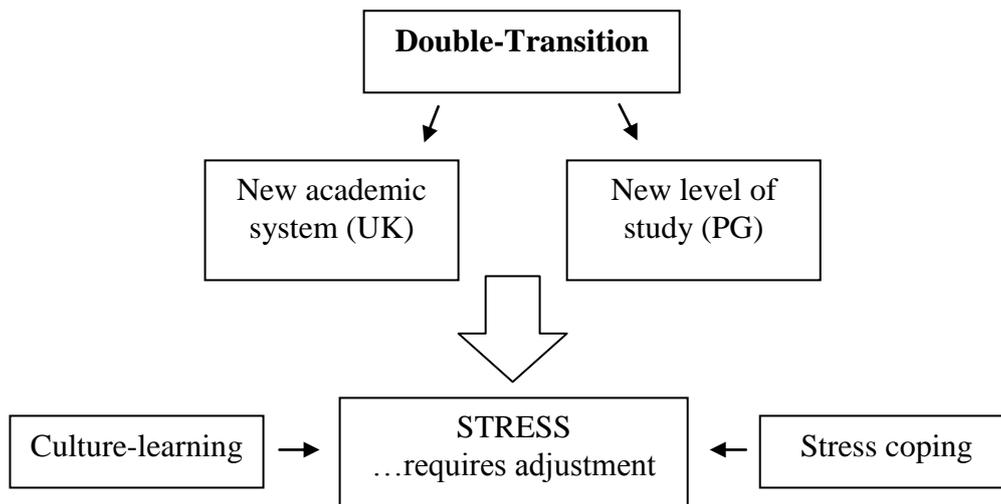


Figure 5.7 The Academic Adjustment of Postgraduate Student Sojourners

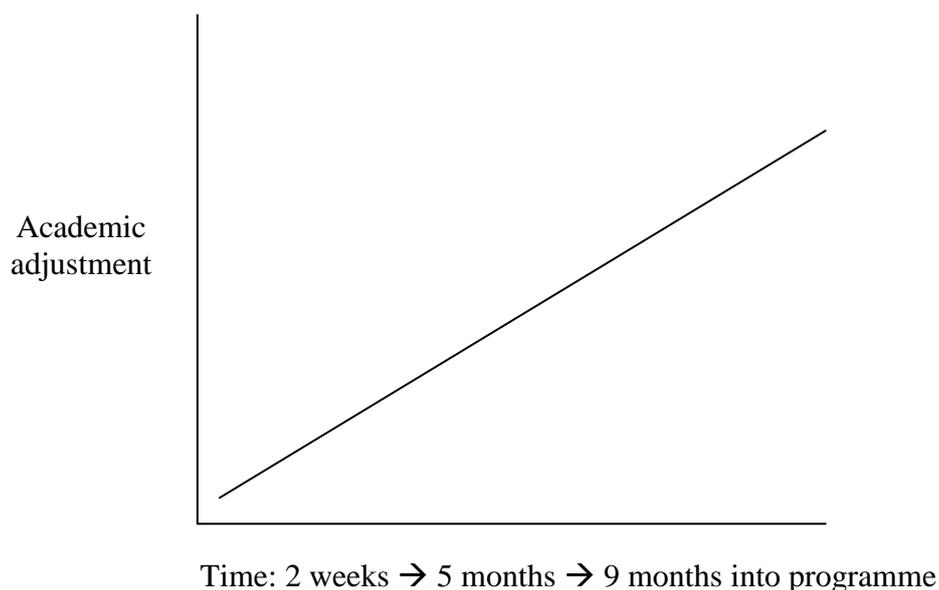


Figure 5.8 The Academic Adjustment Process of the Students in this Study

5.3 Associations between Contributory Factors and Academic Adaptation

This section presents results regarding associations between the contributory factors and the academic achievement measures. For each contributory factor a correlation analysis was performed, followed by a linear single or multiple regression analysis using the enter method.

5.3.1 English language ability

Results suggest a close link between English language ability (ELA) and academic achievement. ELA measured at T1 was significantly correlated with the taught GPA (r

= .30, $p < .01$), the research GPA ($r = .25$, $p < .01$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .30$, $p < .01$). ELA T1 significantly predicted the taught GPA, $\beta = .30$, $t(126) = 3.47$, $p < .01$, and explained 9% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 126) = 12.01$, $p = .001$. ELA T1 also predicted the research GPA, $\beta = .25$, $t(124) = 2.87$, $p < .01$, and explained 6% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 124) = 8.24$, $p = .005$. Finally, ELA T1 predicted the overall degree GPA, $\beta = .30$, $t(124) = 3.47$, $p < .01$, and explained 9% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 124) = 12.02$, $p = .001$.

ELA measured at T2 correlated strongly with the taught GPA ($r = .48$, $p < .01$), the research GPA ($r = .47$, $p < .01$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .51$, $p < .01$). ELA T2 significantly predicted the taught GPA, $\beta = .48$, $t(129) = 6.19$, $p < .001$, and explained 23% of the variance in the data. ELA T2 also predicted the research GPA, $\beta = .47$, $t(127) = 5.95$, $p < .001$, and explained 22% of the variance in the data. Finally, ELA T2 predicted the overall degree GPA, $\beta = .51$, $t(127) = 6.63$, $p < .001$, and explained 26% of the variance in the data.

5.3.2 Knowledge about the UK

Pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK (KNW) correlated significantly with the taught GPA ($r = .21$, $p < .05$), the research GPA ($r = .29$, $p < .01$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .25$, $p < .05$), indicating that students with greater levels of knowledge about the host country are likely to perform better academically. Indeed, simple linear regression analyses showed that KNW was a significant predictor of academic achievement. Firstly, KNW significantly predicted the taught GPA, $\beta = .21$, $t(139) = 2.51$, $p < .05$, and explained 4% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 139) = 6.28$, $p = .013$. Secondly, KNW significantly predicted the research GPA, $\beta = .29$, $t(137) = 3.55$, $p < .01$, and explained 8% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 137) = 12.63$, $p = .001$. Thirdly, KNW significantly predicted the overall degree GPA, $\beta = .25$, $t(137) = 3.06$, $p < .01$, and explained 6% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 137) = 9.34$, $p = .003$.

5.3.3 Autonomy in the decision to study abroad

Next, significant correlations were found between academic achievement and the self-regulation subscales (Table 5.1). Intrinsic motivation correlated significantly and positively with all three academic achievement measures, while introjected and external regulation correlated significantly and negatively with the three variables.

	RAI	INTRI	IDENT	INTRO	EXTER
Taught GPA	.34**	.24**	.03	-.24**	-.31**
Research GPA	.38**	.26**	.000	-.33**	-.31**
Degree GPA	.38**	.26**	.02	-.30**	-.33**

Note: **significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed); INTRI = intrinsic motivation, IDENT = identified regulation, INTRO = introjected regulation, EXTER = external regulation

Table 5.1 Bivariate Correlations between the SRQ-SA and Academic Achievement

Linear regression analyses indicated that the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) was highly predictive of all three academic achievement indicators. Firstly, the RAI significantly predicted the taught GPA, $\beta = .34$, $t(139) = 4.32$, $p < .01$, and explained 12% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 139) = 18.64$, $p < .001$. Secondly, the RAI significantly predicted the research GPA, $\beta = .38$, $t(137) = 4.79$, $p < .01$, and explained 14% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 137) = 22.95$, $p < .001$. Thirdly, the RAI significantly predicted the overall degree GPA, $\beta = .38$, $t(137) = 4.77$, $p < .01$, and explained 14% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 137) = 22.73$, $p < .001$. This suggests that those students who felt they stood behind their decision to study abroad were also likely to perform well academically.

5.3.4 Intercultural competence

Analysis showed that three aspects of IC (CE, SI and FL) correlated significantly and positively with all three measures of academic achievement (Table 5.2). This suggests that student sojourners who score highly on these dimensions are likely to perform well academically.

	CE	OM	SI	ES	FL
Taught GPA	.37**	.13	.22**	-.11	.22**
Research GPA	.34**	.12	.32**	.004	.29**
Degree GPA	.38**	.14	.28**	-.06	.26**

Note: **significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed); CE = cultural empathy, OM = open mindedness, SI = social initiative, ES = emotional stability, FL = flexibility

Table 5.2 Bivariate Correlations between IC and Academic Achievement

Multiple regression analyses yielded statistically significant models for variance in academic achievement in relation to IC. The models contributed to between 21% and 25% of the variance in the data. Coefficient results showed that the main predictors of academic achievement were CE, OM and FL, significantly associated with all three outcome indices. SI was significantly associated with the research and degree GPA. ES was marginally associated with the taught GPA (Table 5.3).

	Taught GPA		Research GPA		Degree GPA	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
Mean CE	.42	4.09**	.39	3.92**	.43	4.33**
Mean OM	-.26	-2.17*	-.41	-3.46**	-.34	-2.87**
Mean SI	.17	1.52	.34	3.14**	.25	2.30*
Mean ES	-.17	-1.94^	-.07	-.80	-.13	-1.51
Mean FL	.18	2.11*	.20	2.36*	.20	2.36*
R²	0.21		0.25		0.25	
Adjusted R²	0.19		0.22		0.22	
F (df)	7.40 (5, 136)		9.00 (5, 134)		8.88 (5, 134)	
Sig.	p < .001		p < .001		p < .001	

Note: **significant at the 99% level, *significant at the 95% level, ^significant at the 90% level

Table 5.3 Regression Analysis of IC and Academic Achievement

5.3.5 Social contact

Significant correlations were found between degree of social contact (SC) and the academic achievement measures (Table 5.4). Degree of contact with co-nationals and with non-co-national international students correlated significantly with all three academic achievement measures. The former showed negative correlations, indicating that the more contact students had with co-nationals, the worse they performed academically. The latter showed positive correlations, suggesting that the more students mixed with 'international' peers, the better they performed academically.

	SC-BS	SC-CN	SC-IN	SC-LC
Taught GPA	.14	-.21*	.43**	.10
Research GPA	.16	-.21*	.45**	.14
Degree GPA	.20*	-.22**	.48**	.14

Note: **significant at $p < .01$, *significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed); SC-BS = social contact with British students, SC-CN = contact with co-nationals, SC-IN = contact with non-co-national international students, SC-LC = contact with the local community

Table 5.4 Bivariate Correlations between SC and Academic Achievement

Multiple linear regression analyses, with the social contact factors as independent and the academic achievement measures as dependent variables, revealed that the social contact factors together explained 20% of the variance in the taught GPA, 21% of the variance in the research GPA, and 24% of the variance in the overall degree GPA. Coefficient results showed that degree of contact with non-co-national international students was the main predictor for all three academic achievement measures (Table 5.5).

	Taught GPA		Research GPA		Degree GPA	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
SC-BS	.07	.87	.07	.89	.08	.99
SC-CN	-.08	-.99	-.08	-.99	-.08	-1.03
SC-IN	.40	4.84**	.41	4.98**	.44	5.46**
SC-LC	-.03	-.32	.01	.10	-.01	-.07
R²	0.20		0.21		0.24	
Adjusted R²	0.17		0.19		0.22	
F (df)	8.43 (4, 137)		9.17 (4, 135)		10.78 (4, 135)	
Sig.	p < .001		p < .001		p < .001	

Note: **significant at the 99% level

Table 5.5 Regression Analysis of SC and Academic Achievement

5.3.6 Social support

With regard to social support (SS), the socio-emotional subscale correlated significantly with academic achievement on the taught element ($r = .26, p < .01$), on the research element ($r = .19, p < .05$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .25, p < .01$). No significant association was found with the instrumental SS subscale. Multiple regression analyses revealed that SS explained 7% of the variance in the taught GPA, 4% of the variance in the research GPA, and 7% of the overall degree GPA. Socio-emotional support emerged as the main predictor for all three academic achievement measures (Table 5.6).

	Taught GPA		Research GPA		Degree GPA	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
SS-SE	.33	3.12**	.26	2.44*	.33	3.08**
SS-IN	-.11	-1.05	-.12	-1.08	-.12	-1.10
R²	0.07		0.04		0.07	
Adjusted R²	0.06		0.03		0.06	
F (df)	5.56 (2, 139)		3.14 (2, 137)		5.33 (2, 137)	
Sig.	0.005		0.046		0.006	

Note: **significant at the 99% level, *significant at the 95% level; SS-SE = socio-emotional social support, SS-IN = instrumental social support

Table 5.6 Regression Analysis of SS and Academic Achievement

Finally, analyses showed significant associations between academic achievement and other adaptation indicators (Box 5.1).

Box 5.1 Association between Academic Achievement and other Adaptation Domains

▪ Satisfaction with life (SWL):

- SWL correlated significantly with the taught GPA ($r = .33$, $p < .01$), the research GPA ($r = .30$, $p < .01$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .34$, $p < .01$).
- SWL emerged as a significant predictor of the taught GPA; $\beta = .33$, $t(140) = 4.11$, $p < .001$; and explained 11% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 140) = 16.92$, $p < .001$.
- SWL emerged as a significant predictor of the research GPA; $\beta = .30$, $t(138) = 3.71$, $p < .001$; and explained 9% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 138) = 13.79$, $p < .001$.
- SWL emerged as a significant predictor of the overall degree GPA; $\beta = .34$, $t(138) = 4.30$, $p < .001$; and explained 12% of the variance in the data. $F(1, 138) = 18.51$, $p < .001$.

▪ Sociocultural adaptation (SCA):

- SCA correlated significantly with the taught GPA ($r = .28$, $p < .01$), the research GPA ($r = .35$, $p < .01$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .33$, $p < .01$).
- SCA emerged as a significant predictor of the taught GPA; $\beta = .28$, $t(140) = 3.41$, $p < .01$; and explained 8% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 140) = 11.64$, $p = .001$.
- SCA emerged as a significant predictor of the research GPA; $\beta = .35$, $t(138) = 4.41$, $p < .01$; and explained 12% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 138) = 19.49$, $p < .001$.
- SCA emerged as a significant predictor of the overall degree GPA; $\beta = .33$, $t(138) = 4.12$, $p < .01$; and explained 11% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 138) = 16.94$, $p < .001$.

5.4 Summary and Discussion of Quantitative Findings

Three indicators of academic achievement were used in this study: grade point averages (GPAs) for (1) the taught degree element, (2) the research element, and (3) the overall degree performance. This is one of the first studies to employ a fine-grained measure of actual academic achievement (cf. Young et al., 2013) as opposed to broader self-report measures (e.g. Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven, 2002; Chirkov et al., 2008). The results presented above show that academic success for international students undertaking one-year taught postgraduate degrees in the UK can be explained by pre-sojourn characteristics as well as aspects developed during the sojourn. The following contributory factors emerged as significant predictors of all three academic achievement measures: ELA, KNW, autonomy in the decision to study abroad, CE, OM, FL, social contact with non-co-national international students, and socio-emotional support (Figure 5.9). Moreover, students with prior overseas experience of five months or more performed significantly better on the taught degree element, the research element, and on the degree overall (Box 4.6). Finally, significant associations were found between academic achievement and satisfaction with life and sociocultural adaptation (Box 5.1). Results are further discussed below, starting with English language ability.

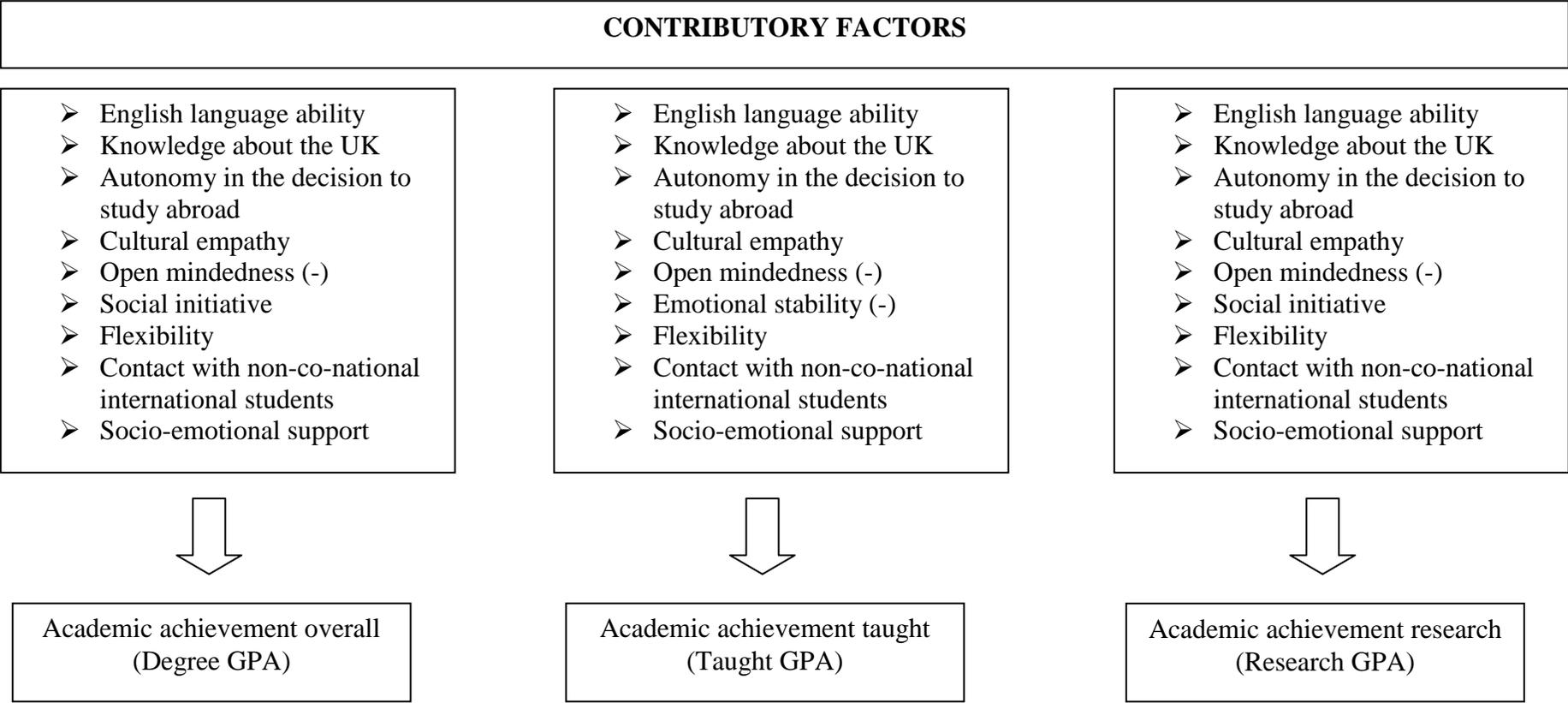


Figure 5.9 Significant Associations between Contributory Factors and Academic Achievement Measures

5.4.1 English language ability

In line with expectations, ELA was significantly associated with all three academic achievement measures. The variance explained in the data by ELA T1 was modest (between 6% and 9%), but ELA T2 was able to explain a considerable degree of the variance in academic achievement (between 22% and 26%). This finding confirms and extends in scope the results reported in a recent UK-based study of postgraduate student sojourners (Young et al., 2013) and provides a uniquely fine-grained picture of the predictive power of ELA for academic success. Although there is ample evidence for the important role ELA in student sojourners' academic adjustment (see Andrade, 2006), much of this evidence comes from qualitative studies (Robertson et al. 2000; Ramsay et al. 2007; Gu et al., 2010) which did not employ quantitative measures of actual academic performance. Studies that did conceptualise academic success in terms of actual grade point averages have commonly used students' TOEFL scores as a measure of ELA. Findings on this relationship are largely inconclusive. A study of 77 first-year undergraduate students in the US reported a significant correlation between ELA and students' GPAs (Stoynoff, 1997). In another US-based study, Messner and Liu (1995) found a significant difference in GPAs between international postgraduate students with TOEFL scores above 550 (IELTS 6.5) and those with scores below this cut-off point. In a UK-based study, Li et al. (2011) found a significant association between English writing ability and students' GPAs. However, other studies of postgraduate student sojourners found no significant association between TOEFL scores and subsequent GPAs (e.g. Light, Xu and Mossop, 1987; Melnick, Kaur and Yu, 2011). This suggests that while language ability as measured by standardised tests such as the TOEFL or IELTS may be an important variable for academic success, other factors such as students' communicative skills and confidence in using the language might also impinge on their academic performance – it is doubtful whether standardised language tests account for these skills. Thus, in light of the predictive power of ELA in this study, it can be argued that self-rating measures of ELA could very usefully be employed as an alternative to pre-programme test scores.

5.4.2 Prior overseas experience

The findings showed that students with prior overseas experience of five months or more performed significantly higher on the taught degree element, the research element, and on the degree overall (see Box 4.6). Although the relationship between student

sojourners' prior overseas experience and subsequent academic achievement is still under-explored, the findings correspond to a recent study by Melnick et al. (2011) which found a significant positive association between prior cross-cultural experiences of Asian postgraduate students in the US and their GPAs. The findings also mirror results from previous research which found a positive relationship between prior overseas experience and adjustment of business sojourners (Black, 1988; Parker and McEvoy, 1993; Yavas and Bodur, 1999). It may be that prior experience of living in another country offset some of the organisational and emotional strain for the students, thus easing their adjustment to living and studying in the UK and allowing them to focus on their academic performance (cf. Melnick et al., 2011).

5.4.3 Pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK

Pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK was able to predict academic achievement to a modest extent (between 4% and 8% of the variance explained). Nonetheless, this provides some indication that students who acquire knowledge about the host country prior to arrival are more likely to perform well academically. This is similar to Chapman et al.'s (1988) study where knowledge of the US educational environment predicted the academic achievement of international postgraduate students. There are also indications in the wider sojourner literature that pre-departure knowledge aids adjustment. For example, Takeuchi, Yun and Russell (2002) found a positive relationship between previous knowledge about the host country and the general and interaction adjustment of Japanese expatriates in the US. With regard to the findings of the present study, it seems likely that those students who familiarised themselves with the academic conventions of the host university prior to arrival, most especially assessment practices, had more accurate expectations and were thus better able to adjust to the new academic environment (Caligiuri et al., 2001), resulting in higher academic achievement.

5.4.4 Autonomy in the decision to study abroad

The Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) was able to explain a substantial amount of the variance in academic achievement (between 12% and 14%), highlighting the link between degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad and subsequent academic achievement. It seems that students who felt they stood behind their decision to study abroad were also likely to perform well academically. Although this relationship is still

relatively under-explored, Chirkov et al. (2007) have previously found that the RAI predicted academic motivation of Chinese international students at a Canadian university (18% of the variance explained). In a follow-up study, Chirkov et al. (2008) found no significant associations between the RAI and academic success. However, the researchers used a rather broad self-report measure of academic success rather than actual academic achievement scores. The present study was the first to investigate the relationship between the RAI and subsequent actual performance on assessed academic work measured in GPAs.

5.4.5 Intercultural competence

The results suggest a close link between IC and academic achievement. Firstly, the findings showed that the MPQ subscales were able to explain a considerable degree of the variance in academic achievement (between 21% and 25%). Only a minority of studies to date have tested the predictive validity of the MPQ subscales for academic achievement. In an early study, Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002) found the MPQ subscales to be slightly predictive of academic achievement among a sample of students at an international business school in the Netherlands (7% of the variance), although a very broad measure of academic performance was used in their study. In a more recent UK-based study, Young et al. (2013) employed a more fine-grained measure of academic achievement (i.e. taught GPA, research GPA, and overall GPA) and found that the MPQ subscales explained between 14% and 26% of the variance in the data. This is similar to the variance explained in the present study.

The results showed that three aspects of IC (CE, OM and FL) were highly predictive of all three academic achievement measures. The finding that OM showed a negative Beta-value is puzzling as it seems likely that open-minded individuals would find it easier to adjust to new academic environments. However, the negative beta-weight for OM must be interpreted with caution, in view of its non-significant correlation with the academic achievement measures. Similar results for CE and OM were found by Young et al. (ibid.); however FL was not significantly associated with academic achievement in their study.

It is not surprising that students who scored highly on CE and FL were also likely to perform well academically. It seems plausible that the ability to empathise with other cultural groups will help students to adjust to unfamiliar learning and teaching styles at the host university, including assessment procedures. Moreover, as familiar

norms and practices of academic study might no longer be appropriate in the new environment (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002), the ability to learn from experiences and adjust behaviour accordingly (i.e. flexibility) is likely to aid students in their academic adjustment, possibly resulting in higher academic achievement.

The results further showed that SI was significantly associated with the research GPA and the overall degree GPA. One possible explanation for this finding is that proactive students are perhaps more likely to look up information on the academic conventions of the host university. Also, students who tend to approach social situations in an active way are perhaps more likely to work with others, and to form study groups with their peers, possibly resulting in higher academic achievement. Moreover, it seems plausible that the ability to take initiative was a useful prerequisite for the, largely student-guided, research element of the degree which required a great deal of independence.

Finally there are indications in the data that the less emotionally stable students were, the higher their academic achievement on the taught degree element. This finding mirrors results reported by Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002) who suggest that emotionally unstable individuals who worry about many things are likely to put more effort into passing assessments, thereby resulting in higher academic achievement. The relationship between ES and mean taught GPA was weak though and further research is needed to ascertain this dynamic.

5.4.6 Social contact

Degree of social contact was able to explain between 20% and 24% of the variance in academic achievement, highlighting the importance of social interaction and friendship networks for student sojourners' academic success. Similar results were reported by Young et al. (2013), although the variance explained was somewhat lower than in the present study (between 13% and 15%). In line with Young et al.'s (ibid.) findings, degree of contact with non-co-national international students emerged as the main predictor of academic achievement, significantly associated with all three outcome measures. The finding is also similar to Li et al.'s (2010) UK-based study where communication with non-compatriots was positively related to academic achievement. This association highlights the importance of links among student sojourners during their time abroad, and provides further insights into the role of 'international ties' for student sojourner adjustment. It also corresponds to Montgomery and McDowell's

(2009) notion of ‘international community of practice’ where student sojourners form supportive study groups.

5.4.7 Social support

The social support (SS) subscales were able to slightly predict academic achievement (between 4% and 7% of the variance explained). Socio-emotional support emerged as the main predictor for all three academic achievement measures, pointing to a link between this type of support and academic adjustment. It seems that emotional support and social companionship (Ong and Ward, 2005) are crucial for the more emotionally challenging aspects of a sojourn abroad such as academic stress caused by assessment. This is in line with research suggesting that SS plays a significant role in reducing acculturative stress overall (Yeh and Wang, 2000; Yeh and Inose, 2003). However, the finding stands in contrast to Young et al.’s (2013) study which found no significant association between SS and academic achievement.

Most research on the impact of SS on academic achievement has been conducted on first-year undergraduate students who transition into HE from high school and findings from this line of research are conflicting. Some studies suggest a positive relationship between SS and GPAs (DeBerard et al., 2004; Robbins et al., 2004). However, other research suggests that SS does not improve academic achievement. For example, Grayson (2003) showed that SS had no impact on the academic success of undergraduate students in Canada. Similarly, Nicpon et al. (2006) found that SS was unrelated to the academic achievement of freshmen college students in the US. More research is needed in the international student context to ascertain the role of SS in academic performance.

5.4.8 Associations with other adjustment domains

The findings revealed significant associations between academic achievement and other adjustment domains. Satisfaction with life (SWL) and sociocultural adaptation (SCA) were both positive predictors of all three academic achievement indicators (see Box 5.1). This is an important finding as both, SWL and SCA are traditionally viewed as outcome variables in the sojourner literature and are seldom treated as independent variables. The findings indicate that students who are satisfied with life in the host environment are also likely to perform well academically. It may be that those with higher SWL are more resilient to academic stressors and thus better able to cope with

academic challenges and setbacks. Although SWL is not commonly used as a predictor variable, a study by Rode et al. (2005) found that SWL was a significant predictor of GPAs of college students in the US. Although it seems instinctively obvious that satisfied individuals will be more successful students, further research on student sojourners is needed to ascertain the impact of SWL and other psychological indicators on academic achievement.

While SCA per se is hardly used as an independent variable in student sojourner research, there are indications in the wider literature that social and cultural adjustment might impinge on academic performance. Studies from the high-school context have shown that social adjustment impacts positively on academic achievement (Chen, Rubin and Lin, 1997), while research on expatriate adjustment found a positive relationship between degree of intercultural adjustment and job performance (Tucker et al., 2004). It seems obvious that students who acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to ‘fit into’ the new sociocultural environment (Ward et al., 2001) will also be successful academically. Indeed, a positive relationship between ‘cultural adjustment’ and academic achievement was found in a recent study of student sojourners in Pakistan (Nasir, 2012). Nevertheless, more research is needed in the international student context to ascertain this association.

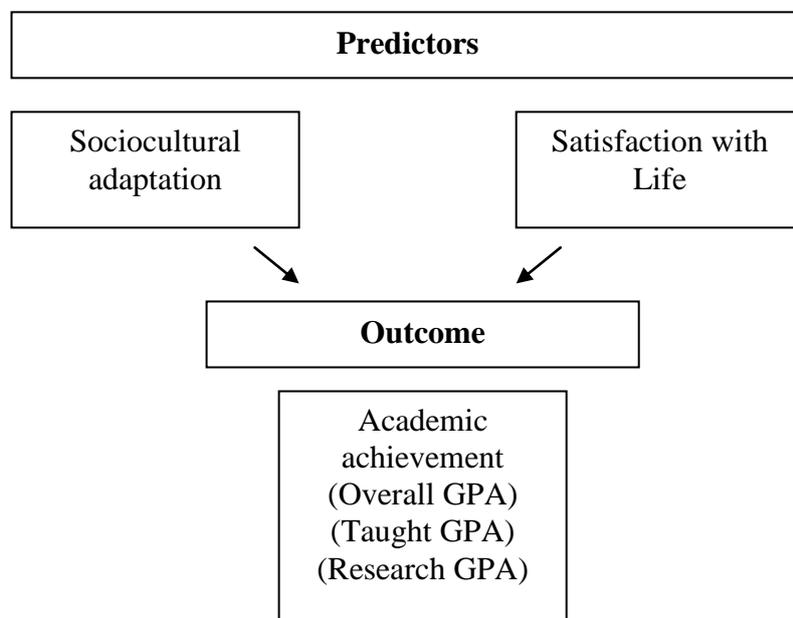


Figure 5.10 Association between Academic Achievement and SCA and SWL

Chapter 6. Psychological Adjustment and Adaptation

This chapter presents findings regarding the second adjustment domain from the conceptual framework for this study: psychological adjustment (see Figure 6.1).

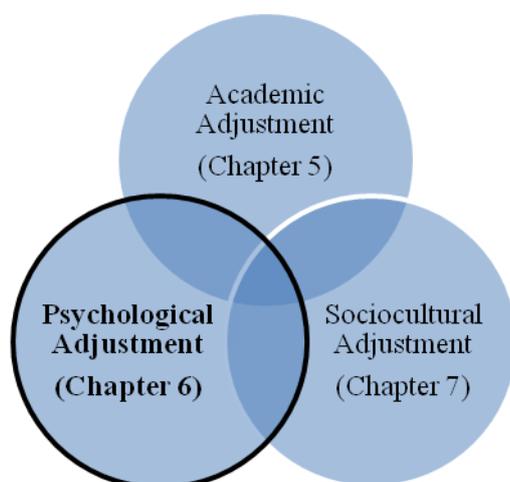


Figure 6.1 The Conceptual Focus of Chapter 6

For this conceptual domain, the research interest was in students' psychological adjustment over time as well as in the outcomes of these processes, measured subjectively using two indicators: psychological wellbeing (PWB) and satisfaction with life (SWL), a common distinction used to measure sojourners' psychological responses to the host environment (Ward et al., 2004).

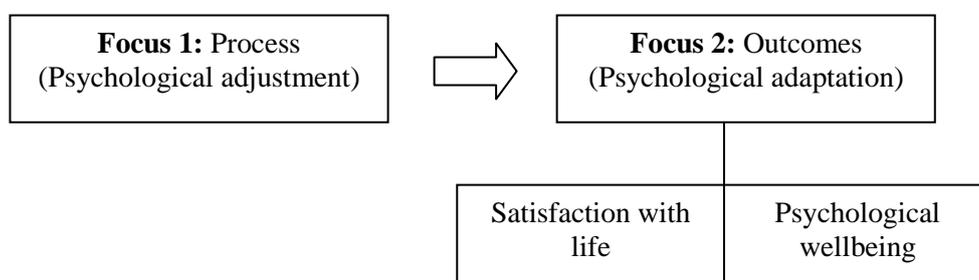


Figure 6.2 Investigating Psychological Adjustment and Adaptation

The following research questions are addressed in this chapter:

1. How do English language ability, knowledge about the host country, prior overseas experience, autonomy in the decision to study abroad, intercultural competence, social contact and social support relate to psychological adaptation?
2. What are the dynamics and patterns of student sojourners' psychological adjustment over time?

Findings are presented below in the following order: First, qualitative findings and representative data from each interview stage and the responses to the open survey question are presented and summarised (6.1), followed by a discussion of these findings (6.2). Secondly, associations between the contributory factors and the outcome variables are presented (6.3), followed by a discussion of associations (6.4).

6.1 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative findings are presented below in the following order: the pre-arrival stage (6.1.1), the first few weeks in the UK (6.1.2), five months into the programme (6.1.3), and nine months into the programme (6.1.4). In light of recent depictions of the initial sojourn stage as a time of stress and anxiety (cf. Ward et al., 2001), a consideration of the pre-arrival stage seemed vital in order to develop a more comprehensive empirical understanding of student sojourners' wellbeing as part of cross-cultural transition. There is little specification in the literature as to what exactly constitutes the initial stage of the international student sojourn (Brown, 2008b), but in this study the initial stage refers to the last few weeks in the home country and the first few weeks of the academic year in the host environment. There appears to be a lack of research integrating the pre-arrival stage and the first few weeks in the host country. Studies on the early sojourn stage often tend to be either pre-departure (e.g. Brown and Aktas, 2011) or post-arrival (e.g. Brown and Holloway, 2008). It was hoped that the interview round at T1 would provide insights into the students' state of mind in the early sojourn weeks while memories of the pre-arrival stage were also still fresh and could therefore be captured. Outcomes of analysis, and representative data from each stage, are presented and summarised below.

6.1.1 The pre-arrival stage

Overall, a majority of comments on students' wellbeing in the pre-arrival stage was of a 'problematizing' or 'negative' nature related to the analytical framework. Nonetheless, there was great individual variation among participants and accounts of the pre-arrival stage ranged from the highly positive to the highly negative. The nature and intensity of emotions experienced before leaving home varied greatly by individual. Some students reported feeling at ease and "ready" to start a new chapter in their lives:

I was already ready to leave my country, so practically I was partying a lot, doing a lot of parties with my friends and everything and just telling everyone that I would never come back and stay in Europe forever. (Mario)

I was ready to go. (Kaari)

I think I was really excited, I don't think I was nervous or anxious or anything like that. (Sarah)

Others felt overwhelmed by the prospects of leaving home:

It felt like "Ok, I'm leaving" and then "Oh my God, I'm gonna leave this country and it's gonna be so far away" and then it felt even worse. I felt even more sad when I got my visa. (Mita)

Most students described the weeks leading up to departure from home as a time of mixed emotions. The following words were used by interviewees in the first interview round to describe feelings about departure from the home country: "Stressed", "excited", "anxious", "unreal", "scared", "nervous" and "depressing". The vocabulary used by interviewees pointed to a jittery state of mind as a number of interviewees reported feeling "torn" between feelings of excitement and anxiety:

[...] anxiety if I was making the right decision but also excited because of the possibilities that could lie ahead. (Robin)

[...] I was quite scared but at the same time I was really excited [...] (Ella)

I was very nervous and very anxious but excited as well. (Flora)

The organisational aspects of preparing for study abroad put some students under stress, in particular issues related to visa procedures and English language requirements as illustrated below:

The visa procedure took my most of time and the packing. It was a bit rush so I don't want to remember that. (Gediz)

I have to have 7 on my IELTS. It took me three times to get 7. (Indah)

My situation was quite complex because I came short 0.5 points in the writing section in IELTS. I had to retake it and just all the documents I had to send. It was very urgent. I was in a rush really. (Gabriel)

For others, financial concerns about tuition fees and living costs emerged as a significant stress factor:

I'm paying the international fee and I'm paying it from my personal savings and it's unbelievable. This amount is unbelievable and that's nothing about the other costs here with the accommodation and with the pocket money. (Esma)

The data also indicated that the prospects of losing familiar social support system seemed to have a great impact on students' wellbeing in the pre-arrival stage, in particular as departure drew closer. Saying goodbye to family members and friends at the airport was a difficult moment for most participants:

When I was at the airport in Romania I started crying when I left my parents [...] I think it was the only moment when I was thinking "Why do I want to do this?" (Anna)

[...] actually leaving Malaysia was very hard. I mean I was on board and I was crying, so it was difficult. (Elya)

[...] when I had to say goodbye to my father it was really hard, then waiting to get on the plane my phone kept ringing and my friends were trying to say goodbye once more even though we already said goodbye and that made it harder for me [...] (Lydia)

However, in some cases it was the parents who struggled most to cope with the departure of their children:

Whenever I saw my mum's face she was about to cry. (Esma)

It was difficult to say goodbye to my mum. She was very worried before I actually got on the plane. (Victoria)

Most students in the sample travelled to the UK by themselves, and some, especially those who travelled long distances, described their journey to the UK as "lonely" and "sad":

I arrived in Dubai and it's little bit lonely because I don't have any friends [...] I just went to the mosque and I pray. (Indah)

[...] I felt so sad. I cried on the plane because I was alone. I heard that some students from Indonesia they came here with their friends, other students probably, but I was alone. (Mita)

Finally, some interviewees worried that their religious background might provoke negative reactions on the part of the host society:

[...] sometimes I think that because of Islamophobia they may be irritated [...] (Celik)

I was quite worried [...] after the whole 9/11 thing because I am a Muslim so people back home always say "Are you sure, you want to go all the way there and study because you know how they treat you guys over there?" [...] (Elya)

However, students who had concerns about discrimination and adverse reactions also commented positively on its absence:

[...] when I say I don't eat pork, they never show a kind of negative reaction. (Celik)

[...] we can't generalise because you won't know it until you go and actually experience it and yeah I mean Newcastle has been really, really kind to me, thank God. (Elya)

6.1.2 *The first few weeks in the UK*

This section draws upon interviewees' accounts of the very start of the academic year just after students' arrival in the UK. Overall, the data indicated that participants experienced a range of emotions concerning the academic and sociocultural environment they were confronting and the familiar world they had left behind. Although 'negative' and 'problematizing' comments dominated in the first interview round, a number of students also showed a positive orientation towards their own psychological adjustment and seemed optimistic and upbeat about their ability to cope with academic demands and day-to-day life in the UK. Previous travel experience, strong motivation to study in the UK, intrinsic attraction to the UK, and personal attitude towards the sojourn combined to alleviate nervousness:

I was quite scared but the thing is that I've already had an experience abroad on my own in a country. (Ella)

I think I'll do just fine because I'm a very optimistic person. (Anna)

I am always happy when I am in the UK (Esma)

[...] wanting to actually be in this kind of environment and country it sort of pushes me to try to do well, try to be OK, try to fit in and everything. (Elya)

Sarah attributed her lack of nervousness to the forethought and planning she had put into the sojourn:

[...] I knew this is something I really wanted to do. This wasn't like an emotional decision where I just decided to go study abroad. I started this process back in January, so I think I had emotionally, physically, mentally prepared myself for a long time for it.

As can be seen from her quote, Sarah felt psychologically ready to enter the new environment which also contributed to a confident and positive outlook. Pre-arrival preparation and the acquisition of information and knowledge about the new environment in advance helped to reduce anxiety and increase confidence among participants. Students prepared for their sojourn in a number of ways. Lydia for example watched films about the host city to familiarise herself with the new environment in advance:

[...] I was trying to build up in my mind an enthusiasm for leaving so I was looking for movies about Newcastle [...]

Others prepared for the academic aspect of their sojourn although these efforts were often restricted to researching course requirements and professors on the internet:

I researched the different professors that were in the programme here, so I kind of read up on them a little bit, read what the expectations were [...]
(Sarah)

On the whole, only few students prepared specifically for their studies prior to departure from home:

I did some research concerning the university and what I'm going to study. I saw the pre-reading list but I didn't read any book from it. (Anna)

[...] I don't have anything prepare about my studies [...] I don't know what kind of teaching style here so I didn't prepare anything about study. (Indah)

Two Chinese interviewees, Ting and Ying, attended a six-week English language course at the host university prior to the start of their degree programme. Research has previously suggested that good language skills aid adjustment and reduce the gap between sojourners and hosts (Brown, 2008a). However, English language training did not have the desired effect for Ting and Ying as both students pointed to a lack of confidence in their own English language abilities at T1:

I don't know how to conquer barriers about language [...] it's hard for me to communicate with other people. (Ying)

[...] I'm not very confident about my English. (Ting)

With some exceptions, students prepared in largely practical manners for their sojourn: packing, organising travel and visa arrangements, looking up information about the host city and university on the internet, and buying warm clothes for the “cold” British weather dominated the pre-departure preparations.

Overall, the main topics of concern to the students were: English language difficulties, loneliness and homesickness, the weather, financial concerns, future career prospects and loss/lack of familial support. In the first interview round, there was a relatively high level of concern in the interviewee group over the twin needs of having to cope in an English-speaking environment and having to meet the demands of the degree programme. Findings indicated a link between foreign language use and feelings of anxiety and nervousness. A number of interviewees felt that language proficiency would affect their ability to cope with the demands of their course, including following lectures, academic reading, classroom discussions and assessed written work:

It's hard for me to read or to listen to the teacher to get information [...]
(Ying)

All the books are in English and everybody speaks English so well, I'm gonna have to catch up with it. (Mita)

The academic demands of the degree programme were a source of great concern for some interviewees who felt they were inadequately prepared for the essay-based nature of their course:

[...] I've only written my dissertation so, because we just read, read, read and then we take the exam orally, we don't really write since we leave school. So academically speaking if I think about this year ahead I'm really worried about writing essays and that's it. (Ella)

Fear of failure was preoccupying during the first interview round, with the importance of academic progress and success reflected in a number of comments:

I will just probably have to kind of do the work that I can do and not think about failing because that's something that I fear, and I know that I'm not gonna fail because I always push myself but it's just this irrational fear. (Kaari)

I am worried about not being able to complete the programme because otherwise when you come back to Turkey, like you have to pay for the money, that's the problem. So I am a little bit under stress that I should complete it successfully. (Celik)

I'm hoping to get really, really, really good marks for all the assignments and everything. (Elya)

A number of students felt that their English language competence might impact on their ability to navigate day-do-day life in host environment. Participants who were second language users of English expressed concern about their ability to communicate with British people and 'native speakers' in general. Interviewees reported feeling "nervous", "stressed" and "scared" about using English on a daily basis, and some perceived their English language proficiency as inadequate, pointing to a lack of confidence in their own abilities:

I don't have enough confidence in myself because I think my English is still not good enough for communicate. (Indah)

Negotiation of everyday communication episodes was a cause for concern for a number of interviewees; in particular interactions with British people. Gediz, for example, was preoccupied that his behaviour might be inappropriate in interactions with host nationals, and felt that he lacked the knowledge to interpret social cues of the host community. He was also concerned about understanding British accents:

I have sometimes difficulty in understanding other accents, including British accent. That's the basic concern for me. This is the most different. Sometimes I don't know how to react or how to behave in certain situations so I hope I will learn. (Gediz)

The social implications of not being able to communicate effectively in English were also emphasised by other interviewees who felt that their English language ability might impact negatively on relationship formation with British people on campus and in the wider community:

I sometimes get very nervous and I don't have intonation [...] sometimes I speak very in a dull way so I am sometimes worried about this because I may seem a boring person. (Celik)

Some students were conscious that language ability would affect their ability to adjust to the new environment:

If I can conquer the barriers of language, maybe everything will be easier than before. (Ying)

Confidence and concern over language ability varied considerably in the interviewee sample. Some interviewees did not express any concern about English language ability, but rather pointed to the “exciting” opportunity of studying in English and reported feeling at ease about this:

I'm excited about the opportunity to study [...] in English. It's a new thing for me. (Anna)

[...] I think that I can speak English fluently and have no problems at all. (Esma)

[...] everything is in English, but I think I will have the ability to do it. (Lydia)

Next, this study found an association between transition and longing for home. Missing home was a common theme of conversation with interviewees who repeatedly described the first few days in the new environment as “difficult”. Instances of insomnia and homesickness seemed to occur frequently in the initial sojourn stage, particularly during the very first night spent in the UK:

[...] at night I'm very homesick because it's the first night I spent here. (Ying)

I was still jetlagged, so I would sleep around 7pm, but then I would wake up at 3 or 4am in the morning. It's still dark and nobody was awake. (Mita)

The night was pretty rough just because I couldn't sleep and I was like “Man, what am I doing?” I think that was probably the worst I had as far as homesickness. (Robin)

With no access to the support structures enjoyed at home, some students turned to ‘virtual’ support via online communication tools such as Skype:

[...] I couldn't sleep. I just called my mother and my boyfriend and I cried. I just couldn't sleep and I just slept maybe two hours. (Indah)

I made phone calls all the time to my family member, to my friends and busy with connect to the computer because I want to go to....send e-mails [...]
(Ying)

For some students homesickness was compounded by feelings of isolation and loneliness:

[...] when I went to bed I always felt that I was in a plane or [...] in a stranger's house because this was my own house and I was just like by myself and nobody in the house, nothing. (Esma)

And then the first one month I was here, I was really homesick [...] I was just feeling lonely in my room, "Oh my God, I'm so far away!" (Mita)

Initial experiences of homesickness and isolation were profound enough for some students to lead them to contemplate returning home impulsively. Students recalled thinking "one year is just too long" (Mita) and "I want to buy a ticket tomorrow and go back" (Tao). Shortly after arrival in the UK, Esma packed her bags and was ready to cut her sojourn short:

I was always on the telephone saying that I want to go back for sure, and I even once I packed my stuff and went to the airport. (Esma)

Despite some initial distress, all interviewees emphasised that their wellbeing improved rapidly once classes had started and they had the opportunity to interact with their peers. This highlights the crucial role of social ties and social support for psychological adjustment.

A number of students commented on the importance of a family support system for psychological wellbeing, and the temporary loss of this support network caused some students to feel "sad", "concerned" or "nervous". Feelings of homesickness seemed particularly strong among those whose dependents at home were a source of concern - students who had left partners and children in their home countries seemed to struggle with the loss of a close family unit:

Currently my wife and children are still in the US. This has led to a great deal more sadness in my life than is usual. (Student from the US, male, T1 survey)

I am mindful of my husband, children and business in Barbados and concerned that everything remains well in my absence. (Student from Barbados, female, T1 survey)

Given that the postgraduate student population is typically older than the undergraduate student body (MacLeod, 2006), it is not surprising that several participants were married with children, and that concern about those left behind was a common theme for these students. One student reported that her family had not supported her decision

to pursue postgraduate study abroad. Her quote below illustrates the potential negative effects of lack of familial support on student sojourner wellbeing:

My family did not support me coming to England for my master's. They were upset that I was 'leaving them' and felt like I could get a fine job in the USA without a master's. I worry that when I graduate I will not be able to get a job and they'll say I told you so. (Student from the US, female, T1 survey)

A further topic of concern was the climate in the host country and comments about the "cold" and "rainy" British weather were common across the sample, but especially salient to those from warmer climates:

The snow, I've never lived in the snow [...] I've never had to walk in it [...] that's probably the only thing that I'm nervous about, being cold. (Sarah)

[...] when I arrived at the accommodation it was raining and I was thinking "Oh, did I make the right decision to come to a really rainy place?" because I'm a person that is very fond of summer. (Lydia)

The next concerns for students were related to the costly nature of an academic sojourn. References to costs associated with an academic sojourn were common right across the sample and a number of students reported feeling anxious about their finances and expenses:

My savings are going to be finished in about January. (Silvia)

I'm also worried about budgeting my money; make sure that I'm going to be successful with that. (Robin)

If only I didn't have to pay for my flat instalment. (Student from Macau, male, T1 survey)

Some students emphasised the importance of finding part-time work in order to cope with the financial implications of study abroad:

I very much hope I will get a part-time job, not to cover all my expenses but some of them, and I think this is a goal for me but also I'm a little bit worried that it might not happen. (Lydia)

Next, several interviewees expressed concerns about future career prospects. Students' comments related largely to the ability to re-enter the job market successfully and to build a career along the desired path:

I'm nervous about landing a career after I'm finished. (Robin)

At the moment I'm a bit scared to enter the job market [...] I just hope that I will be really prepared for the job market. (Flora)

I'm worried that maybe I finish my degree and graduate and I will just have to go back home and not get this job and not travel a lot. (Victoria)

One interviewee felt "nervous" about the UK visa policy and felt that his plans to find

work in the UK after completion of his master's degree were threatened by current immigration policy:

There are difference between the European students and the international students. I don't want to immigrate but I want to stay here a little longer because maybe one year and a half is a little short. This is what I'm a little worried about. (Tao)

Tao belonged to a cohort of students who could not qualify for a so called post-study work visa (PSW) as the UK government had abolished this arrangement in the previous year. It had previously been possible for overseas graduates of British universities to work in the UK for up to two years upon completion of their studies.

Two further issues with potential implications for psychological wellbeing were problematized by the students: living arrangements in the host country and mid-sojourn visits to the home country. Some students felt that mid-sojourn visits to their home countries might impact negatively on their wellbeing and could 'interrupt' their psychological adjustment:

I feel that if I go home for a month, like if I went home for Christmas and in March for a month that would screw me. Going home and then I've comforted there for a month and then either missing here or not wanting to come back [...] I just don't wanna mess with where I'm at too much and the adjustment.

Despite these concerns, Robin did eventually return to the US for Christmas and Easter. Furthermore, the nature of living arrangements in the UK seemed to be crucial for students' wellbeing as Esma's account exemplifies. Esma was the only student in the sample who lived by herself. In the first interview she explained that "personal space is my luxury", and felt that she needed a quiet environment in order to keep up with the demands of postgraduate study. Nonetheless, she highlighted the disadvantages of living alone and seemed to struggle to cope with living by herself:

It's a little bit hard because I have started to speak with the mirror and with the walls sometimes because I am not used to this.

She attempted to compensate for this lack of company through 'virtual' contact with friends and family in her home country, Turkey:

[...] the technology is really good nowadays with the Skype and all of these telephone cheap calls. Whenever I want, I can call my family or my friends and it's not that much far away.

The importance of 'virtual' contact with home was also emphasised by other interviewees and was seen as crucial for psychological wellbeing. For example Sarah felt that daily e-contact with her family in California enabled her to "feel part of their

lives” and sharing her experienced with family members helped her to adjust to the new surroundings:

I talk to my family every single day for probably three hours a day, so I think that is a big push for me because they know exactly everything that's going on with me day to day, and I know exactly what's going on with my family day to day [...] I'm so close to them and so...adapting and adjusting has been fine [...] (Sarah)

Others also highlighted the importance of close interpersonal relationships for psychological wellbeing. In particular partners living in the UK were identified as a reliable and crucial source for emotional support:

I have a lot of support of him [the boyfriend] and obviously my friend is living with me, so I think I'll be fine with that background. (Flora)

I think I'll do fine because I have a close relationship with my parents and we talk on Skype daily and also my boyfriend lives quite close [...] (Lydia)

As this chapter has shown, feelings of excitement were present in the initial sojourn stage and a number of interviewees showed a positive orientation towards their own psychological adjustment. Nonetheless, positive feelings of initial excitement seemed to be outweighed by more negative experiences of stress, anxiety, homesickness and loneliness.

It seems clear that transition acted as a trigger for stress for most participants, and the data revealed a general trend of insecurity and decreased emotional stability in the initial sojourn stage. The weeks before departure from home were generally described as a time of mixed emotions as students were torn between feelings of excitement and anxiety. The first few days in the new environment were experienced as difficult by many participants, especially the first night which was characterised for some by insomnia and longing for home. However, it must be noted that transition was not a uniform and generalisable experience as students differed in their experience of acculturative stress. Some felt at ease during the pre-arrival stage and the first few weeks in the host country, and demonstrated a confident and optimistic outlook at T1, while others were overwhelmed by the experience of leaving home and entering an unfamiliar environment.

Key issues of concern identified by the students in the first data-collection stage included English language difficulties, the weather in the UK, costs associated with the sojourn, career prospects and loss/lack of familial support. The importance of interpersonal relationships for psychological wellbeing and the crucial role of ‘virtual’ contact with home were highlighted by a number of students. Participants’ accounts of

their experiences in the initial sojourn stage are captured in the diagram below (Figure 6.3).

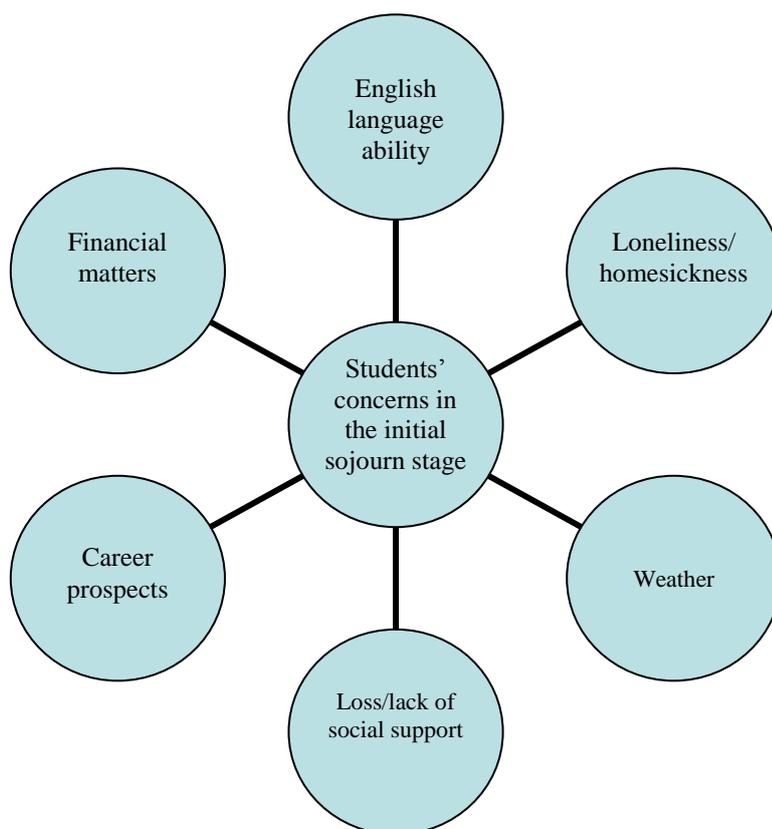


Figure 6.3 Students' Concerns in the Initial Sojourn Stage

6.1.3 Five months into the programme

The second interview round took place when students were five months into the programme. Overall, there was little comment on psychological wellbeing at T2 but, on the whole, students seemed to feel better five months into the sojourn compared to the first few weeks in the UK, illustrated by the frequent use of positive words such as “happy”, “nice” and “good”. After some initial acculturative stress during the early stage of the sojourn, many students demonstrated a more relaxed demeanour during the second interview round, reporting increased confidence and satisfaction with their life in the UK:

I've been feeling good about myself, bit more confident than before coming here. I started to get used to living alone because this was a first for me and I was a bit anxious in the beginning but now I feel good, I don't know, I've been feeling like this is right for me [...] (Lydia)

Didn't think I would be as ok as I am being away from home for this long, but I'm totally fine. (Sarah)

[...] it took some physical and mental maybe some efforts but now I feel that I'm already, like, where I have to be. (Gabriel)

Overall, homesickness seemed to be most intense in the initial sojourn stage (as suggested in many models of sojourner adjustment) and diminished over time as students formed a network of friends among their peer group. Nonetheless, at significant times, for example at night, at Christmas, and during busy assessment periods, a longing for home tended to resurface and intensify for some participants:

Sometimes it is a little bit difficult, especially at night because I miss my friends and family from home. It gets a little bit lonely but not too much. (Victoria)

I have friends there, so I spent Christmas with them. It was nice, it was very nice but yeah I think it was the first time I really missed the family atmosphere, I don't know, the traditions and the meals. (Anna)

I think the more time you have to think, the more homesick you can get, so I've been trying to keep myself as busy as I can. (Robin)

Although there was some initial doubt about the implications of mid-sojourn home visits for psychological adjustment (see 6.1.2), trips to the home country during the Christmas vacation seemed to have a refreshing effect on student wellbeing in some cases:

It's a short break but I think I needed it. (Elya)

I thought that it would be better to go back and see my family [...] I just wanted to relax with my family who looks after me and cooks and, you know, nice house, nice people and I just relaxed. (Esma)

I went home to see my family and that was really nice. I think I missed my family a lot, so that was a nice like step in between. (Flora)

[...] I was able to go home for a month which was really great because I got to share my experiences back home, and then you know get that sense of home and family and everything, and kind of rejuvenate me for the next six, eight months. (Sarah)

By the second interview round most students had formed stable friendships with their peers and a number of interviewees commented positively on the support generated by these newly formed relationships:

They are very supportive, I don't know, we talk all the time and try to give advice about anything. Advice about, I don't know, school projects, advice about places to go and where to go, events. (Anna)

Turkish friends, like we come together, we are from the same scholarship, so we have the same problems, so we sometimes talk about it. And academic support, we always talk about my department friends. (Celik)

The majority of ‘negative’ and ‘problematizing’ comments at T2 were related to academic aspects of the sojourn in the UK as students had experienced the intensive assignment schedule typical for a British one-year Master’s programme. Although students seemed to generally cope well with academic writing, it was experienced as a time-consuming and stressful process, indicating a link between emotional wellbeing and academic workload:

[...] most of the things were written assignment in the first semester, so you had to do a lot and it was your first semester. It made me depressive. (Esma)

I also had the pressure of writing all the assignments [...] it really wasn't that good I guess. (Victoria)

At T2 participants were anxiously awaiting their first feedback on assessed work, thus this was an issue of great importance to the students and generated a number of comments in the interviews. Many interviewees seemed to feel insecure about their academic performance, illustrated in the use of words such as “stressed out”, “worried” and “nervous”:

I was stressing out a bit 'cause I didn't really know, and still don't know how well I'm doing in my assessments [...] I don't know what exactly the lecturers expect in my assignments, so I guess I was kind of nervous and felt a bit under pressure about writing my essays because cause I was never sure if it will be good enough or not. (Flora)

It's between happy and also a little bit worried about my marks I guess. So it's a mix of lots of feelings. (Mita)

Feeling nervous of my result. You know the first time I came I wanted to become, like make my parents proud of me and wanna become like excellent (Indah)

At the time of the second interview round students had completed a large part of their assessed work but had not yet received any feedback from assessors. Thus, students’ reaction to feedback and the effect of academic achievement on their psychological wellbeing could not yet be monitored at this stage. Hence, it was not yet clear at this stage in how far academic adjustment was associated with psychological wellbeing throughout the sojourn. Nevertheless, it appeared that students’ psychological wellbeing was associated to some extent with the nature and intensity of academic demands. Apart from the academic aspects of study abroad, the cold weather during the winter months remained a dominant topic of conversation and some students pointed to the implications of the “depressing” British weather for their psychological and physical wellbeing:

[...] the weather is a problem. Yeah, I was frustrated, depressed, angry and at the same time, yeah I mean, weather was making me very, very depressive because in the mornings, I mean it's nine o' clock, it's dark, three o' clock, it's dark and because I come from, like, a place which is always sunny, first it affected me a lot. (Esma)

I didn't expect that I would be ill for such a long time. (Kaari)

Future job prospects equally remained a source of concern for several participants and a number of interviewees expressed a desire to improve their career opportunities.

Students seemed conscious that the MA degree alone would not guarantee successful entry into the job market and part-time work and internships became increasingly a priority for students by T2:

I have to start working or, I don't know, do something so that's basically my main issue [...]. (Silvia)

I want to find some opportunities to like volunteer or internship, so this is the most difficult for me because I should write my CV and you know the competition is very fierce because I want to grasp every chance to improve. (Tao)

Overall, the second interview round yielded less comment on psychological wellbeing than at T1, but on the whole most students seemed to have adjusted well to the new environment and reported feeling mostly “happy” and “comfortable”. Nonetheless, some interviewees experienced feelings of loneliness and homesickness, especially during the Christmas period. The main topic of salience for students’ wellbeing at T2 was academic achievement. Students experienced the busy assignment period as “stressful” and “depressing” and were anxiously awaiting their first feedback on assessed work.

6.1.4 Nine months into the programme

By T3, students had been nine months into their programme and were thus able to reflect on their own adjustment trajectories over time. From the students’ accounts two key findings emerged. Firstly, that there was no such thing as *the* international student experience. Participants experienced cross-cultural transition in distinct and nuanced ways demonstrating the complexity of the international student sojourn. Some students described their sojourn as “wavy” (Silvia) and as a period of “ups and downs” (Lydia), while others reflected more positively on their overall wellbeing:

[...] I thought I would have more trouble kind of being away [from home]. (Robin)

Secondly, despite variation between individuals, a trend for psychological adjustment could be observed from the data. Students' accounts of their experiences and wellbeing throughout the sojourn strongly suggest that the initial sojourn stage was a time of stress, anxiety and nervousness. Feelings of loneliness and homesickness were greatest during this time as students had to cope with the loss of familiar support systems and had only limited meaningful relationships in the UK:

I think at the very beginning it was the greatest shock because obviously you don't have anyone at the very beginning, your support system is not built up yet and everything is new. (Sarah)

As the sojourn progressed, students' wellbeing generally seemed to improve as they were able to build a supportive network of friends and got used to life and study in the UK:

I didn't really have any like psychological or like real intense adjustment or like loss of social support network issues because I think you develop friendships here that replace your social support network so I think that was a big help with my adjustment. (Robin)

[...] I started to go to class and then I meet many people and then I just started to adapt to the people, to the environment and everything. (Mita)

By T2 instances of homesickness had become considerably less frequent and by T3 they had disappeared altogether. On the whole, it seemed that the longer students were exposed to the host environment, the happier they felt:

When I arrived in October I was so scared but I feel much more self-confident now and happier in general. (Italian student, female, T2 survey)

[...] if I scale 1-10, now it's like 7, 8 compared to 2 or 3 the first time I came here. (Indah)

[...] it was a big difference between the beginning and the end because as you get used to, you feel different. When you come you are very quite sensitive, more sensitive. (Gabriel)

Several students depicted the initial sojourn stage as a rather bleak time characterised by loneliness and homesickness. Looking back, a number of interviewees described their first few days and weeks in the UK as "sad":

When I first came here it was kind of really sad. (Elya)

[...] the first time I just shocked and I really felt lonely, I cry a lot [...] I felt like I didn't have friends, I felt like I didn't have anyone I could talk to. I always rely onto my mother and my friends back home [...] (Indah)

[...] the first one month I was here, I was really homesick [...] I was just feeling lonely in my room, "Oh my God, I'm so far away!" (Mita)

On the whole, the data provided little evidence for a U-curve trajectory (Lysgaard, 1955) with a 'honeymoon' stage of early euphoria (Oberg, 1960), although some interviewees described the early stages of their sojourn as "exciting", "interesting" and "new":

To begin with, the first months when I was very happy because everything was so interesting and new. New people, new places. Also I had a lot of energy. (Anna)

[...] initially it was really nice because it was a very different city and we like hanged around a lot. (Celik)

Findings also suggest that although students' psychological adjustment improved as time progressed; their overall wellbeing remained variable and was, at times, influenced by external factors such as the weather and the demands of postgraduate study. A number of interviewees reported difficulties with adjusting to the weather and repeatedly described it as "depressing":

The first like two, three months I was really thinking about turning back but I now know the reason. It was not because I hated the school or the culture, it was because of the weather [...] it was raining, raining and I just felt like just shouting at someone or doing nothing because the weather affects me a lot. (Esma)

Maybe go to somewhere sunny otherwise you will be depressed. (Gediz)

There was strong evidence for a link between academic aspects of study abroad and psychological wellbeing. Busy assessment periods seemed to impact on students' wellbeing throughout the course of the sojourn and a number of interviewees repeatedly described these time periods as "depressing" and "stressful":

[...] Christmas and January with assignment period, it was like a low period that I had. Not a bad mood but I got a little bit depressive. I don't know, maybe because I didn't go home, maybe because I was so busy with the assignments, so it was like a darker period. (Anna)

I'm a bit stressed with the exams and the assignments because they are all concentrated in this month mainly, so yeah it's a very intense period of my life. (Lydia)

Nonetheless, most students did report relatively steady academic adjustment (see Chapter 5) which also seemed to positively reflect on their psychological wellbeing. Over time, students reported feeling "less stressed" and "more comfortable" with academic study in the UK:

I would say that at the beginning I panicked with uni work so I was really stressed but then things got better so under that aspect. (Ella)

I was very worried about studies in the beginning but I kind of feel rather comfortable with it now or confident. (Victoria)

Students were also more anxious as they were waiting for feedback on assessed work and some interviewees reported “feeling better” once they had received input from assessors:

It's torturing me that the grades are taking so long. (Flora)

After I know the exam result I feel much better. (Ting)

Another factor which seemed to have somewhat ‘interrupted’ students’ psychological adjustment progress at times was home visits. Although visits to the home country were described by some interviewees as “rejuvenating” and “relaxing”, others reported that they found it difficult to re-adjust to the host environment after a period of time spent at home. Homesickness appeared to resurface after visits to the home country:

When I came back from holidays, especially from this spring holiday for one week or even more than that I felt really homesick and I was trying to talk myself out of that state of mind. (Lydia)

[...] I think the more I visit Turkey, the more I feel homesick because I have some kind of adaptation problems when I come here [...] I feel down when I come here. (Celik)

Future career prospects were a source of concern for students throughout their sojourn, but towards the end of their time in the UK some students appeared particularly anxious about the future:

[...] one of the things that have made me a bit worried is the fact that I'm not sure what's gonna happen [...] in the long term I have so many uncertainties and this sometimes has caused me a bit of a trouble [...] (Lydia)

As their time abroad drew to a close, students also seemed to feel increasingly “sad” about leaving the UK and the friends they had made there:

[...] since everybody is going home so there is a lot of farewell parties, yeah everybody got into that really sad mood [...] it's gonna be really sad leaving.

Reflecting on her state of mind in the last few weeks of her sojourn, Kaari reported feeling “nostalgic about the year and sad to leave friends”.

6.2 Discussion of Psychological Adjustment over Time

Given the range of sojourner literature on ‘culture shock’ (e.g. Ward et al., 2001) and the popularity of associated models such as the U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955), it might be expected that international students experience high levels of anxiety and stress. A look at the earlier literature indeed paints a rather bleak picture of student sojourners’

physical and mental health. In a 1967 paper, Ward argued for the existence of a 'foreign-student syndrome', characterised by depression, vague physical symptoms and a withdrawn interaction style (Furnham, 2004). Similarly, a 1992 study by Janca and Helzer, reported severe psychological breakdowns among international students in Yugoslavia, characterised by paranoia and depression, symptoms the researchers took as evidence for "maladaptation to the new living conditions" (p. 287). More recently, it is still widely reported that student sojourners experience more stress and anxiety than their local peers (Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002), however the assumption that the experience of study abroad results in poor general mental health is being increasingly challenged. It is worth emphasising that the experience of study abroad ultimately leaves many students positively disposed to their host university, the host city and the host country as a whole. Negative experiences and difficulties in the early sojourn stages are generally soon overcome and most students recall mainly positive experiences (Furnham, 2004).

In this study, although students reported various degrees of frustration and insecurities, especially in the initial sojourn stage, overall there was little indication that at any stage profound threats to their wellbeing had occurred. This is similar to Brenner's (2003) findings on the psychological adjustment of US students sojourning abroad. The vast majority of students in the present study reported a positive sense of wellbeing and satisfaction throughout the sojourn, although the initial sojourn stage (including the weeks leading up to departure from home) was experienced by many as difficult. This is in line with previous research in the UK and Australia (e.g. Brown and Holloway, 2008; Khawaja and Stallman, 2011), and stands in direct opposition to the notion of early 'honeymoon' euphoria suggested in the U-curve model (see Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960).

Schreier and Abramovitch (1996) distinguish between initial and ongoing concerns, a useful typology which can be applied to this study. The new situation did, perhaps not surprisingly, cause some anxiety among the students and issues surrounding language confidence, academic stressors, loneliness, and homesickness were salient in the early sojourn weeks, while frustration with some aspects of the host environment (e.g. the weather) was present throughout the sojourn. However, not at any stage did this lead to deeper psychological problems or pathological symptoms such as depression (with perhaps one exception where one student genuinely considered returning home at one point early in the sojourn). This finding stands in contrast to Brown's (2008a)

ethnographic study of postgraduate student sojourners in the UK which reported evidence for more intense psychological and physiological reactions such as emotionality, tearfulness, insomnia, anxiety, loss of appetite and depression.

Overall, the findings indicate that students' psychological adjustment remained variable over time (cf. Ward et al., 1998) although overall it did seem to improve as the sojourn progressed reflected in students' accounts of increased confidence. Instances of homesickness and sadness were most salient in the initial sojourn stage and seemed to subside over time. After a period of initial doubts and insecurities, students' psychological adjustment generally followed a path of improvement (Figure 6.4), although a slight drop was recorded approximately 3-4 months into the sojourn when students became nostalgic during Christmas time and had to deal with their first assessed academic assignments. From the start of the second semester onwards psychological adjustment seemed to level off, perhaps as a consequence of students having become more effective 'cultural learners' (Ward et al., 2001). Nonetheless, academic stressors and aspects of the host environment such as the weather continued to have an impact on students' wellbeing throughout, albeit not to a great extent.

The finding that psychological adjustment difficulties were most pronounced in the early sojourn weeks does not coincide with the 'honeymoon' phase of euphoria suggested in the U-curve model (Lysgaard, 1955), but is in line with more recent research which depicts the initial sojourn stages as a time of stress and nervousness (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1996a, 1996b; Brown and Holloway, 2008a, 2008b). The findings further correspond to Ward et al.'s (2001) conceptualisation of psychological adjustment, suggesting that student sojourners' wellbeing is likely to be lowest when life changes are greatest while coping resources (i.e. social ties and social support in the host country) are limited. Similar to the pattern found in this study, research commonly reports a decrease in psychological adjustment between departure from home and arrival in the host country (Ying and Liese, 1991; Brown and Holloway, 2008), followed by fairly swift improvement in the first few months of the sojourn (Ward and Kennedy, 1996b).

Consistent with previous literature, building social ties appeared to buffer stress (cf. Furukawa, 1997; Lee et al., 2004). Students who had left partners or children in their home countries expressed a sense of loneliness and concern for the wellbeing of their family members, exemplifying the effect of loss of social ties on student sojourner wellbeing. For others, living costs and tuition fees in the host country were of concern.

Although financial means might be a considerable concern for university students in general (Rosenthal et al., 2006), whether home or international, those coming from abroad are likely to face higher tuition fees and costs of living than in their own country. Consistent with prior studies, some students sought part-time work in order to compensate for their financial expenses in the host country (cf. Li and Kaye, 1998; Roberts et al., 1999).

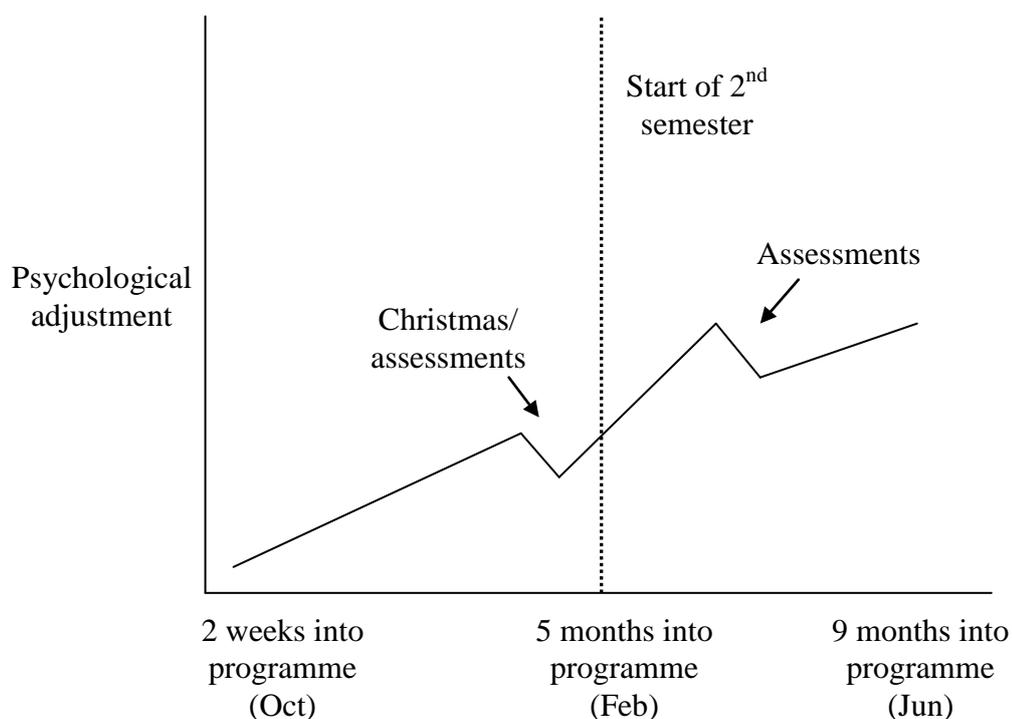


Figure 6.4 Psychological Adjustment over Time

By far the greatest amount of stress was prompted by the transition into an unfamiliar academic environment. Concerns in the early stages related largely to perceived English language ability and its impact on academic success, as well as unfamiliar academic conventions such as essay-writing and self-directed learning. However, worries about academic aspects decreased steadily over time as students developed what Brown (2008a) calls ‘academic cultural competence’ and reported growing ease in coping with the demands of their degree programme. This highlights the role of culture-learning in psychological adjustment, indicating that the more students learned about their academic host environment the better they felt psychologically as discussed below. Nonetheless there was a slight drop in psychological adjustment as students confronted their first assessment period around Christmas. This finding points to a correlation between adjustment to the academic environment and student wellbeing as suggested by Zhou and Todman (2009).

Although the demands of postgraduate study such as busy assignment periods continued to trigger some stress from time to time, this did not seem to significantly impact on students' general sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction which remained fairly constant throughout the sojourn. This is sustained by the questionnaire results which showed no significant differences in the PWB and SWL scores between the different measurement-points in time (Chapter 4), further indicating that psychological adjustment seemed to follow a relatively steady path after some initial acculturative stress upon arrival. It might be that knowing that their sojourn in the UK was temporary may have impacted on how psychologically affected students became (Brenner, 2003).

Overall, findings from the interviews indicate that students viewed their sojourn as a learning process, describing it as a growth-facilitating experience. At the onset of their sojourn, some students felt relatively incompetent, doubting their own academic, linguistic and social abilities. They did not yet feel that they had sufficient knowledge and experience to respond appropriately to the demands of the host environment, and this lack of confidence seemed to hinder their adjustment (cf. Lewthwaite, 1996). However, over time, these students acknowledged that much had been learned through consistent exposure to the host environment. Learning the characteristics of the host environment (Furnham and Bochner, 1982, 1986) led to increased confidence among the students and was seen as paramount for their own sense of psychological adjustment. Thus, it seems that students' wellbeing and SWL improved as a direct function of acquiring knowledge and skills that enabled them to function effectively in the (academic) host environment (Ward et al., 2001). This suggests that culture-learning can perhaps be considered a coping response to acculturative stress. In light of this finding, it makes sense to recognise the complementarity of the culture-learning and the stress and coping framework, rather than viewing them as completely separate constructs (Ward et al., 2001).

What is apparent in the present research is that students hardly reported substantial difficulties, and very little evidence was found of persistent psychological difficulties. However, it should be noted that this sample was characterised by a number of factors which may have eased their transition into the host environment. One such factor is the supportive environment created by strong non-compatriot friendships among the cohort which could have worked as a coping mechanism during cross-cultural transition. Social mixing with 'international' peers (i.e. non-co-national international students) was positively related to students' sense of psychological

adjustment (see also Chapter 8). The study showed that a sense of social connectedness was fundamental to the students' wellbeing: the interview data highlights the importance of contact with others and, most especially, of social support derived from international peers for students' own sense of psychological adjustment. Furthermore, the questionnaire results showed that students had a strong sense of social support – more than half of the participants scored above the midpoint of the 5-point scale for social support (Chapter 4), and nobody in the interviewee sample reported feeling isolated at any point in the sojourn.

Another possible explanation for the relatively smooth psychological adjustment could be the focus on international postgraduate students who are likely to be older (MacLeod, 2006) and thus perhaps better able to deal with acculturative stress, although findings on the relationship between age and adjustment are ambiguous (Ward et al., 2001). Students' educational background may have also played a role: all participants had previously completed at least an undergraduate degree and it might therefore be possible that this prepared them for some of the stress encountered in the host environment, although not necessarily for local learning and teaching practices and the specific demands of PG study (Garson, 2005; Luxon and Peelo, 2009). Generally, prior education is associated with better adaptation and lower levels of stress due to its link to resources such as culture-specific knowledge and skills (Ward et al., 2001). It could also be that the students in this study were particularly well prepared for their sojourn as many reported previous overseas experience (8/20 interviewees). Research suggests that students with prior overseas experience encounter fewer adjustment difficulties and less acculturative stress, and exhibit greater satisfaction with life (e.g. Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Bochner et al., 1986; Rohrlach and Martin, 1991), although no significant difference in PWB and SWL was found between students with and without prior overseas experience in this study (Chapter 4). It is generally believed that students with prior overseas experience may learn how to cope with reactions to living in an unfamiliar environment, although prior sojourns abroad do not necessarily always prevent acculturative stress (Furnham, 2004). To sum up, three interrelated processes seemed integral to the psychological adjustment of the students in this study:

- (1) Time: diminishing psychological difficulties as the sojourn progressed
- (2) Coping: coping mechanisms used for dealing with acculturative stress, including social contact and social support

- (3) Culture-learning: acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills, leading to increased confidence

6.3 Associations between Contributory Factors and Psychological Adaptation

This section presents associations between the contributory factors and the psychological adaptation indicators, PWB and SWL.

6.3.1 English language ability

English language ability (ELA) measured at T1 correlated significantly with SWL ($r = .21$, $p < .05$); no significant correlation was found with PWB. A linear regression analysis revealed that ELA T1 was a significant predictor of SWL, $\beta = .21$, $t(127) = 2.41$, $p = .018$, and explained 4% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 127) = 5.78$, $p = .018$, $R^2 = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .04$. ELA measured at T2 correlated significantly with both SWL ($r = .45$, $p < .01$) and PWB ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). Linear regression analyses revealed that ELA T2 was a significant predictor of SWL (20% of the variance explained) and of PWB (4%) (Table 6.1).

	SWL		PWB	
	β	t	β	t
ELA T2	.45	5.72**	.20	2.34*
R²	0.20		0.04	
Adjusted R²	0.20		0.03	
F (df)	32.75 (1, 130)		5.46 (1, 130)	
Sig.	p < .001		0.021	

**significant at the 99% level; *significant at the 95% level

Table 6.1 Regression Analysis of ELA T2 and SWL and PWB

6.3.2 Knowledge about the UK

A significant positive correlation was found between knowledge about the UK (KNW) and SWL ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). The correlation between KNW and PWB ($r = .23$), was not statistically significant. A linear regression analysis showed that KNW was a significant predictor of SWL, $\beta = .20$, $t(140) = 2.39$, $p = .018$, contributing to 4% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 140) = 5.72$, $p = .018$, $R^2 = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .03$.

6.3.3 Autonomy in the decision to study abroad

A significant positive correlation was found between relative autonomy in the decision to study abroad and psychological adaptation (Table 6.2). The RAI correlated positively

with both, SWL and PWB. Positive correlations were found with the intrinsic motivation subscale, and negative correlations were found with the introjected and external regulation subscales.

	RAI	INTRI	IDENT	INTRO	EXTER
PWB	.26**	.25**	.04	-.15	-.18*
SWL	.37**	.26**	.15	-.25**	-.32**

**significant at $p < .01$; *significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed); RAI = Relative Autonomy Index, INTRI = intrinsic motivation, IDENT = identified regulation, INTRO = introjected regulation, EXTER = external regulation

Table 6.2 Bivariate Correlations between the SRQ-SA and PWB and SWL

The RAI was then entered into multiple linear regression models with SWL and PWB as outcome variables. The models were statistically significant and contributed to 14% of the variance in SWL and to 7% of the variance in PWB (Table 6.3).

	SWL		PWB	
	β	t	β	t
RAI	.37	4.73**	.26	3.14**
R²	0.14		0.07	
Adjusted R²	0.13		0.06	
F (df)	22.36 (1, 140)		9.86 (1, 140)	
Sig.	$p < .001$		0.002	

**significant at the 99% level

Table 6.3 Regression Analysis of the RAI and SWL and PWB

6.3.4 Intercultural competence

Aspects of IC correlated positively with the psychological adaptation indices (Table 6.4).

	PWB	SWL
IC T1		
CE	.14	.42**
OM	.26**	.33**
SI	.27**	.42**
ES	.43**	.29**
FL	.11	.24**

**significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

Table 6.4 Bivariate Correlations between IC and PWB and SWL

Multiple regression analyses using the enter method yielded statistically significant models for variance in SWL and PWB in relation to IC. First, the four IC subscales were entered a multiple regression model with SWL as the outcome variable. A highly

significant model emerged, contributing to 28% of the variance in the data. Analysis of coefficients showed that CE, SI and ES were significant predictors of SWL. CE was the strongest predictor, followed by SI and ES (Table 6.5). Next, the IC subscales were entered into a multiple regression model with PWB as the outcome variable. Another highly significant model emerged, contributing to 21% of the variance in the data. Analysis of coefficients showed that ES was a significant predictor of PWB (Table 6.5).

	SWL		PWB	
	β	t	β	t
Mean CE	.37	3.80**	.04	.41
Mean OM	-.15	-1.33	.06	.52
Mean SI	.26	2.46*	.11	1.04
Mean ES	.21	2.63*	.40	4.64**
Mean FL	.02	.23	-.11	-1.21
R²	0.28		0.21	
Adjusted R²	0.25		0.18	
F (df)	10.56 (5, 137)		7.30 (5, 137)	
Sig.	p < .001		p < .001	

**significant at the 99% level; *significant at the 95% level

Table 6.5 Regression Analysis of IC and SWL and PWB

6.3.5 Social contact

Significant positive correlations were found between SWL and contact with British students ($r = .26, p < .01$), with non-co-national ISs ($r = .47, p < .01$) and with members of the local community ($r = .25, p < .01$); no significant correlations were found between degree of SC and PWB. To explore the relationship between degree of SC and SWL further, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The model was highly significant and contributed to 26% of the variance in the data. Analysis of coefficients showed that degree of contact with non-co-national ISs was the main predictor of SWL. Contact with British students was marginally associated with SWL (Table 6.6).

	SWL	
	β	t
SC-BS	.14	1.69^
SC-CN	.04	.54
SC-IN	.43	5.43**
SC-LC	.11	1.33
R²	0.26	
Adjusted R²	0.24	
F (df)	11.92 (4, 138)	
Sig.	p < .001	

**significant at the 99% level; ^significant at the 90% level

Table 6.6 Regression Analysis of SC and SWL

6.3.6 Social support

Significant positive correlations were found between the social support (SS) subscales and both psychological adaptation indicators (Table 6.7).

	Socio-emotional SS	Instrumental SS
PWB	.17*	.17*
SWL	.34**	.25**

**significant at $p < .01$; *significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

Table 6.7 Bivariate Correlations between SS and PWB and SWL

A multiple regression analysis showed that the two subscales accounted for 12% of the variance in SWL. Analysis of coefficients showed that socio-emotional support was a significant predictor of SWL (Table 6.8). An ANOVA yielded no significant association between the SS subscales and PWB.

	SWL	
	β	t
SS-SE	.31	3.06**
SS-IN	.05	.47
R²	0.12	
Adjusted R²	0.11	
F (df)	9.43 (2, 140)	
Sig.	$p < .001$	

**significant at the 99% level

Table 6.8 Regression Analysis of SS and SWL

Box 7.1 Association between Psychological Adaptation and other Adaptation Domains

▪ Sociocultural adaptation (SCA):

- SCA correlated significantly with both PWB ($r = .35, p < .01$) and SWL ($r = .43, p < .01$).
- SCA emerged as a significant predictor of SWL, $\beta = .43, t(141) = 5.70, p < .001$, and explained 19% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 141) = 32.43, p < .001$.
- SCA also emerged as a significant predictor of PWB, $\beta = .35, t(141) = 4.43, p < .001$, explained 12% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 141) = 19.65, p < .001$.

▪ Academic adaptation:

- SWL correlated significantly with the taught GPA ($r = .33, p < .01$), the research GPA ($r = .30, p < .01$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .34, p < .01$).
- In a simple regression analysis the overall degree GPA emerged as a significant predictor of SWL, $\beta = .34, t(138) = 4.30, p < .001$, and explained 12% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 138) = 18.51, p < .001$.
- An ANOVO yielded no significant association between the overall GPA and PWB.

6.4 Summary and Discussion of the Quantitative Findings

This study confirmed a variety of contributory factors for student sojourners' psychological adaptation. Overall, the contributory variables were better able to predict SWL than PWB. The findings indicate that there are some pre-sojourn characteristics which make students sojourners more likely to adjust well psychologically to the host environment: students exhibiting high levels of SWL after nine months of study in the host country are likely to be language proficient, emotionally stable and proactive, and to have high levels of cultural empathy. They are also likely to have made the decision to study abroad independently from others, to have high levels of self-perceived knowledge about the host country, and to have high levels of social contact with non-co-national international students and socio-emotional support in the host country (Figure 6.5). Students exhibiting high levels of PWB after nine months of study in the host country are likely to be emotionally stable, and to have made the decision to study abroad independently from others (Figure 6.5). Findings are further discussed below, starting with the role of English language ability.

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

- English language ability
- Knowledge about the UK
- Autonomy in the decision to study abroad
- Cultural empathy
- Social initiative
- Emotional stability
- Contact with non-co-national international students
- Socio-emotional support



Satisfaction with life

- Autonomy in the decision to study abroad
- Emotional stability



Psychological wellbeing

Figure 6.5 Significant Associations between Contributory Factors and SWL and PWB

6.4.1 English language ability

English language ability (ELA) measured at T1 was able to predict satisfaction with life (SWL) over time, albeit to a modest extent (4% of the variance explained). ELA measured at T2 predicted a considerable degree of the variance (20%) in SWL, and explained a small amount of the variance in psychological wellbeing (PWB, 4%). This suggests that students who were satisfied with their ability to use English were more likely to feel satisfied with life the host environment. ELA T2 emerged as a better predictor of psychological adaptation than ELA T1, most likely because at T2 students were better able to relate their language ability to the experience of living and studying abroad (Young et al., 2013). However, the predictive ability of ELA T2 over time remains unclear. A mid-sojourn ELA measure could very usefully provide further cues to the predictive validity of ELA over time. Overall, ELA was a better predictor for SWL than for PWB.

In the wider literature, findings regarding the link between language proficiency and psychological adaptation of student sojourners are inconclusive. Some studies did not find a significant association between language skills and psychological adaptation (e.g. Ward and Kennedy, 1993), while others have linked language ability to increased student wellbeing (e.g. Ying and Liese, 1991). With regard to SWL, some studies suggest that life satisfaction in the host country is associated with command of the host language (e.g. Perruci and Hu, 1995; Ward and Masgoret, 2004), while other work found no significant association between ELA and SWL (e.g. Sam, 2000; Young et al., 2013).

There are several possible explanations for the association between ELA and students' SWL found in this study. It seems likely that the ability to communicate in English is vital for students' self-esteem and confidence (Tananuraksakul, 2009 cited in Tananuraksakul and Hall, 2011), thus resulting in greater SWL. Secondly, SWL is likely to be related to the degree of social contact and social support in the host country (Ward et al., 2001). Student sojourners generally experience a loss of familiar social ties and support systems as a consequence of cross-cultural transition, thus the formation of new ties becomes paramount (Ong and Ward, 2005). Communication skills and language ability are essential for social interaction and will thus be an important prerequisite for the formation of friendships in the host country (Ward et al., 2004). Better command of the host language could thus lead to greater SWL through the establishment of social ties. A link between social contact and student wellbeing has

been found in a number of studies (e.g. Tananuraksakul and Hall, 2011; Young et al., 2013).

Another possible explanation might be that good command of the host language, or the language of instruction, might lead to greater academic success, thereby also leading to greater SWL. Studies have consistently concluded that student sojourners with a better command of the language of instruction are more likely to perform better academically (Andrade, 2006). As academic success is likely to be a key objective for student sojourners (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006), a link between academic success and SWL follows logically. Leung (2001) emphasises that academic satisfaction should be considered an integral aspect of psychological adaptation as being able to cope with academic demands is an important adjustment issue for student sojourners. Future research could very usefully differentiate between academic satisfaction and social satisfaction (cf. Perrucci and Hu, 1995).

6.4.2 Prior overseas experience

Although it seems intuitively logical that students with prior experience of living or studying abroad would find it easier to cope with the psychological challenges of study abroad (Melnick et al., 2011), no significant differences in SWL and PWB were found between those with and those without prior overseas experience. This suggests that previous experience of living abroad might not necessarily lead to reduced acculturative stress (Furnham, 2004). In the management literature, prior overseas experience has been found to be positively related to success in an assignment abroad (Takeuchi et al., 2005), and it is commonly expected that expatriates with previous experience abroad are likely to have gone through trial and error processes which allowed them to develop effective coping strategies (Gudmundsdottir, 2012). However, in how far this is true for student sojourners remains unclear. It might be that more specific prior experience of living in the host country may have a greater effect on student sojourners' psychological adjustment as it might reduce uncertainty and stress about the host environment (ibid.).

6.4.3 Knowledge about the host country

Knowledge about the UK (KNW) emerged as a significant predictor of SWL, although the variance explained in the data was modest (4%). No significant association was found with PWB. Nonetheless, this finding provides some indication that pre-sojourn knowledge about the host environment can lead to greater life satisfaction among

student sojourners. Ward et al. (2001) argue that culture-specific knowledge and skills provide the basis for successful intercultural interactions and can thus, in extension, facilitate psychological adaptation to the host environment. Prior research has also found that the acquisition of culture-specific knowledge is positively related to psychological wellbeing (Scott and Scott, 1991), although KNW did not emerge as a significant predictor of PWB in this study.

6.4.4 Degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad

Regression analyses showed that the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) predicted both SWL (14% of the variance explained) and PWB (7%) over time. This indicates that if students made the decision to study abroad independently from others, as opposed to succumbing to external pressures, they were more likely to feel happy and satisfied with their life in the host country. This is similar to prior research by Chirkov and colleagues where the RAI accounted for between 9 and 15 percent of the variance in student sojourner wellbeing (Chirkov et al., 2007, 2008). Chirkov et al.'s (ibid.) work however combined SWL and PWB into one wellbeing scale, whereas the differentiation between SWL and PWB in this study provided a more fine-grained picture of the predictive power of the RAI for the cognitive (SWL) and affective (PWB) dimensions of subjective student wellbeing (Sam, 2000).

6.4.5 Intercultural competence

The MPQ-scales were found to be highly predictive of both SWL and PWB, accounting for 28 percent and 21 percent of the variance respectively. A recent study by Young et al. (2013) on the adaptation of postgraduate student sojourners in the UK also yielded statistically significant models for both outcome indices, although the variance explained by the MPQ-scales was higher than in the present study (50% for PWB and 29% for SWL). However, it must be noted that Young et al. (ibid.) employed a concurrent research design which did not account for the predictive validity of the MPQ-scales over time. Conversely, the longitudinal design in the present study showed that the MPQ-scales had predictive power for student sojourners' psychological adaptation over a period of time (i.e. 9 months). In an earlier longitudinal study of student sojourners' adaptation in the Netherlands, the MPQ-scales were able to predict subjective wellbeing over a period of six months (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002). With regard to the MPQ-dimensions, emotional stability (ES) emerged as a

significant predictor of both SWL and PWB. This finding is in line with prior research which identified ES as a key factor in SWL and PWB (Young et al., 2013). SWL was additionally predicted by cultural empathy (CE) and social initiative (SI). The three predictors are further discussed below, starting with ES.

The predictive power of ES for psychological adaptation is not surprising as emotionally resilient individuals are probably more likely to cope well with stressful life events such as a sojourn abroad (Berry, 2006). Student sojourners have been found to experience more stress and anxiety than their domestic peers, both socially (Hechanova-Alampay et al. 2002) and academically (Ramsay et al., 2007), thus the ability to cope with this stress can be considered an important asset and has long been seen as a key factor for a successful intercultural experience (Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman, 1978). The broader psychological literature suggests that emotionally stable individuals tend to appraise new situations as less stressful, and will thus exhibit less negative emotional reactions (Berry, 1970; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002).

The strongest predictor of SWL was CE, suggesting that students with an ability to empathise with others are more likely to feel satisfied with their life in the host country and with study in a multicultural setting. It is possible that students with the ability to communicate with others in a culturally appropriate way were more sensitive to how others respond to them (Ward et al., 2001) and were able to better understand and adjust to others in the host environment, thereby creating a supportive atmosphere and enhancing social relationships (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002).

A further predictor of SWL was SI, defined as the ability to approach social situations in an active way (*ibid.*). The link between SI and psychological adaptation is not a new finding. Research has previously found a link between extraversion and psychological adjustment among samples of student sojourners in New Zealand (Searle and Ward, 1990) and, more recently, among Australian sojourners in Singapore (Leong et al., 2007). Similarly, a recent longitudinal study on Singaporean exchange students showed that increased SI predicted a reduction in psychological difficulties over time (Leong, 2007). The link between SI and increased SWL could be explained by the role of SI in interpersonal communication. It seems likely that a socially proactive disposition can assist student sojourners to build relationships with others, thus making them feel socially connected and supported (Black and Gregensen, 1999; Tananuraksakul and Hall, 2011), thereby also leading to greater life satisfaction. It is

also likely that students who score highly on SI are more likely to take a proactive approach to problem-solving and are thus better able to manage uncertainties associated with cross-cultural transition and overcome challenges and setbacks (Leong, 2007).

6.4.6 Social contact and social support

A multiple regression analysis revealed that degree of social contact (SC) was able to predict SWL to a considerable degree (25% of the variance). Degree of contact with non-co-national international students emerged as a statistically significant predictor, suggesting that students who have regular contact with other (non-co-national) student sojourners are more likely to exhibit greater life satisfaction. This finding is similar to Young et al.'s (2013) where a regression analysis yielded a statistically significant model for degree of SC in relation to both SWL (although it contributed to only 9% of the variance) and PWB. No significant association was found between degree of SC and PWB in this study.

The finding that degree of SC accounted for a considerable amount of the variance in SWL is not surprising. Social contact is thought to buffer stress by providing support (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). It seems likely that students with higher degrees of SC will receive greater levels of social support which could impact positively on their SWL. Findings from this study support this assertion: a regression analysis showed that social support accounted for a considerable degree of the variance in SWL (11%) and socio-emotional support emerged as a significant predictor of SWL. This indicates a link between social support and the psychological adaptation of student sojourners. Indeed, in the stress and coping literature social support is viewed as a major resource and as a significant factor in predicting psychological adaptation (see Ward et al., 2001 for a review). A number of studies have also found a negative correlation between social support and psychological difficulties such as homesickness (e.g. Hannigan, 1997; Dao, Lee and Chang, 2007).

Although contact with British students was found to be marginally predictive, the significance of contact with non-co-national international students is particularly intriguing and challenges the common perception that student sojourners need to build ties with host nationals in order to experience a successful sojourn. Prior research has suggested that ties with host nationals are generally beneficial for sojourners' psychological adaptation, including their SWL and their ability to cope with stress (Ward et al., 2001). Nonetheless, it seems plausible that student sojourners of different

backgrounds can also help facilitate one another's psychological adjustment in a community of shared experience and solidarity. Indeed, Adelman (1988) comments on the significance of contact with 'comparable others' (i.e. those also going through the sojourn experience), which might offer a platform for sharing information about coping in the host environment and thus provides emotional benefits for the student sojourners. A similar line of argument is presented by Church (1982) who points to the protective functions of 'expatriate bubbles' which might enhance self-esteem and can provide a sense of belonging, while also easing feelings of anxiety and stress. However, earlier research by Kennedy (1999) and Ward and Searle (1991) found that the degree of interaction with non-compatriot international students was not related to psychological adaptation. More recently though, there have been some indications that this type of contact might play a positive role in psychological adjustment and adaptation, although research on non-co-national international contact is still relatively scarce (Marginson et al., 2010). In a study on student sojourners in Australia, Kashima and Loh (2006) found that the more 'international ties' students had the better they were adapted psychologically, although the same was true for ties with local students. In a qualitative study of students sojourning in the UK, Montgomery and McDowell (2009) found evidence for the formation of highly supportive 'international communities of practice'. Findings of a similar nature were also reported in the qualitative part of Young et al.'s (2013) study and in the interview data of the present study (Chapter 8).

6.4.7 Associations with other adaptation domains

The findings show significant associations between aspects of psychological adaptation and other adaptation domains (Box 7.1). Firstly, sociocultural adaptation (SCA) emerged as a significant predictor of both, PWB and SWL indicating that students who reported high levels of SCA were also likely to feel happy and satisfied with life in the host environment. Secondly, the overall degree GPA emerged as a significant predictor of SWL, suggesting that students who performed well academically were also likely to achieve high levels of SCA (Figure 6.6).

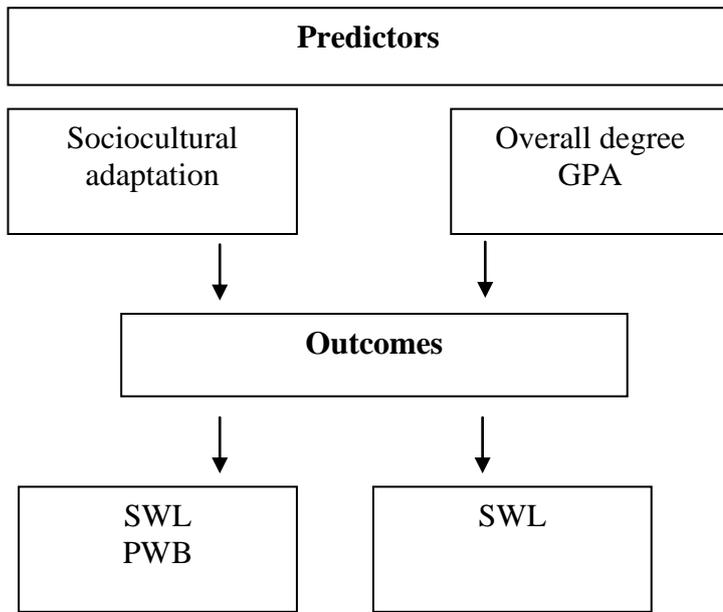


Figure 6.6 Associations between Psychological Adaptation and SCA and Academic Achievement

Chapter 7. Sociocultural Adjustment and Adaptation

This chapter presents findings regarding the third adjustment domain from the conceptual framework for this study: sociocultural adjustment and adaptation. Findings regarding academic and psychological adjustment and adaptation are presented above in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively (see Figure 7.1).

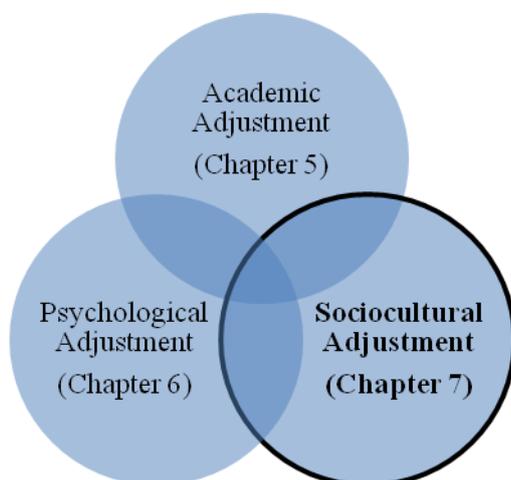


Figure 7.1 The Conceptual Focus of Chapter 7

Sociocultural adjustment is conceptualised here as the processes associated with becoming effective in daily performances and ‘fitting into’ the host environment (see also 2.2.2). Sociocultural adaptation refers to the outcome of these processes. The qualitative data aimed to explore students’ own perceptions of their sociocultural experiences and thus provided a fine-grained and nuanced picture of participants’ ‘lived’ sociocultural adjustment. The quantitative data aimed to investigate which factors contributed to sociocultural adaptation over time. Outcomes of analysis and representative data are presented and summarised below, starting with the qualitative findings.

7.1 Qualitative Findings

7.1.1 T1: Two weeks into the programme

At T1, the interviewees had been in the host environment for approximately two to three weeks.³⁹ Thus, students’ comments at this stage were largely related to initial first-hand

³⁹ One interviewee, Ting, had attended a pre-session English language course in the host city prior to the start of her degree programme, and had therefore already been in the UK for three months by the first interview round.

experiences in the new environment. Overall, findings suggest that students generally showed a positive orientation towards the host environment and their own sociocultural adjustment (Figure 7.2). This was reflected in positive comments about initial encounters with British people and in students' general motivation to explore the new environment - curiosity about aspects of life in the UK and a desire to learn more about "UK culture" was expressed by many students, including references to history, travel, the arts, popular culture and sports:

The most important thing is that I would like to learn about English culture [...] I would like to learn more about British story, like their traditions (Celik)

I would love to go to London and you know go to that Royal Albert Hall and just catch a play or orchestra performance or whatever just get immersed into the different culture and different things that they have here that we don't have back home. (Elya)

You have to take advantage of the British culture, for example, I want to visit one football game in St James' Park and travel also. (Gabriel)

Students were particularly keen to learn about their host city and interact with local residents:

I would like to meet with local people more because I think they represent the culture, British culture better. (Celik)

It would be nice just to get to know more about this area and more about the culture. (Flora)

Several interviewees commented on the importance of interactions with local British people for their own sense of sociocultural adjustment:

It will help me get used to the UK life better and more quickly. (Ting)

We want to adapt the life here, want to learn more about the local, more about the city, more about the life in UK. (Ying)

Interviewees' accounts of initial first-hand encounters with British people were for the most part positive - the words "friendly", "polite" and "open" were used repeatedly to describe British people:

I love that people are not as scared to talk to each other. So far when I waited for the bus I almost always had a tiny conversation with someone or a shop-assistant who talked to you. (Flora)

They are always optimistic, and they are helpful, they are friendly. (Lydia)

I didn't expect northern British to be so friendly, they are always smiling. (Ella)

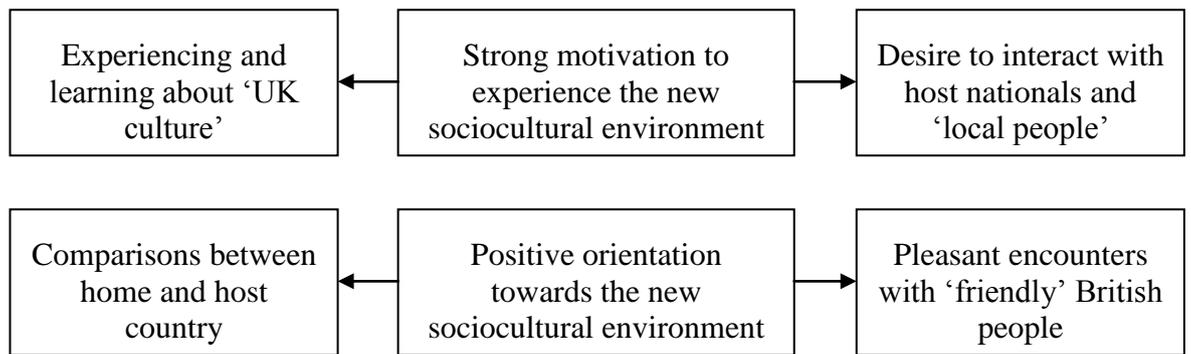


Figure 7.2. Positive Orientation towards Sociocultural Experiences

Comparisons between the home and host country were common in the first interview round and these were often favourable for the host country:

During daytime every person on the street will smile at you. It is not usual in China. (Ting)

In general I think I've seen more polite manners than at my hometown. (Flora)

It seems that they are warm people. I had some problems in Lithuania because people are not eager to help you, just different characters. Here people are more open. (Gabriel)

However, some students struggled to adjust to the local 'Geordie' accent:

They have difficult accent, sometimes I just cannot understand, maybe it's the Geordie accent not all British. (Victoria)

I don't understand most of what they were saying. I just nod and shake my head. (Gediz)

Problematizing and negative comments were largely related to younger British people:

It's quite a difference between my impression from media and so on, from Romania and the impression you see here [...] the youth seems like really crazy. (Anna)

The very young teenage people are sometimes quite rude. (Flora)

A number of students seemed to struggle to identify with younger British people and seemed somewhat reluctant to engage with them. Ying, for example, was hesitant to approach younger people in the host city:

I am afraid to talk with them. They made their hair in colourful so I don't think they are friendly to talk with.

Negative or problematizing comments about younger people were often accompanied by statements about their perceived over-consumption of alcohol. This is best illustrated in the exchange with Ella below:

E: (...) for what concerns the young people as well, they are really different from what I'm used to.

I: Could you give me an example?

E: Well, the approach of young people when they go out for example. I mean I am not always in my own house, not even in Italy, for sure, but I mean here I feel like people just go out to drink.

Similarly, some students seemed reluctant to engage in social activities that involved parties and drinking alcohol:

I'm not saying that I don't like them, just at the present moment the way that they spend their free time, the weekend and these parties - it's a little bit strange for me. (Gabriel)

Moreover, the data indicated that students struggled to adjust to the vibrant nightlife in the host city - some interviewees reported feeling anxious when walking home at night:

There are many, many drunk people so I am afraid of them. (Celik)

During night I'm a little afraid because drunk people. (Ting)

Other problematizing comments were related to unfamiliar norms for social interaction. For example, Celik and Indah discovered that relationship-formation in the new environment seemed to follow different rules than in their home countries:

People are a little bit more individualistic, like I think I sometimes miss the Eastern kind of culture - more closer people. (Celik)

In our culture if we know each other we have contact and making some relationship but in here if for example I meet you today and, like, we talk and after that finish, you know, so that's kind of new for me. (Indah)

Others struggled with “British politeness”. For example Kaari felt that she had to be “extra-polite” and expressed unease about the role of “small talk” in interactions with British people:

That kind of English politeness is something that I find a bit difficult to adjust to [...] in Finland, if you say sorry once that's enough [...] politeness or small talk is not necessarily the thing that we master in Finland. (Kaari)

Food was a further topic of comparison between home and host country – these were usually of a problematizing nature as students struggled to adjust to unfamiliar food or commented on the “different” food culture encountered in the UK:

They have many different things compared to my country. I didn't like their taste of food or their cuisine. (Gediz)

The food is a little bit problematic here for me [...] I find it a little bit greasy and everything is like in sandwich or, I don't know, hamburgers. (Esma)

You cannot adapt to the English food, Western food here [...] I miss Chinese food very much. [Tao]

I'm still not very happy about all the food [...] I do miss bakeries. I don't know what to do without bakeries so far. [Flora]

Some interviewees commented on special dietary requirements which sometimes put constraints on the food choices available to them, or required extra effort to obtain suitable food products:

I'm Muslim and I need to eat Halal food and it took about 40 minutes by walk to go to Fenham [an immigrant area in the host city] so and it cost more money to get there. (Indah)

Because of my religion I can't eat pork so I have very limited options to eat here. (Gediz)

Findings suggest that adjustment to food was also a source of concern for students prior to their arrival in the UK - in the weeks before departure from home, food seemed to be of great importance to students as Mita's quote demonstrates:

I just ate lots of Indonesian food because I knew that I would not be able to find Indonesian food here.

A number of interviewees also brought food products with them to the UK:

Maryland seafood seasoning like I had to bring it and hot sauce and American peanut butter. So I brought that just because I knew that was stuff I would miss. (Robin)

I brought some Turkish kind of soups. [Celik]

I brought some Chinese traditional food and Chinese ingredients because my friends told me it's very important here - you have to cook yourself (Tao)

A further topic of conversation identified by the students was the weather in the UK - a number of interviewees, especially those from warmer climates, expressed concern about the "cold" and "rainy" British weather:

I'm sort of afraid of winter because I never had winter in our country. (Indah)

I went to Tesco to look for some ingredients but actually the vegetables were not as fresh as we have in Turkey because of the weather. (Esma)

It's so different for me because Malaysia is really, really hot and we don't really have winter and cold. (Elya)

Preparations for the British climate were also of importance to the students prior to their arrival in the UK:

The season here is very different from in China, so I have to prepare more warm clothes. (Ting)

I went out and bought a lot of like coats and scarves and stuff like that that I had never really bought before. (Sarah)

In sum, students' comments on sociocultural adjustment at T1 were often related to comparisons between the UK and their home countries and could be either very positive or more problematizing – this varied greatly by individual and depended on the conversation topic. Lydia, for example, commented on the ease of starting her new life in the UK, referring to organisational aspects such as setting up a bank account and registering with a GP (general practitioner):

Everything feels so organised. I can only compare this experience with the one I had in my country and things weren't that well organised there.

Robin, however, described life in the UK as “stricter” than in the US, referring to several unfamiliar rules encountered in the early sojourn weeks:

In the US it's a little different as far as like rules and the way things are [...] there's a lot of rules, like, back to the bike, I strapped it to a rail, like a fence rail – can't do that [...] TV rooms close at midnight [...] and laundry is only open certain hours.

Figure 7.3 below illustrates aspects of sociocultural adjustment which were of importance to the students in the early sojourn stage. It clearly shows that although students were generally very motivated to engage with the new sociocultural environment, problematizing and negative comments dominated in the first interview round.

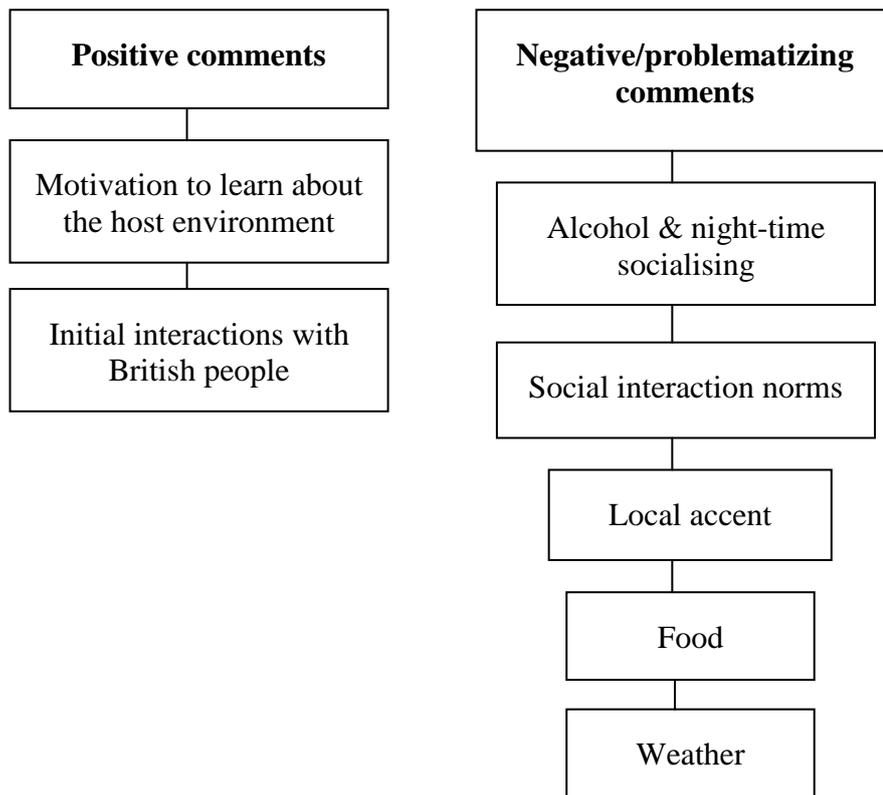


Figure 7.3 Comments on Sociocultural Adjustment at T1

7.1.2 T2: Five months into the programme

The second interview round took place in mid-February when students were five months into their programmes of study. At this point, participants had more experience of living in the UK and of interacting with British people. Thus, the interviews at T2 yielded much more detailed comment on students' actual sociocultural adjustment than at T1. Analysis showed that the majority of comments were either positive or problematising related to the analytic framework – neutral or negative comments were less usual. Overall, students reported feeling more familiar with the host environment, having settled into a daily routine as exemplified in Robin's quote below:

I don't really have any issues throughout my day as I might have had in October [...] how to go to the grocery store effectively, I know how to use the buses effectively, the metro, you know. In a pub, I know to go up to the bar and order food and drinks [...] I'm learning the norms of society. I think I've pretty much gotten most of them. (Robin)

Most interviewees commented positively on their experiences of social interaction by T2, and communication with others was generally perceived as "easy":

I've got to know a lot of great, wonderful people and I've spent a lot more time outside of the room. (Elya)

A number of students reported a slight improvement of their English language ability and increased confidence from daily interactions with British people:

I think I have learnt some basic vocabulary in daily life [...] the street terminology or the things you use in daily life. (Gediz)

In the part-time job I had in the first semester I was surrounded only by native English speakers [...] now I feel more confident about speaking in English. (Lydia)

I definitely learned to understand English native speakers better because at the beginning it was frightening. (Victoria)

However, some students still struggled to understand the local accent:

I'm used to American English so sometimes I can understand everything from one person and sometimes I can't understand anything from another person, so I've been struggling a little bit with accents and different English. (Mario)

Others felt that home visits or long periods of speaking their first language impacted negatively on their English language ability:

I think I felt like when I came back from Finland, I couldn't speak English at all, from my Christmas break. (Kaari)

Christmas vacation is a long time. Most of the time I stay at home so I think during that time what I improved - gone. (Ying)

In the second interview round, students commented on several more specific aspects of life in the UK than at T1, in particular the study-life balance. A number of interviewees commented on the impact of academic workload on social activities and felt they had missed opportunities to get to know the host environment in the first semester:

Actually I thought that we didn't spend enough time to know much thing about acculturate because we had to do the assignments. I couldn't go to the other cities or I couldn't explore the other parts of the city. (Gediz)

Some interviewees felt overwhelmed by the double demand of living and studying abroad:

I had to manage everything on my own, like house rents [...] everything is new for me, just everything, buying daily food and stuff like that, just everything, and at the same time I have to keep up with the studies. (Mita)

A majority of interviewees commented on daily life in the host city, and all who did so were positive about it:

It has a perfect dimension [...] you have all you need in a small space. (Ella)

I like the walking. I'm not used to that, getting yourself outside, you know. I mean at home you just get in the car and you drive. (Sarah)

Sometimes I get Starbucks coffee and I go for a walk and just admiring the sense [...] the city is beautiful. (Victoria)

Similar to T1, interactions with British people, albeit mostly restricted to brief service encounters (see Chapter 8) were evaluated largely positively as students recalled effortless conversations with people in the street and a genuine interest on the part of local residents in people from outside the UK:

In the street you can just have a chat with someone, like waiting in front of the shop maybe. They are open to this, they don't mind it. (Celik)

Students' perceptions of British people remained largely positive at T2 and words such as "friendly", "helpful", "polite" and "open-minded" continued to be used to describe local residents:

It's a really great city, full of really nice people. (Elya)

People say sorry all the time. Even if you bump into someone, they would say sorry and I like it. (Flora)

Students also continued to draw comparisons between the host environment and their home countries, albeit less frequent than at T1:

I still think that people are very friendly and they are a bit more happy with their life than I see people in Romania for instance. (Lydia)

Everything is so perfect compared to my country [...] for example the trains, they start the journey on time. (Gediz)

Moreover, as many students had travelled to other places in the UK by T2, comparisons between the host city and other British cities and regions became more common:

My impression, the northern you go the nicer you get. I went to Glasgow and Edinburgh and they were nicer I think than here, but if you go to London people here are nicer than London. (Indah)

I think that the people from North-part is kinder than Southern. (Ting)

Despite many positive comments and favourable comparisons, students' perceptions of the host society had become more nuanced by the second interview round. Students were increasingly differentiating between different groups of British people, and comments about these groups were varied, ranging from the highly positive for some groups to the highly negative for other groups.

All interviewees commented positively on interactions with British people working on campus such as academic and administrative staff and student services personnel at the university's accommodation sites. Moreover, contact with British

people in service encounters such as in banks, public transport and supermarkets were also evaluated positively:

When I go shopping or go to the supermarket or other places they always very kind and always say 'thank you' many times, so I feel very happy.
(Ying)

There are lots of kind and really, really polite people here, British people, and very helpful, like in the university or when I go to shopping and things like that, they are usually really helpful. (Mita)

In general, students showed a positive orientation towards older British people whereas comments on younger British people remained largely problematizing or, at times, negative. A number of interviewees observed an apparent discrepancy between the behaviours of younger and older British people:

I have a very contrastive opinion about the young British people and the more mature and I think the mature are very responsible and polite and the young ones are very crazy and party people. (Anna)

I think the old men, they are very gentlemen and polite maybe to ladies. And the young people here, I can't say they are naughty but maybe they are unique or special. (Ying)

On the whole and similar to T1, students' orientation towards younger British people and the nightlife in the host city remained mostly problematizing or negative, and these feelings became stronger over time:

During the night, not just weekends, like there's drunk people everywhere, I don't know it's just shocking for me because they really like shouting, yelling.
(Mita)

I was really upset for some of the girls and boys who were like fifteen or sixteen and drunk [...] this is too much freedom and it doesn't give a good impression of British people. (Esma)

A number of interviewees struggled to adjust to the nightlife in the host city as exemplified in Flora's comment below:

They wear a lot of make-up and high heels and stuff like that, and it's sometimes a bit hard to adjust because I'm not used to people dressing up that much.

Others commented on a perceived lack of places to socialise which were not pubs or nightclubs:

There's no other choice here like only pub and club that open at night but if you go to Indonesia you can go to a restaurant, you can go to the café.
(Indah)

However, some comments about the vibrant nightlife in the host city were more neutral:

They are partying every day. I mean Mexican people, we are known for doing parties all the time [...] but here it's amazing, I mean even Mondays they are partying. (Mario)

They really enjoy their going out and partying and I'm just amazed. (Robin)

The evening is coming because the activities in bar start and the people becomes crazy [...] it quite surprise me because before I came here I didn't know the life in night time is so exciting. (Ting)

A further issue of great interest to the students at T1, “British politeness” was also commented on extensively at T2. Although the students generally appreciated politeness and friendliness, it also created some confusion and critical reactions:

We don't really know if they are being nice or being polite [...] I would really love to get to know them a little better and see what they are all about. (Elya)

Maybe I expected their politeness to be authentic but a lot of times I felt that it's just a crust, it's not real. (Kaari)

A number of interviewees also continued to struggle to adjust to the climate. The weather was a frequent conversation topic as the second interview round took place shortly after the winter semester:

I didn't expect it to be really cold but it caught me by surprise. (Elya)

I've never lived in cold weather before, so waking up every day and not having it be warm and sunny, that's a huge change for me. (Sarah)

It's really cold. I wish it was a bit warmer. (Mita)

Several students experienced prolonged periods of illness throughout the winter months and felt that the weather impacted negatively on their physical and psychological wellbeing (see also Chapter 6):

I don't really like the weather because it always makes me sick. (Victoria)

The weather now is changing a lot, so I don't know why but when I was in Indonesia I didn't often get sick but here I got flu, I got cold, I got sore throat and sometimes fever. (Indah)

Weather was making me very, very depressive because in the mornings, I mean it's nine o' clock - it's dark, three o' clock - it's dark and because I come from like a place which is always sunny. (Esma)

In contrast to the weather, food seemed of lesser importance to the students than at T1, reflected in little comment on this issue overall. Nonetheless, some students reported becoming more accustomed to British foods:

I used to eating British food maybe because it's different from Chinese food and I used to cooking and eating this. At first I don't like eating a lot of bread but now I like it. (Ying)

Others remained critical of perceived local eating habits:

I prefer my own food culture. I miss certain ingredients, I miss certain ways food is prepared so I'd say I'm not really agreeing with, like, having crisps as a part of your healthy diet is a good choice. (Flora)

Figure 7.4 illustrates students' comments on sociocultural adjustment at T2. It shows that although positive comments had increased by T2, there was still a fair share of problematizing/negative comments.

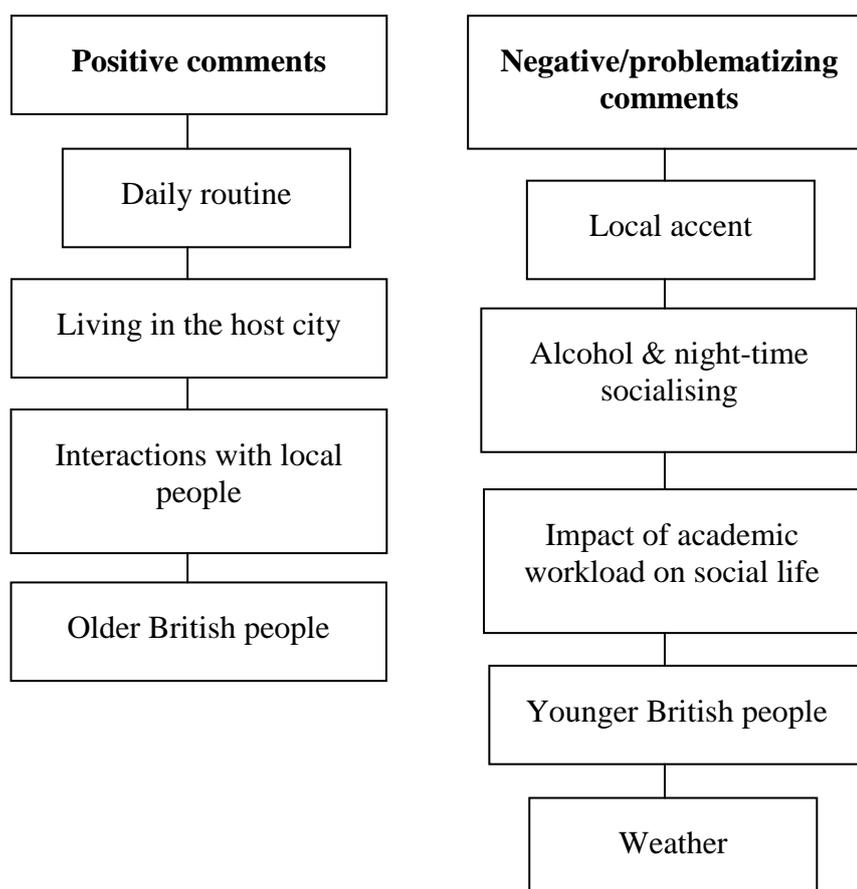


Figure 7.4 Comments on Sociocultural Adjustment at T2

7.1.3 T3: *Nine months into the programme*

By T3 students were nine months into their programmes. Interviewees now commented overwhelmingly positively on their sociocultural adjustment over time and, overall, students seemed to feel well adapted to the host environment. Living in the UK and “fitting in” was described as “easy”, and students reported feeling “comfortable” and “used to” life in the host city:

It's been ok fitting in - it's good. (Elya)

I am used to living here more. (Celik)

I don't really have to deal with adjustment issues anymore. (Robin)

I have adapted to this culture and I think I like this place. (Tao)

I have adapted the life here. (Ting)

Some students exceeded their own expectations for their sociocultural adjustment and seemed surprised about their ability to adjust to life in the UK:

I was surprised mostly of myself and about my ability to adapt to new surroundings and to make strong social networks in such a short time. (Kaari)

I think things are so easy [...] everything is just simple, not as complicated as I thought it would be. (Mita)

Comparison between host and home country were considerably less frequent in the third interview round. After nine months in the host environment, most had developed a clear daily routine and were generally more focused on their day-to-day activities rather than comparing life in the UK to previous experiences in their home countries – by T3 students mostly viewed their lives in England as “normal”:

I feel like I'm just living my life here [...] it's kind of like this is the life I live and back home is my old life, but I didn't feel like that last year, but now I feel like that. (Robin)

I think this is like life right now, so I really don't compare it to back home anymore or think about what I would be doing if I was back home because I'm not. (Sarah)

Findings indicate that sociocultural adjustment improved gradually as the sojourn progressed. Over time, students acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to function effectively in the host environment. Interviewees' own accounts provide evidence that most adjustment difficulties were experienced in the early sojourn stage when students had only limited meaningful interpersonal relationships and were not yet familiar with aspects of life in the host environment such as where to shop and where to go to socialise. As time progressed, students “learned” about the host city and got increasingly “used to” life in the UK:

I started to just manage everything on my own and I guess as time goes by I started to get used to it and I started to have fun and enjoying it a lot. (Mita)

I think at the very beginning it was the greatest shock because obviously you don't have anyone at the very beginning, [...] but after the first couple of weeks I think I was really able to adapt, and ever since then it's been pretty much the same. (Sarah)

It's kind of difficult to adapt myself with the weather and the culture of this country at first but slowly after almost a year being here I felt comfortable enough with the environment. [Malaysian, female, T2 survey]

Nonetheless, some students felt that the demands of their degree programme sometimes inhibited them from fully immersing themselves in the host environment. A number of interviewees felt they had “missed out” on opportunities to socialise and explore their host country:

One thing I expected to be more, like maybe to see more, to go somewhere more [...] now we go home, so I feel I did quite not that much. (Gabriel)

I also noticed that I had missed some particular features because of the Master I was attending, which got all my energy and attention. [Ella, follow-up survey, 12 months after arrival in the UK]

I was very much focused on my academic performance and finding a job for when I finished. Actually I wasn't enjoying myself that much, but now I am more [...] I started realising "Oh, I've been missing out on this!" (Lydia)

Similarly, some students felt that their time spent in the UK was not enough to acquire a comprehensive understanding of their host country:

Maybe the time I get to know it is very short. I need to spend a long time to get understand the culture [...] I can experience more and I can get more knowledge about it. (Ying)

Overall, as students were approaching the end of their sojourn, the interview focus shifted from adjustment issues to outcomes of living abroad. Students overwhelmingly described their experience as positive and many stated that they would “do it again”:

I think it's a great experience [...] if I could go back I would probably spend more time abroad. (Flora)

I can tell everyone at home that this is a wonderful experience and everyone should just go. (Mita)

I'm very happy with how everything has been going. [Robin]

I think I had a wonderful experience in the UK. [Ying]

It was absolutely worth it. [Kaari]

A number of interviewees also commented explicitly on the benefits of living abroad, especially its transformative nature. After living at great distance from family members and familiar surroundings for nine months, students reported increased self-confidence, life skills, and a greater sense of independence:

For me it's just gaining my self-confidence [...] hopefully I can go abroad again. (Indah)

I can cook myself, I should control my time, everything. In China, my parents always take care for me but now I care for myself. I think I enjoy the freedom, enjoy the abroad life. (Tao)

I have never lived by myself before. Now I can take charge of myself and a house - that's a big achievement. (Esma)

Orientations towards British people remained, on the whole, positive although comments on interactions with host nationals were less frequent at T3 than in the first two interview rounds - nine months into the sojourn most students seemed to have settled into their 'international' friendship circles, and interactions with British people remained on the periphery of students' social lives, restricted largely to brief service encounters (see Chapter 8). Nonetheless, these encounters were overwhelmingly commented on positively, and similar to the previous interview rounds, British people were described as "friendly", "helpful" and "open-minded":

School, everybody are very nice, and in case you come to a bank or a restaurant, everybody are very nice there as well. (Victoria)

People have seen me, for example that I'm looking for something or I cannot find something and they just stop and ask me if they can help. (Anna)

Most of the bus drivers are very friendly and in the shops they are quite friendly. (Flora)

Here people just smile at you and "Hi pet, hi flower!" (Ella)

Comments on younger British people and the nightlife in the host city decreased markedly from T2 to T3 as students became, on the whole, more accepting of the reality encountered in the host city:

Maybe at first I'm shocked because I thought England will be more sophisticated or whatever, but now ok they are the same. There's a crime, there's a bad people, there's a good people. (Indah)

Nonetheless, references to the vibrant nightlife remained common:

Concerning the young people, this was a cultural shock [...] I cannot believe it when I see how many people just lay down on the asphalt being very, very drunk. (Anna)

What I don't necessarily agree with, but maybe that's just me, is like the drinking and going out culture – I can't take it [...] it's very, very hard to get used to and very hard to not be judgemental (...) [Flora]

I like partying and am used to party people too as I am from a major city but this is crazy here and I often was shocked! [German, female, T2 survey]

Sometimes, the perceived "difference" in social activities inhibited some students to fully immerse themselves in the host environment and form close bonds with younger British people, including local students:

I feel some barriers and it's quite difficult how they behave, huge difference compared to my country. (Gabriel)

In contrast, interactions with older British people were consistently described as pleasant and rewarding:

I have known quite a lot elder people. They are friendly and taught me a lot which made me feel confident and enjoyable with my life in UK. [Chinese, female, T2 survey]

Finally, adjustment to the weather in the UK remained a topic of importance to the students throughout all interview rounds and seemed to affect the physical and psychological wellbeing of students throughout the sojourn as illustrated below:

Maybe go to somewhere sunny otherwise you will be depressed. (Gediz)

If you are not used to the cold weather you might get a bit shocked when you come here. (Mita)

I wish weather was better because it's just constant topic of frustration. (Victoria)

I was sick all the time! (Kaari)

The weather was terrible! (Sarah)

Figure 7.5 illustrates students' comments on sociocultural adjustment at T3. Comments were now largely positive although some sociocultural adjustment issues mentioned in the previous interview rounds remained salient.

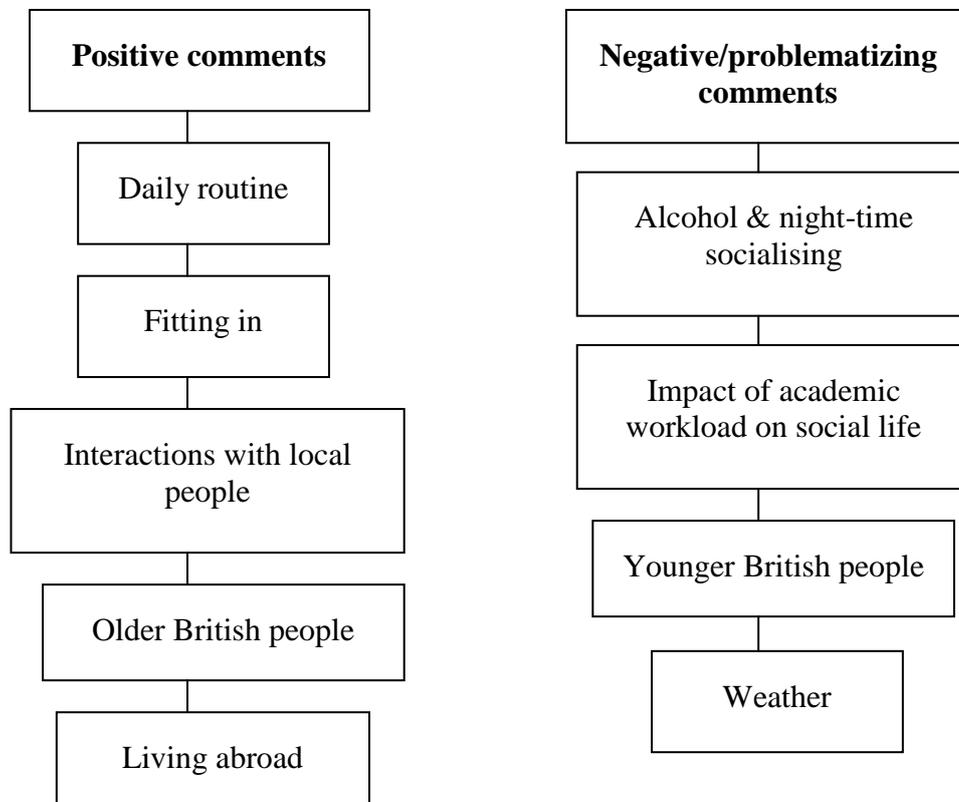


Figure 7.5 Comments on Sociocultural Adjustment at T3

7.2 Discussion of Sociocultural Adjustment over Time

The following section provides a discussion of students' sociocultural adjustment over time. Comparisons are drawn between the trajectory found in this study and Ward and colleagues' culture-learning conceptualisation of sociocultural adjustment (see Ward et al., 2001).

Student sojourners arriving in the UK to undertake university study have to deal with complexities and challenges in daily life that the average domestic student is unlikely to encounter; although they do share some adjustment challenges with home students in the academic domain (Andrade, 2006). Sociocultural challenges include communication issues such as learning how to interpret the local accent and colloquial usage of the host language, and challenges associated with food, housing, the weather, finances, bureaucracies, as well as the attitudes and behaviour of local people (Rosenthal et al., 2006). Ward et al. (2001) situate sociocultural adjustment within a culture-learning and social skills framework and place great importance on the sojourners' ability to learn about the host culture and to interact with host nationals. According to this conceptualisation, sociocultural adjustment difficulties are expected to be at their peak in the initial sojourn stage when the sojourner has the least familiarity with and knowledge about the host society, and when meaningful relationships with host nationals are still limited. The sociocultural adjustment trajectory is described by Ward and colleagues as an ascending curve representing a learning-process (i.e. the acquisition of culturally relevant knowledge and skills) over time. This learning curve is anticipated to be rapid in the early stages of the sojourn and is subsequently expected to level off as the sojourner becomes increasingly familiar with the host society (Ward et al., 1998).

Ward and colleagues' conceptualisation of sojourner sociocultural adjustment is not specific to student sojourners, but studies have tested its applicability to the international student context. Overall, evidence from these studies remains inconclusive. Some earlier studies found supportive evidence. For example, Ward and Kennedy (1996) found that Malaysian and Singaporean students sojourning in New Zealand experienced the greatest amount of sociocultural difficulties in the initial sojourn stage and showed steady improvement over time. Ward et al.'s (1998) study of Japanese students in New Zealand showed similar results. However, more recent research suggests that Ward and colleagues' conceptualisation may be too basic; not taking into account that sociocultural adjustment may not progress at the same rate for

all students and that thus patterns for sociocultural adjustment may not be uniform within or across samples (Coles and Swami, 2012). In a UK-based study of student sojourners on one-year taught MA programmes, Wright and Schartner (2013) recently uncovered great individual variation, challenging linear models of sociocultural adjustment. Other studies have found that sociocultural adjustment difficulties may not necessarily level off over time. For example, Rosenthal et al. (2006), and Zhou and Todman (2009) both found that difficulty of making friends outside compatriot circles persisted over time, a phenomenon also found in the present study (see Chapter 8).

Overall, the sociocultural adjustment of the students in this study seemed to follow an ascending curve over time as suggested in previous research by Ward and colleagues (Ward et al., 2001). The interview data indicates that sociocultural difficulties were greatest in the early weeks of the sojourn and that students' sociocultural adjustment improved as the sojourn progressed. However, the trajectory was not as smooth as suggested by Ward and colleagues and there were two key differences between their model and the pattern uncovered in this study as discussed below: (1) sociocultural adjustment was not determined by culture-learning as a result of host national contact; (2) some adjustment difficulties did not level off over time as predicted by Ward and colleagues' model. Figure 7.6 illustrates the adjustment issues that persisted throughout the sojourn. These aspects generated comments in all three interview rounds and are discussed below. The most poignant of these issues were related to contact with British people, or lack thereof, which was a persistent feature of students' sociocultural experiences.

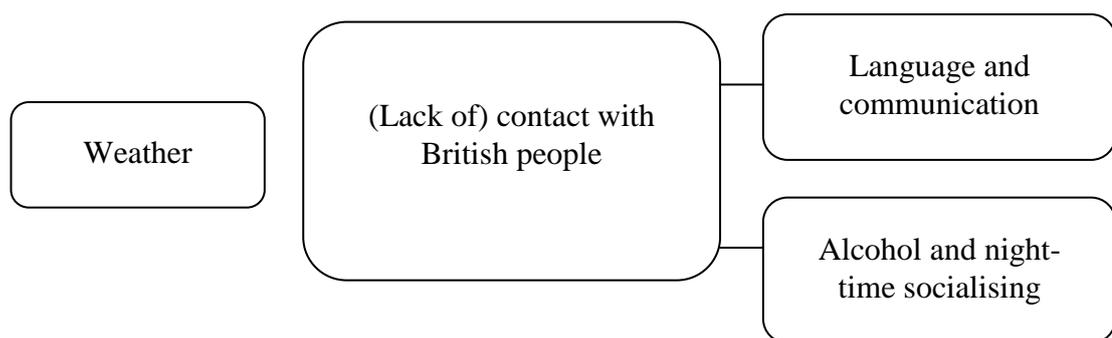


Figure 7.6 Persistent Sociocultural Adjustment Issues

7.2.1 Lack of contact with British people

It is important to note that students followed three distinct adjustment patterns with regard to the social groups examined in this study (British people, co-nationals and non-co-nationals international students). At the onset of the sojourn, in spite of initial

nervousness and anxiety, students seemed optimistic and there was the expectation that social relationships with people in the host environment would be successfully formed and maintained. This was not the case for contact with host nationals. It was noted that Britons were friendly and kind but difficult to instigate and maintain relationships with. The finding that students experienced British people overwhelmingly as friendly, warm and polite stands in direct contrast to the book *Disappointed Guests* (Tajfel and Dawson, 1965), where international students described British people as patronising, conservative and unfriendly.

All interviewees repeatedly expressed the view that it was difficult to meet British people – most especially British students – a trend that persisted throughout the sojourn. Nonetheless, the motivation and desire to interact with British people was strong, and students acknowledged the social and linguistic benefits of host contact. It was felt that contact with British people could give them cultural knowledge that was not available elsewhere. Contact with British people was consistently described as short, superficial and formulaic, and took place largely in service encounters (e.g. supermarket, bank) where conversation beyond small-talk and standardised interaction was hardly possible. A similar finding was reported in a study by Khawaja and Stallman (2011), where student sojourners in Australia felt that interactions with local students remained superficial, and struggled to talk about personal matters or interests. Findings suggest that academic and administrative staff at the university were the most important brokers of the host culture. The two interviewees who reported most host national contact were those who lived with British students. While there was frustration of not being able to form closer host ties, over time students seemed resigned to the fact that a lack of host contact was a persistent feature of their sojourn in the UK.

Inherent to a culture-learning approach to sociocultural adjustment (Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Ward et al., 2001) is the assumption that social interaction with host nationals provides international students with the opportunities for developing an understanding of the host environment, which ultimately leads to improved sociocultural adjustment (Ataca and Berry, 2002; Li and Gasser, 2005). However, the degree of interaction between student sojourners and host nationals has been found to be low across a number of student samples and locations, with students generally wishing more interaction than they actually experience (Thomson et al., 2006). In line with previous research, findings from this study suggest that social contact with co-nationals and other fellow student sojourners was much more frequent than contact with British

people, in particular British students (only 10% reported to interact with local students 'often'). The level of social interaction with British people remained low throughout the sojourn and in all interview rounds students reported great difficulty in instigating and maintaining relationships with Britons. This was also reflected in the questionnaire responses, where 'Making British friends', 'Getting to know people from the local community' and 'Getting to know people in depth' were among the items students reported to have had most difficulties with, although the mean for sociocultural adaptation was otherwise high (Chapter 4). Moreover, the interviewees consistently emphasised their struggle 'to find' British people. Students ascribed this lack of contact to a variety of reasons as discussed below.

First, a number of structural issues were identified by the students as obstacles for social interaction with British people, including skewed student intake onto university courses and placement in same-country or 'international' accommodation. It was evident from the interview data that students perceived the highly international make-up of their courses as a key barrier to social mixing with British students, although they did otherwise enjoy the diversity encountered on their courses. The finding that high international student numbers on certain university courses might impede social contact with host nationals is not new. A number of researchers have highlighted the role of structural factors in impeding host national interaction. For example, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) have blamed skewed student intake for the formation of 'ethnic communities' within host universities. Taught postgraduate degrees in the UK seem to be particularly affected by the formation of international student enclaves that exist parallel to the host student community (Volet and Ang, 1998), with 70% of taught postgraduate students reporting that they had no UK-friends at all in a study by UKCOSA (2004). Young et al.'s (2013) and Wright and Schartner's (2013) studies of student sojourners on UK taught postgraduate degrees further confirm this trend. In both studies, international students reported only little interaction with British students, often to the great regret of the former. These findings suggest that social mixing between student sojourners and home students is perhaps more likely in courses where international student numbers are lower (Merrick, 2004).

Next, placement in same-country or 'international' accommodation was identified as making social contact with British people very difficult. Most students in this study shared cooking and leisure facilities with fellow 'internationals' rather than British students. Postgraduate accommodation in particular appeared to be dominated

by student sojourners, reflecting the high numbers of international students on many postgraduate courses (UKCISA, 2013). Accommodation arrangements have been identified as crucial for the development of intercultural contact (e.g. Kudo and Simkin, 2003); however placement in exclusively ‘international’ halls of residence may be counterproductive to the integration of student sojourners with the host community (cf. Harrison and Peacock, 2007). It is clear from these findings that it is a challenge to host universities, as well as to individual student sojourners, to develop approaches and structures that successfully encourage this type of social interaction. Thus, one important question that arises from this study is: How can student sojourners’ sense of connectedness with host nationals be strengthened?

Harrison and Peacock (*ibid*) point out that classroom and housing are “spaces which can be proactively ‘managed’ by university authorities” (p. 53). Indeed, university structures have the potential to create a social space where student sojourners and local students can meet and interact (Coles and Swami, 2012), thus receiving institutions can play a strategic role in encouraging the social integration of their international student population with the local student community - this includes carefully managing accommodation (Sovic, 2009). Conscious approaches to encourage and support this type of social mixing are needed on courses with a high proportion of international students because it is at course-level, as this study indicates, that students form many of their social relationships. Studies have also shown that student sojourners want more institutional support in developing social ties on their course (e.g. Bartram, 2007). Thus, one means to facilitate interaction with host students is to create opportunities for mixed interaction, although this might be difficult to achieve on programmes with skewed student intake. Recent OECD statistics suggest that international students tend to choose different programmes of study than their local peers (OECD, 2012b). Volet and Ang (1998) go as far as saying:

Over the years, it has become clear that unless intercultural contact is engineered as part of formal study, social cohesion will not happen and all students will miss out on critical learning opportunities (p. 9).

In addition to a general sense of isolation from host students, the interview data indicated a perceived sense of reluctance from local students to instigate interaction, a finding previously confirmed in Wright and Schartner’s (2013) UK-based study. Although motivation to interact with local students is generally high among student sojourners (Young et al., 2013), a perceived lack of reciprocal interest from the former

has been reported in a number of studies (e.g. Jacob and Greggo, 2001; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002).

7.2.2 Alcohol and night-time socialising

Several students ascribed their lack of host contact to the night-time socialising and related alcohol-consumption of British people. The vibrant nightlife and perceived high level of alcohol consumption in the host city was unsettling for students, and the interview data showed that students were reluctant to engage in social activities or to attend events where alcohol was consumed in large quantities. This reluctance was further exacerbated by behaviour associated with alcohol consumption and night-time socialising such as shouting and fighting, and unfamiliar dress styles. This was persistent throughout the sojourn with interviewees repeatedly stating that British people ‘drink too much’. Religious observance did not seem to play a significant role as perceived over-consumption of alcohol emerged as a major adjustment issue for all interviewees. This finding is supported by a UKCOSA (2004) survey which found that the alcohol consumption of British students was perceived as excessive by their international counterparts. Brown’s (2008a) ethnographic study of student sojourners in the UK also found that the perceived high level of drinking among the host population was a source of dissatisfaction with life in the host country.

There have been several previous studies investigating the alcohol consumption among British university students (see Gill 2002 for a review), but findings are ambiguous. Smart and Ogborne (2000) found that per capita consumption by British students was lower than that of their peers in other European countries, and Hibell et al., (2009) report a drop in alcohol consumption among British students. However, research on the general population has recently documented an unprecedented rise in heavy drinking among youngsters in the UK, most especially among young women (Plant and Plant, 2006). A 2013 study commissioned by the *Centre for Social Justice* reported that alcohol dependence among British men was second in Western Europe, and alcohol dependence among British women higher than anywhere else in Europe. It was estimated that one in four adults in England drank to harmful levels. The same report also found a north-south divide in England and concluded that 26 of the 30 local authorities with the highest rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions were in the north of the country (BBC, 2013), the setting of the present study. Moreover, UNITE’s (2006)

International Student Experience Report concluded that international students' alcohol consumption was markedly lower than that of their British peers.

In response to these findings, a £3,000 video entitled 'Beware British Binge Drinking' was recently commissioned by Cambridge University. It urges international students to steer clear of what they call 'Britain's binge-drinking culture' (Bryant, 2012). Interestingly, in a UK-based study by Peacock and Harrison (2009) British students themselves identified a distinct 'British drinking culture' which, it was felt, could create an alien and intimidating environment for international students. Research by Harrison and Peacock (2008) further reported that the social spaces frequented by UK students were generally loud (e.g. bars, nightclubs) which may add additional barriers for social interaction, a finding also uncovered in the present study. Effective communication in noisy settings is likely to demand significantly more effort (Peacock and Harrison, 2009), especially when communication takes place in a foreign language. Students in this study pointed to a lack of spaces to meet British students that were not bars or nightclubs, echoing an observation made by Malaysian undergraduate students in the UK in a study by Coles and Swami (2009). Findings from Harrison and Peacock's (2008) study support this and show that British and international students tend to frequent distinct night-time social spaces.

In sum, it seems that alcohol played a key part in the segregation of UK and international students. This study clearly shows that student sojourners, from a multiplicity of countries, feel uncomfortable with the perceived over-consumption of alcohol in the UK. Host universities need to be aware that some international students might associate public intoxication with aspects such as violence or power relationships (Harrison and Peacock, 2008). Host universities could offer alternatives way of social mixing at and beyond course-level. This is further addressed in the conclusion (Chapter 9).

7.2.3 Language and communication

In addition to the difficulties in establishing host contact, there were some other adjustment issues that persisted over time. One was related to the use of language and communication norms. It is interesting that although interviewees commented frequently on the friendliness and openness of locals, they seemed to struggle with what they described as 'British politeness'. This shows that a lack of shared cultural reference points (e.g. politeness norms) can affect communication (Harrison and Peacock, 2008).

This is also exemplified in the item ‘Understanding jokes and humour’ which was among the items rated as most difficult by the students (Chapter 4). The finding is also in line with Volet and Tan-Quigley’s (1995) study of social interactions between administrative staff and international students in Australia. The researchers found that intercultural small talk can be difficult and can create serious misunderstandings.

Understanding the speech of locals was another frequently mentioned difficulty that persisted throughout the sojourn. The questionnaire results confirm this as ‘Understanding the local accent’ was the item students experienced most difficulties with (Chapter 4). They also seemed to struggle with different ‘Englishes’ and accents encountered in the host environment. It is important to remember that all students in this study had fulfilled the host university’s English language entrance requirements; nonetheless they struggled with the more colloquial use of English and local variants. This shows that student sojourners, who have possibly studied more formal English in their home countries, find themselves struggling with the less formal language-in-use and the sociolinguistic skills needed to negotiate the host environment (Rosenthal et al., 2006).

7.2.4 The weather

Adjustment to weather conditions in the UK such as rain, snow and fewer daylight hours, were a further challenge for the students throughout the sojourn but most especially during the winter semester. The questionnaire results showed that ‘Dealing with the climate’ was among the items students had most difficulties with (Chapter 4), and in the interviews students repeatedly explained how the rainy and cold weather impacted negatively on their psychological wellbeing. The British weather was also blamed for recurrent physical illnesses and diminished outdoor activities. Pre-arrival information and preparation for the British weather (e.g. buying warm clothes) did little to reduce the effect of direct experience. These findings are not new and are supported in other research on international students’ adjustment (e.g. Maundeni, 2001). The British weather has previously been identified as an obstacle to adjustment by student sojourners in Brown’s (2008a) longitudinal study. Finally, academic workload was perceived as hindering to sociocultural adjustment in general as social mixing decreased during busy assessment periods, highlighting the link between academic and sociocultural experiences (Coles and Swami, 2009).

7.2.5 Summary

To sum up, the overwhelming impression from the data is that students developed a routine in daily life tasks (e.g. where to shop, where to eat) as the sojourn progressed. Over the three interview stages, all interviewees reported progress in sociocultural adjustment over time (Figure 7.8) and a sense of generally successful accommodation to the new sociocultural environment, although there were areas in which adjustment was seen as less successful, most especially interactions with British people. Thus sociocultural adjustment, although generally improving over time, can be seen as a long and uneven process (Coles and Swami, 2012) that involves more than merely the acquisition of new culture-specific knowledge and skills emphasised in cultural learning models (Furnham and Bochner, 1986; Ward, 2004). Stress and coping approaches are also needed to deal with more difficult sociocultural experiences such as the weather and perceived lack of host contact.

Most importantly, data from this study suggests that student sojourners manage to achieve high levels of sociocultural adaptation even without the extensive host national contact that is so central to culture-learning models. The findings especially underline the importance of links among non-co-national international students relative to contact with host nationals, and provide further corroborative evidence for the crucial role of these ‘international ties’ in the sociocultural adjustment process (cf. Montgomery, 2010). The interview findings indicate that the students in this study gradually adjusted to the new sociocultural environment through interaction with others who were also going through the ‘study abroad experience’ (cf. Young et al., 2013) rather than through the acquisition of knowledge and skills from members of the ‘host culture’ (Figure 7.7). The development of (cross)cultural communication skills seems to take place within an ‘international community of practice’ (cf. Montgomery and McDowell, 2009) and it is therefore important that this aspect be included in culture-learning models of sociocultural adjustment.

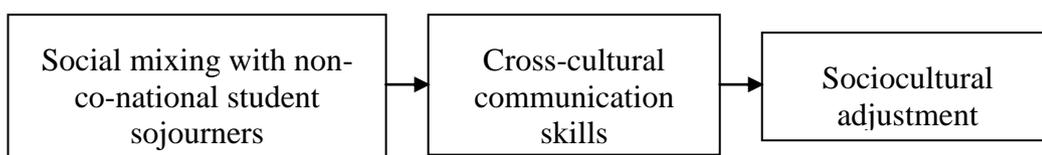


Figure 7.7 ‘International ties’ and Sociocultural Adjustment

In light of this finding, the notion of acquiring ‘culture-specific’ skills, as originally conceptualised in the culture-learning model (Furnham and Bochner, 1986) may take an

overly narrow view of both acquisition and of ‘culture’ (Holliday et al., 2004). It seems that we need to re-think our conceptualisation of what sociocultural adjustment actually involves, and that the role of host national contact in student sojourners’ sociocultural adjustment might be overrated, especially in light of the widely reported lack of host national contact (e.g. Parks and Raymond 2004; Wright and Scharner, 2013). Thus, the assumption that host nationals play an integral role in student sojourners’ sociocultural adjustment might not necessarily be accurate in light of the centrality of non-co-national international ties.

The conceptualisation of sociocultural adjustment requires a more complex and nuanced perspective than the one offered by the original culture-learning model, taking into account the interactions student sojourners have with their international peers, thereby placing less emphasis on the importance of host national contact in this process. Moreover, an initial stage of rapid adjustment as suggested by Ward et al. (2001) could not be clearly discerned in the data. Rather, students’ learning curve was found to go beyond the early sojourn stages without necessarily levelling off over time, and was also found to be more uneven than originally suggested in the culture learning and social skills literature (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Thus, those providing support services to international students at the host universities should be aware that students’ sociocultural adjustment process seems to be a gradual and uneven process, with a learning curve that extends well beyond the initial stages (Coles and Swami, 2012).

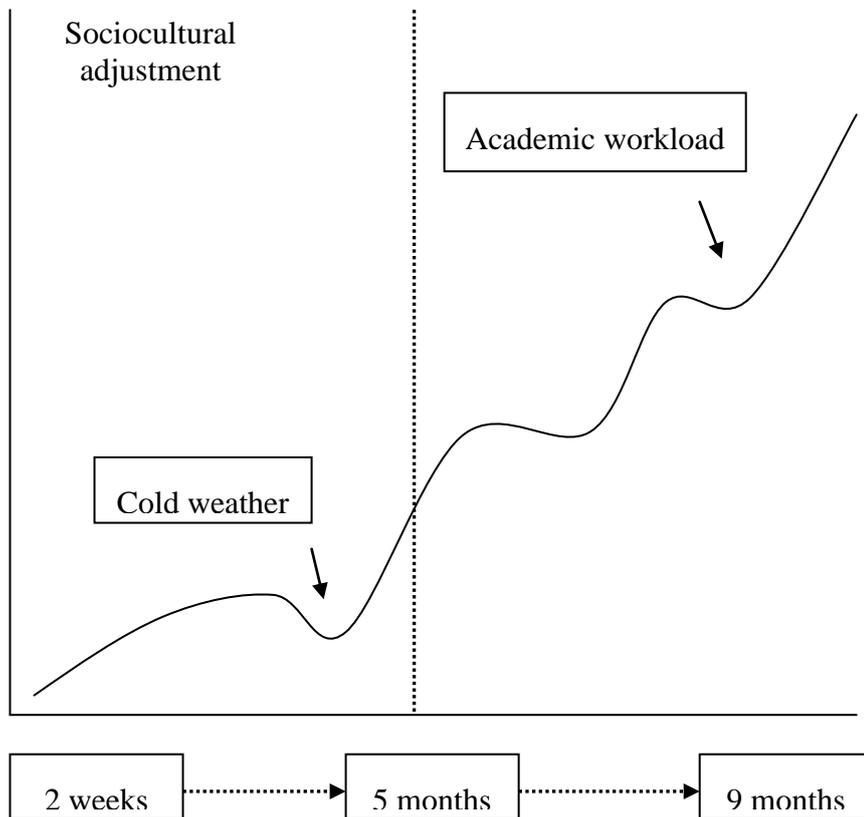


Figure 7.8 Sociocultural Adjustment over Time

7.3 Associations between Contributory Factors and Sociocultural Adaptation

In order to investigate the relationships between sociocultural adaptation (SCA) and the various contributory factors, a series of correlations were first computed. Significant correlations were found between SCA and several contributory factors (Tables 7.1). A series of linear simple and multiple regression analyses were then performed to determine the predictive power of the contributory factors for SCA. Results are presented below.

	ELA T1	ELA T2	CE	OM	SI	ES	FL	KNW
SCA	.11	.40**	.33**	.36**	.48**	.35**	.28**	.34**

	RAI	INTRI	IDENT	INTRO	EXTER	SC-BS	SC-IN	SC-CN	SC-LC	SS-SE	SS-IN
SCA	.45**	.31**	.12	-.34**	-.38**	.23**	.36**	-.08	.18*	.33**	.17*

**significant at $p < .01$; *significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

Note: ELA = English language ability, CE = cultural empathy, OM = open mindedness, SI = social initiative, ES = emotional stability, FL = flexibility, KNW = pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK, RAI = Relative Autonomy Index, INTRI = intrinsic motivation, IDENT = identified regulation, INTRO = introjected regulation, EXTER = external regulation, SC-BS = social contact with British students, SC-IN = social contact with other non-co-national international students, SC-CN = social contact with co-nationals, SC-LC = social contact with the wider local community, SS-SE = social support - socio-emotional, SS-IN = social support - instrumental

Table 7.1 Bivariate Correlations between SCA and the Contributory Factors

7.3.1 English language ability

Firstly, an ANOVA yielded no significant association between ELA measured at T1 and SCA. However, ELA measured at T2 was a significant predictor of SCA, $\beta = .40$, $t = 5.04$, $p < .001$, and explained 16% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 130) = 25.42$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .16$, adjusted $R^2 = .16$.

7.3.2 Knowledge about the UK

Secondly, a simple linear regression analysis showed that KNW explained 11% of the variance in SCA, $F(1, 140) = 17.68$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .11$, adjusted $R^2 = .11$. Analysis of coefficients showed that KNW was a significant predictor of SCA; $\beta = .34$, $t = 4.20$, $p < .001$.

7.3.3 Autonomy in the decision to study abroad

Thirdly, the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) was a significant predictor of SCA, $\beta = .45$, $t = 5.98$, $p < .001$, and explained 20% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 140) = 35.70$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .20$, adjusted $R^2 = .20$.

7.3.4 Intercultural competence

Fourthly, the five IC subscales were entered into a multiple linear regression models with SCA as the outcome variable. The model was highly significant and contributed to 29% of the variance in the data. Analysis of coefficients showed that CE, SI and ES were significant predictors of SCA (Table 7.2).

	SCA	
	β	t
CE	.19	2.00*
OM	-.08	-.68
SI	.35	3.32**
ES	.22	2.77**
FL	.03	.40
R^2		0.29
Adjusted R^2		0.26
F (5, 135)		11.20
Sig.		$p < .001$

**significant at the 99% level; *significant at the 95% level

Table 7.2 Regression Analysis of IC and SCA

7.3.5 Social contact

Fifthly, a multiple regression analysis revealed that degree of SC contributed to 16% of the variance in SCA. Analysis of coefficients showed that degree of contact with non-co-national ISs was the main predictor of SCA. Contact with British students was marginally predictive (Table 7.3).

	SCA	
	β	<i>t</i>
SC-BS	.15	1.78 [^]
SC-CN	.04	.43
SC-IN	.33	3.95**
SC-LC	.05	.59
R²	0.16	
Adjusted R²	0.14	
F (4, 138)	6.63	
Sig.	p < .001	

**significant at the 99% level; [^]significant at the 90% level

Table 7.3 Regression Analysis of SC and SCA

7.3.6 Social support

Finally, a multiple regression analysis showed that the two SS subscales together explained 11% of the variance in SCA. Socio-emotional support emerged as a significant predictor of SCA (Table 7.4).

	SCA	
	β	<i>t</i>
SS-SE	.36	3.58**
SS-IN	-.06	-.60
R²	0.11	
Adjusted R²	0.10	
F (2, 140)	8.64	
Sig.	p < .001	

**significant at the 99% level

Table 7.4 Regression Analysis of SS and SCA

To sum up, students who experienced successful sociocultural adjustment nine months into their programme of study were likely to feel language proficient and knowledgeable about the UK, to have made the decision to study abroad independently from others, and to be proactive, emotionally stable, and to have high levels of cultural empathy. They were also likely to mix with British students and non-co-national

international students, and to have high levels of socio-emotional support in the host environment (Figure 7.9).

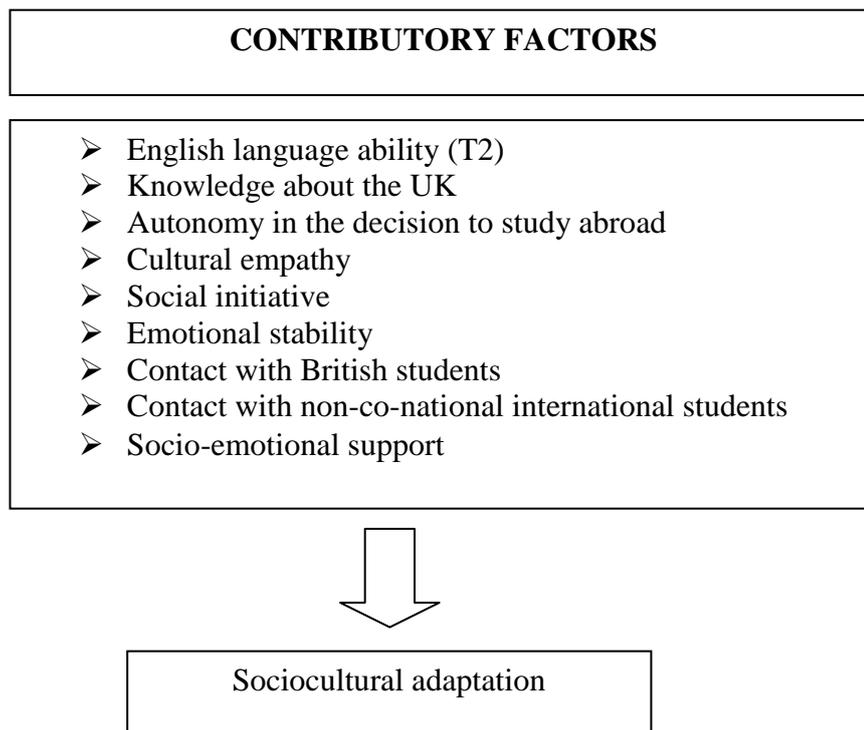


Figure 7.9 Significant Associations between Contributory Factors and SCA

Box 7.1 below shows associations between SCA and the other adaptation domains.

Box 7.1 Associations between SCA and other Adaptation Domains

▪ Psychological adaptation:

- SCA correlated significantly with both PWB ($r = .35, p < .01$) and SWL ($r = .43, p < .01$).
- PWB and SWL together explained 21% of the variance in SCA, $F(2, 140) = 18.85, p < .001$. Both, SWL ($\beta = .34, t(140) = 3.99, p < .001$) and PWB ($\beta = .18, t(140) = 2.11, p < .05$) emerged as statistically significant predictors.

▪ Academic adaptation:

- SCA correlated significantly with the taught GPA ($r = .28, p < .01$), the research GPA ($r = .35, p < .01$), and the overall degree GPA ($r = .33, p < .01$).
- In a simple linear regression analysis the overall degree GPA emerged as a significant predictor of SCA, $\beta = .33, t(138) = 4.12, p < .001$, and explained 10% of the variance in the data, $F(1, 138) = 16.94, p < .001$.

7.4 Summary and Discussion of the Quantitative Findings

7.4.1 English language ability

ELA measured at T1 did not show significant predictive power for SCA over time. However, ELA measured at T2 explained a considerable amount of the variance (16%) in the data, indicating that ELA measured at exit-point is better at predicting SCA. It is possible that differences in the criteria used to define ELA may have impacted on its predictive power. It may be that self-rated ELA at T1 was somewhat inaccurate as students had little experience of using English in an applied setting at this point. Future research could very usefully investigate the predictive power of a mid-sojourn ELA measure. The findings suggest that students who felt more satisfied with their ELA also reported better SCA. The association between ELA T2 and SCA could be explained by the crucial role of language ability for social interaction (Swami, 2009), which is an inherent part of sociocultural adjustment (Ward et al., 2001). While the role of ELA in sociocultural adjustment is still under-explored relative to academic adjustment (Andrade 2006), some prior research on student sojourners did report a significant link

between lack of English fluency and sociocultural adjustment problems (e.g. Poyrazli et al., 2002; Schutz and Richards, 2003; Yeh and Inose, 2003).

Confirmation for the crucial role of ELA for SCA can also be found in the interview data. Findings suggests that students' confidence in using English improved over time and was essential for fulfilling everyday tasks and for interacting with others, two key indicators of sociocultural adaptation (Ward et al., 2001). It appears that proficiency in the host language and, most especially, confidence in one's ability to use the language enables international students to not only effectively carry out everyday tasks (Yang et al., 2006) but also to successfully interact with others and establish meaningful relationships in the host environment as language skills invariably affect the quantity and quality of intercultural interaction (Ward et al., 2004).

7.4.2 Knowledge about the host country

Pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK emerged as a significant predictor of students' SCA and explained 11% of the variance in the data. This suggests that students who felt knowledgeable about the UK also reported high levels of SCA after nine months in the host country. This finding is in line with previous research which has found SCA to be affected by 'cultural knowledge' (Black, 1988; Ward et al., 1998), and points to the relevance of culture-learning approaches for the study of student sojourners sociocultural adjustment and adaptation (Ward et al., 2001).

7.4.3 Prior overseas experience

No significant difference was found in terms of degree of SCA between students with prior overseas experience and those without (Chapter 4). This is somewhat surprising as it is commonly assumed that exposure to a foreign country facilitates a social learning process whereby individuals learn to cope with unfamiliar cultural situations effectively (Begley and Shannon, 2008). That is, people will interact with others from different backgrounds during their sojourn abroad and thus acquire new knowledge and intercultural skills (Lee and Sukoco, 2010). However, it may be that previous experience of living in other countries may not necessarily be a prerequisite for subsequent sociocultural adaptation as 'culture-specific skills' (Furnham and Bochner, 1986) acquired in one location may not be appropriate in another location. Perhaps prior exposure to the host country might have a more pertinent effect as it allows sojourners

to interact with host nationals and to acquire knowledge specific to the host environment (Gudmundsdottir, 2012).

7.4.4 Autonomy in the decision to study abroad

Regression analysis showed that the Relative Autonomy Index (RAI) was able to predict SCA to a considerable degree (20% of the variance explained). This indicates that the more students felt that they stood behind their decision to study in the UK; the more likely they were to report high levels of SCA nine months into the programme of study. Chirkov et al.'s (2007) study of Chinese student sojourners in Belgium and Canada, on which the present study was based, found no significant association between the RAI and subsequent SCA. Their study employed a cross-sectional design and, in contrast to the present study, did not investigate the predictive validity of the RAI over time. However, in a subsequent longitudinal study of international student samples in Canada, Chirkov et al. (2008) did find evidence for the predictive validity of the RAI for SCA, although the variance in the data explained by the RAI was lower than in the present study (10%).

It is important to mention that in spite of the results discussed above, the interview findings suggest that an intrinsic motivation for study abroad did not mean that students did not experience any sociocultural adjustment difficulties. Even those who made their decision to study abroad independently from others and showed a strong personal attraction to the UK did struggle with sociocultural adjustment issues at some point in their sojourn, including aspects such as food and weather and relationship-formation with members of the host community (see 7.1).

7.4.5 Intercultural competence

The results indicate that SCA was closely associated with intercultural competence. The amount of variance in SCA explained by the MPQ subscales together (29%) was statistically significant and is comparable to prior research. For example, the MPQ scales previously accounted for 28% of the variance in the SCA of Singaporean exchange students (Leong, 2007) and for 26% of the variance in peer social support of 'western' expatriates in Taiwan (Van Oudenhoven, Mol and Van der Zee, 2003). More specifically, social initiative (SI), emotional stability (ES) and cultural empathy (CE) emerged as significant predictors in this study, suggesting that students who scored

highly on these aspects were also likely to report high levels of SCA after nine months in the host environment.

SI exhibited the strongest effect which is in line with previous research where increased SI predicted a reduction in sociocultural difficulties among student sojourners (Leong, 2007). The broader empirical literature further confirms the importance of SI and proactive tendencies for intercultural communication and relationship-building (Black and Gregensen, 1999), both of which are essential for sociocultural adaptation (Ward et al., 2001). Indeed, Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2000) found that SI was most predictive of the extent to which university students in the Netherlands engaged in intercultural activities. According to the culture-learning approach, in order to achieve SCA, the student sojourner needs to interact with others in the host environment (Ward et al., 2001) and has to learn new social skills and behaviours in order to 'fit in' (Furnham and Bochner, 1986). Thus, the tendency to approach social situations in an active way becomes a useful prerequisite for forming social relationships and for learning about the host environment (Li and Gasser, 2005).

Findings also suggest that ES (i.e. the ability to remain calm in stressful situations) contributed to better SCA. This is in line with stress and coping approaches to cross-cultural transition which depict a sojourn abroad as a stressful life event that requires coping responses (Berry, 2006). Indeed, contact with the unfamiliar host environment can have an intimidating and distressing effect on the student sojourner (Greenland and Brown, 2005), thus ES becomes a crucial element for SCA – emotionally stable individuals are probably more likely to appraise their transition into the host environment as less stressful (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2002), and are thus more likely to report higher levels of SCA.

Finally, CE emerged as a third crucial dimension in students' SCA. CE has been linked to fewer sociocultural adjustment difficulties in previous research (Leong, 2007). It seems that individuals who are able to empathise with members of different cultural groups are also more likely to establish a rapport with the host environment and to interact successfully with others, thereby acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to function effectively in the host environment (Bochner, 2006).

7.4.6 Social contact

Degree of social contact (SC) was able to explain 16% of the variance in SCA. Contact with non-co-national international students emerged as the main predictor, indicating

that students who had high levels of contact with other international students during their sojourn were more likely to report high levels of SCA after nine months in the host environment. This finding is interesting as it stands in direct contrast to previous research which has identified contact with host nationals as crucial for student sojourners' SCA (e.g. Ward et al., 1998; Li and Gasser, 2005). From a culture-learning and social skills perspective, the degree of contact with host nationals is widely seen as an important predictor of SCA (Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000), and social mixing with host nationals is thought to allow student sojourners to acquire the 'culture-specific' skills and knowledge necessary to 'fit in' and function effectively in the host environment (Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Bochner, 2006). However, in the present study degree of contact with British students only emerged as a marginally significant predictor of SCA, and contact with the wider local community was not predictive of SCA. What is more, the interview findings show that contact with host nationals remained at the periphery of students' social experience throughout the sojourn and did thus not play a central role in their sociocultural adjustment. Instead, the majority of students identified ties with non-co-national international students as their core social network (Chapter 8).

Although contact with non-co-national international students seemed to compensate for the lack of host contact to some extent (cf. Young et al., 2013), the dearth of contact with Britons did result in regret and perceived detriment among the student sojourners. Host contact was seen as important for students' own sense of sociocultural adjustment in the interviews, and many students reported wanting more contact with British people in order to learn about 'British culture'. This does indicate that the students themselves attached great importance to learning about the 'host culture' from host nationals. However, the results of this study show that students were able to achieve high levels of SCA despite a lack of host contact and without this form of culture-learning via host contact. The little contact students had with British people was, by and large, perceived as instrumental and formulaic rather than close and rewarding which mirrors a trend observed in other studies (e.g. Burke, Watkins, and Guzman, 2009). Contact with British students in particular was scarce, underscoring the frequently observed isolation of international students from home students (e.g. Wright and Schartner, 2013).

7.4.7 Social support

A regression analysis showed that social support (SS) explained 11% of the variance in sociocultural adaptation. Socio-emotional support emerged as a significant predictor, indicating that students with high levels of this type of support in the host country were likely to exhibit high levels of SCA over time. This finding emphasises the quality of social contacts as an important dimension of cross-cultural adaptation, and mirrors previous research that pointed to a buffering effect of SS on acculturative stress (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

Studies have recently started to make a distinction between instrumental and socio-emotional support (e.g. Chavajay, 2013), and the importance of socio-emotional support over instrumental support as indicated by the results is intriguing as SCA is generally explored through a culture-learning lens (Ward et al., 2001). From this perspective, instrumental support is viewed as an important contributory factor associated with learning the skills necessary to understand the host environment (Li and Gasser, 2005; Bochner, 2006). This view reflects the assumption that it is host nationals who provide student sojourners with instrumental support (Bochner et al., 1977; Furnham and Bochner, 1986). While this might be true to a certain extent for university staff and service encounters off-campus, the paucity of closer host contact reported in this study (Chapter 8) could mean that students did not receive the level of instrumental support generated through host ties alluded to in previous studies.

Overall, the findings suggest that instrumental support might not be as central to SCA as previously thought. In fact, coping resources in the form of socio-emotional support might play a more crucial role, thus pointing to the relevance of stress and coping approaches (Berry, 2006) for the study of sociocultural adjustment and adaptation. A possible explanation for the importance of socio-emotional support is that adjusting to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment can be a daunting and stressful experience for student sojourners (Ward et al., 2001). When an international student arrives in the host country, she/he might experience a lack of fit with her/his new sociocultural environment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). These intercultural encounters can result in feelings of helplessness and confusion, thereby triggering acculturative stress (Berry, 1970; Furnham, 1982). In order to cope with the challenges associated with becoming functional in the new environment, socio-emotional support in the host country, in particular from peers, can function as a stress buffer that aids students in their sociocultural adjustment. In other words, student sojourners who receive high

levels of socio-emotional support in the host country will find it easier to cope with sociocultural adjustment issues such as the weather, food and social relationships.

7.4.8 Associations with other adaptation domains

Significant associations were found between SCA and the other adaptation domains (Box 7.1). These are displayed in Figure 7.10 below. Firstly, SWL and PWB both emerged as significant predictors of SCA, indicating that students who felt happy and satisfied with life in the host environment were also likely to report high levels of SCA. This provides further evidence that SCA and psychological adaptation are closely linked (Ward et al., 2001). It seems likely that happy and satisfied students will also embrace the sociocultural environment more fully. Secondly, the findings revealed a close relationship between SCA and academic achievement. The overall degree GPA emerged as a significant predictor of SCA, indicating that students who performed well academically were also likely to experience more successful SCA. This finding strongly indicates that student sojourners' SCA should not be considered in isolation from their academic performance (Zhou and Todman, 2009). Future research could very usefully employ academic achievement as a predictor variable to further explore the link between academic and sociocultural adaptation of student sojourners.

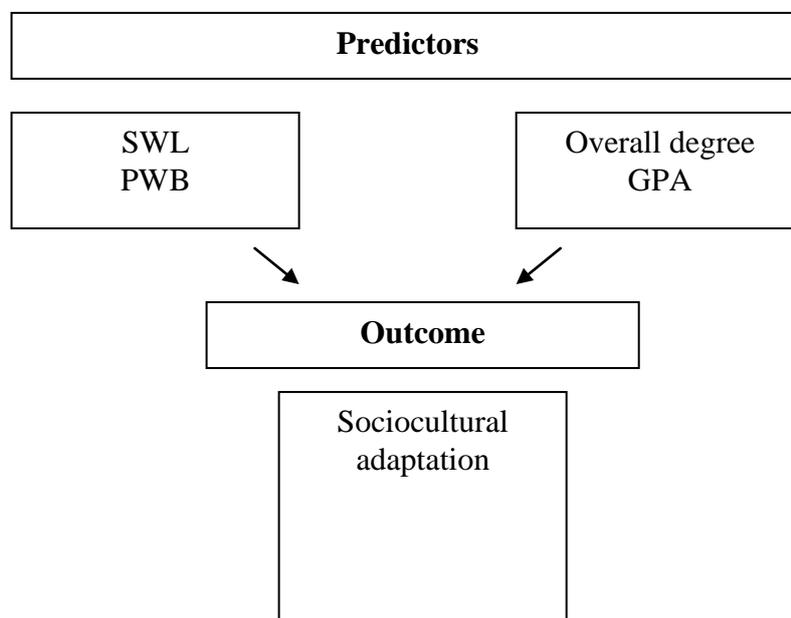


Figure 7.10 Association between SCA and other Adaptation Domains

Chapter 8. Social Contact and Friendship Networks

8.1 Introduction

Although it could be argued that social contact could be viewed as part of sociocultural adjustment, analysis showed that social relationships were of major importance to the students and generated a lot of talk across all three interview rounds. This warranted a separate chapter on social contact and friendship networks. Findings are presented below with references to students' comments. Data was drawn from the interviews, the open survey question, and the interviewee follow-up questionnaire. The thematic focus was on social contact with co-nationals, host nationals, and non-co-national international students, a typology first proposed by Bochner et al. (1977) in their *Functional Model of Friendship Networks* which depicts co-national contact as a primary network, followed by a secondary host national network, and a tertiary international network (Chapter 2).

Overall, students spoke extensively of the importance of social contact for their own sense of adjustment and wellbeing, and issues associated with friendship formation such as 'where', 'how' and 'with whom' to make friends. Students spoke of the loss of familiar social support systems as an immediate consequence of study abroad, and commented on the importance of social contact, in particular in times of homesickness and loneliness:

I think when you have a support system here with some friends then it's a lot easier that you are not dwelling on home, you know. [Robin, T1]

You have no family here so basically the friends become your family. [Silvia, T1]

The interaction strategy adopted by many students seemed to be of a selective nature, choosing their friends carefully. This was reflected in comments on the value of "deep" and "meaningful" relationships, and the importance attached to "really getting to know people". Forming a large network of acquaintances seemed to be of very little relevance to most students:

I'm not the kind of person who has like 50 different friends because my time is quite valuable because I have to do a lot. [Flora, T1]

(...) if I have a strong core group of friends that means more to me than knowing everybody on campus or being a social light. [Robin, T1]

(...) go into bars late at night and just like have these drunken ridiculous conversations with people, that's not really me. You know I'd rather sit down, have a cup of coffee and really get to know someone (...) [Sarah, T1]

The first few weeks at the host university were generally described as an “easy” time to meet people relative to later stages in the sojourn:

Everybody is very friendly and constantly searching for new friends so you can just come to anyone at the street and say "Hey, my name is..." and they will be like "Hello, my name is...what are you studying?" [Victoria, T1]

(...) in the beginning of the semester you can make new friends, you can meet with people, but in the middle of semester it's a little bit difficult. You cannot say "What's your name?" (...) it is a little bit weird. [Celik, T2]

Most students quickly formed a core group of friends during a phase of initial excitement about the opportunities to “make friends from all over the world”:

I've made new friends really fast. [Kaari, T1]

I was fortunate enough to meet like my group of friends that I have now pretty much in the first like two or three weeks of being here. [Sarah, T2]

Enthusiasm for intercultural friendships and the “international study environment” was particularly great, reflected in comments such as “I love being involved with international students” (Flora, T1) which were common right across the sample. The cultural diversity encountered at the host university was embraced by all interviewees and the formation of intercultural friendships was identified as a clear objective by many, illustrated in comments such as “I want to meet as many people as I can from different backgrounds” (Anna, T1) and “I just want to meet people from all over the world” (Mita, T1). At the same time, students identified national or cultural background as irrelevant for friendship formation - seeking out particular nationalities or groups of people was of little priority to students:

I don't really look at people's nationality as such, I mean I try not to make it influence my view on people. [Kaari, T1]

"Ok, must meet an Asian person or I have to be friends with someone from Italy." – I never really thought like that. [Sarah, T1]

I don't like specify it, like "I have to meet this nationality and I need to be friends with them" (...) [Flora, T1]

Initial contacts formed at the beginning of the academic year often developed into close and stable friendships that grew stronger over time. In some cases, close friendships somewhat replaced familial support systems in the students' home countries – the term ‘family’ was used by some interviewees when they spoke about their friends in the UK, indicating the formation of a social community that offered belonging as well as support:

I think we just got closer. We know each other better, we know each other more, you know kind of like brother, sister, family-type thing. [Sarah, T2]

(...) once a week my friends at Leazes [student accommodation], we all have like a family group dinner together, so I feel like I have a lot of support system here. [Robin, T2]

On the whole, relationships seemed to be fairly stable for most students - little change was reported over the course of the sojourn:

Nothing really changed much for me. I have met a lot of good people. [Victoria, follow-up survey, 12 months after arrival in the UK]

I've had my same consistent group of like ten friends that we always hang out with and do family dinners. [Sarah, T3]

My social network was really based of those in my program and in my accommodation. My network really never changed. [Robin, follow-up survey, 12 months after arrival in the UK]

However, as academic workload and pressure increased, the time students spent socialising subsequently decreased. A number of interviewees explained how, as academic workload intensified, they had less contact time with their friends. Thus, course demands and busy assignment periods sometimes became an impediment for social contact. Recalling the assignment period around Christmas time, Victoria explained:

I had very limited contact with other students, with other people. And I also had the pressure of writing all the assignments [...]

Others also pointed to the impact of academic workload on social contact throughout the sojourn:

(...) there was like two or three days when I couldn't go out of the house because I was writing non-stop and spending my nights doing this (...) [Lydia, T2]

I have lots of jobs to do and I will not be socialising until mid of June, so I'm not very active socially. [Gabriel, T3]

(...) you feel the pressure of the assignments and you don't want to hang around much, so I couldn't hang around much in second semester. [Gediz, T3]

(...) a lot of times I was too busy to meet with friends (...) [Kaari, T3]

Friendships were formed in various locations but overall social contact took largely place within university structures, in particular in the initial sojourn stage. On the whole, three structural spaces where extensive social interaction took place could be discerned from the data: student accommodation, lectures and seminars, and organised social activities as presented below.

In the initial sojourn stage, a number of students saw their living arrangements as crucial for their social integration. Out of 20 interviewees, 13 chose to live in accommodation provided by the university, mostly in residences for postgraduate students. Rationales for this

choice were varied, including safety, costs and proximity to the university campus, but mainly students viewed university accommodation as a “good place to meet people”:

I didn't want to live like alone somewhere in private accommodation without sharing the space with fellow students. [Lydia, T1]

I thought it's going to be easier, I mean I didn't know anyone here so I just choose the student accommodation. [Indah, T1]

On the whole, most students successfully developed close friendships with the people they lived with. Flat and housemates were particularly important in the first few weeks after arrival in the UK as they were often the first point for social contact and provided a source of support:

[...] my flatmates have been just awesome, they have been showing me around, taking me to their parties [...] they were really helpful, yeah, they helped me a lot. (Kaisa, T1)

[...] when I came to my accommodation I saw a Chinese girl [...] I said to her "Can you not leave me alone in the room, can you just stay here to chat with me or can you tell me where I can buy food, where I can register?" (Tao, T1)

For some students, their houses or halls of residence became more and more a focal point for social activities as the sojourn progressed, in particular during busy assignment periods when many students tended to socialise more at home as is illustrated in Flora's account below:

(...) on Sunday the boys cooked and on Saturday me and another girl cooked for them, so a lot of social life is happening inside the flat at the moment as well because we have so many assignments, so I'm staying a lot of the time at home. [Flora, T3]

The most common activities with housemates included cooking together and going out for meals, but students also organised other collective activities such as going to the gym and going on weekend-trips:

(...) we have some kind of activities in the flat, we go shopping together or a few times we cooked together (...) [Livia, T1]

In general we go somewhere or cook in our accommodation, we eat together with Chinese friends. [Gediz, T2]

(...) we just eat dinner together usually every night, we are going to Paris together, we've been to Scotland together a couple of times, so it's my sort of travel group. [Robin, T3]

Even when relationships were not close, the proximity in university accommodation (i.e. sharing a kitchen) facilitated interaction between neighbours in some cases:

On my floor where I share my kitchen I'm the only American, everyone else is from China and they are so great because they always want to cook for me and they are always bringing me tea and that kind of stuff. [Sarah, T1]

For others, however, proximity alone was not sufficient for these relationships to grow beyond small-talk in the hallway or kitchen. These students commented on the superficiality of such interactions and pointed to a lack of “meaningful” contact with housemates:

(...) I live with six other people but I only talk with one person, she's from Canada and we are fine but with the others we just say "Hi" and sometimes we didn't say anything. [Indah, T2]

Maybe just in my kitchen I sometimes got many chances to talk with some international students because we share the kitchen but this is the only chance for me to talk with international students. [Ying, T3]

Some interviewees felt annoyed, over time, by behaviour they had experienced in their accommodation or felt they had alienated others with their own habits:

I have some little troubles with my roommates. Just very little, like I use their and they use my things without permissions. [Tao, T2]

We share the kitchen but there is always some problems. Yeah some people are maybe selfish, they wouldn't clean the kitchen and sometimes damage the kitchen. [Ying, T2]

Another important space for social interaction were the lectures and seminars the students attended. As the programmes of study were largely based on independent self-study, students took advantage of the limited classroom time and frequently formed friendships around their teaching schedule:

I have a group of friends and we go together for coffee or for lunch between courses (...). [Lydia, T1]

Structured interaction as part of, for example, assessed group work was described as an occasion for closer interaction with classmates - opportunities for social interaction through course structures such as group work or classroom discussion were valued and students generally welcomed their expansion.

(...) I had to do much work in groups so that helped me a lot to, I don't know, have more interactional approach with people in my course. [Ella, T3]

However, some students struggled to sustain this interaction beyond the classroom setting:

(...) when we have classes I also don't have a chance to talk with them because maybe they come late or they will leave early and I'm not very familiar with most of them. Some of them just speak one or two sentences. [Ying, T3]

Outside the classroom, organised activities led by a variety of Student Union societies were another structure which encouraged social interaction, and students spoke positively of the local Student Union and opportunities on offer at the host university to “meet new people”:

(...) the Student Union have many activities. Maybe they should join that, maybe that's one of the ways to find friends and meet new people. [Mita, T3]

While some organised activities were not sustained beyond the first few weeks, others were longer lasting and provided students with opportunities for social interaction throughout the sojourn. This seemed to be particularly the case for activities with an intrinsic value for students' identity, such as societies with religious affiliation and sports teams:

Once in month (...) we have that like reading Koran and there's some people who will give speech and everything and I can have free food, Indonesian food. And it's also for girls, only girls. [Indah, T3]

Something I like very much from here which I think doesn't exist in Mexico at all is the societies, so I'm in 3 or 4 societies, so I'm always participating in their activities (...) and then I'm also in the handball team, so I'm training twice a week with them. [Mario, T2]

Students were also resourceful and developed their own organised social communities and events as part of their course. This created new opportunities for social contact outside the classroom context, and encouraged students who had not made many friends in semester one to become more involved in university-led activities in the second semester:

(...) the day before yesterday we had a CCC social activity. This is the first activity I take part in during this time (...) I think if there are other activities in future, I will take part. [Ying, T2]

From the CCC Society, events were organized that would get our program together to do cultural activities. That helped build friendships that crossed social groups, and that created a basis for different groups of friends to make connections and all hang out together. [Robin, follow-up survey, 12 months after arrival in the UK]

8.2 Contact with Host Nationals

Most students in this study arrived in the UK with a strong desire for host national contact and were, on the whole, highly motivated to experience “the British culture”. They expected to learn about local “customs”, “traditions” and “habits”, and repeatedly expressed a desire to feel “involved” with British society. This is best encapsulated in the statement from the self-report survey below:

I really want to join this society, learn about British culture, to go to church every Sunday and apply for a volunteer in a charity group. All I want to do is the know more about this society with right understanding. [Chinese, female, T1 survey]

A strong desire to experience all things British was also evident in students' motivations for study in the UK, and some interviewees specifically stated that they had chosen the UK over other destinations due to an intrinsic personal attraction to the country:

(...) I knew that the best place to go would be the UK (...) I guess I'm a little bit obsessed with it. I mean, everything, the UK, I mean I love the history, I love the (...) literature, I love the language (...) [Elya, T1]

(...) the music is very popular in my country and I like studying language and I like English, study in English, so I've always wanted to come here since high school (...) [Mita, T1]

I always wanted to go and study in England. [Silvia, T1]

I am always happy when I am in UK [Esma, T1]

Other rationales for host interaction were of a more instrumental nature, related to English language development and the acquisition of practical country-specific knowledge:

[...] it [host contact] surely can improve my spoken language. (Ying, T1)

I think it's important to at least know somebody or have somebody who can recommend some places, or who can tell you where to buy cheap sheets and curtains. (Kaari, T1)

I can get some information about the local, about work, education. They [British people] live here. (Tao, T1)

Despite evident motivation and desire for host national contact on the part of the ISs, expectations for contact with British people remained largely unmet. Comments such as “I want to meet more British people” (Anna, T1) and “I was hoping to meet more British people” (Flora, T1) were common across the sample:

I would like to have more British friends because of my English, because I would like to improve my English and I would like to know more things about British culture, like eat at someone's house with her British mum and something like that. [Mario, T2]

Tracking students' comments over a nine-month period revealed that length of time spent in the UK did not automatically lead to more contact with British people. Most interviewees reported a lack of host contact that persisted throughout the sojourn - statements such as “I don't have many British friends.” (Gediz, T3) were common in all three interview rounds. In fact, most interviewees' accounts of extent and degree of host national contact remained similar over time as illustrated in Anna's and Victoria's case below (Table 8.1):

	T1	T2	T3
Anna	I haven't met too many British people so far.	I think it is very difficult to make British friends.	I don't have any British friends.
Victoria	I have met, like talked to a few British people but we are not, like friends in the full term [...]	I don't have a lot of British friends here, like if you think about it not even one.	I don't even think that I have like a friend, like a British friend at all here which is quite strange because I am in UK.

Table 8.1 Lack of host contact over time

Developing friendships with UK nationals was repeatedly described as “difficult” and students pointed to a lack of opportunities and ‘places to go’ to meet with British people:

I don't have British friends and I'm really keenly searching for people (...) where can I find them? (...) in a pub, but you cannot talk with all of the strangers in a pub [Esmā, T2]

(...) it's pretty difficult to find British friends here. [Kaari, T1]

I would like to know someone from Newcastle but they are not here. I don't know where they are. [Mario, T2]

(...) I don't know how to make British friends because I don't have the chance to meet local person or British friend. [Ying, T2]

Several interviewees blamed skewed student intake on the degree programmes and residence in university accommodation for their isolation from British students and the wider host community:

I am living in university accommodation, so I don't have any neighbours, any local people. [Celik, T1]

(...) the circumstances are such that you usually get in contact with such people because I'm international, so there's international socials, international something, meeting, so it's always like international. [Gabriel, T2]

The thing is in our programme are actually not that many British people, so the British people I'm meeting I usually just meet quite briefly. [Flora, T2]

I don't spend a lot of time with British people and that's not intentional. That's just, is there any British people in our programme? [Sarah, T2]

Some identified English language difficulties, in particular the local ‘Geordie’ accent, as a barrier for interaction with British people:

If I'm the only non-native English speaker among all Geordies sometimes it gets too difficult for me to follow and I just feel external, so sometimes I'm a bit influenced by this. [Ella, T3]

I have some problems with Geordie accent and some kind of British accents but, yeah I can understand. There is no problem in lectures and with academic people, but in the streets I have still some problems with local people. [Gediz, T2]

Maybe most difficult thing is sometimes their accent. Sometimes when I talk to them I can't understand totally because the accent. [Ying, T2]

Contact with local students was particularly difficult to instigate, and several interviewees observed segregations between British and international students due to an apparent lack of interest and initiative on the part of the British students:

Sometimes they [British students] are not very eager to talk with you. You have to start the conversation by your own. [Gabriel, T1]

(...) I think they already have their own group of friends probably. [Mita, T2]

British prefer to be friends with British. I guess that's maybe because of the language or maybe for some other reasons, I don't know. [Victoria, T2]

A perceived lack of common conversational topics and high international student numbers were identified as contributing to this perceived segregation. This is illustrated well in the following exchanges with Gediz and Silvia (Tables 8.2 and 8.3)

G: In my course there are I guess three British students and the rest are from other countries and I realised that they didn't want to talk with us as often as the others so yeah I don't know many things about the British colleagues here.

I: Why do you think they are not so keen to talk to you?

G: I don't know, maybe we can only talk about basic things, about the modules not about life here and other things, maybe sports. We just talk about modules and how things go in Newcastle but most of them are from Newcastle so the talking are not interesting for them maybe.

Table 8.2 Exchange with Gediz

S: [...] now I'm basically spending 95% of my time with the people from the school which are basically all internationals.

I: And is that more circumstances or choice?

S: I would say both because I guess British people are a bit maybe fed up of the internationals [...] there is this huge amount of foreigners here and they maybe feel like threatened in their culture [...] it's not like they are not open or anything but I feel like maybe there is this tendency to go like "Ok, why are there so many internationals? We are British" you know.

Table 8.3 Exchange with Silvia

On the whole, students struggled to instigate and sustain “deep” relationships with British people, and host contact generally remained superficial throughout the sojourn, largely restricted to interactions with university staff and brief service encounters off campus such as setting up a bank account and speaking to cashiers in supermarkets:

I have to have some contact with them [British people] because of this setting up the house, even like calling for gas or electricity or speaking with the grocery man outside. [Esma, T1]

Every day maybe I went to the market, I went to the supermarket, I speak to the people but they are not my friends. [Ying, T1]

It's just the lady I meet in Tesco or the cab drivers and everybody. [Elya, T2]

Service encounters in shops and supermarkets were described by students as formulaic, allowing for little conversation beyond standardised interaction:

I don't engage so much into contact with them [British people], just I mean the service, when you go in shops, when you go in restaurants, something like that, so I don't have like deeper contacts (...) in shops they have, like three phrases, it's "Hello, do you need your bagging, do you have your club card?" and it's always the same. [Gabriel, T2]

On several occasions interviewees explained that it took great effort to go beyond the exchange of courtesies and small-talk:

(...) they are good at chit-chatting about the weather and talking about what you are gonna do next weekend but they get awfully awkward when you are talking about your emotions or some difficulties or, I don't know, just personal things. [Kaari, T2]

(...) I haven't got to, you know, establish a more deeper relationship with any of the British people I've come to know. It's just the first interaction and then that's too much. [Lydia, T3]

Unmet expectations and the perceived lack of host contact resulted, at times, in feelings of disappointment and frustration:

I always feel depressed since I cannot communicate better with local people in Newcastle. It makes me feel very upset. [Chinese, female, T1 survey]

I have made a lot of friend here but all of them are from different countries, not UK (...) so this is a little sad I guess. [Victoria, T3]

However, some students also demonstrated agency and self-initiative, and – critical of their lack of ties with British people – described conscious tactics to increase host contact for the remainder of their sojourn. This often included joining organised activities - students who lived with British students or took part in university-led activities, for example sports clubs, generally reported more host national contact:

(...) since I'm living in Britain it would be nice to know more British people. I don't know, I'm attending loads of, like, events from the Give It a Go things [Student Union activity] and I hope I will meet more people there. [Flora, T1]

I spend a lot of time with my flatmate and his English friends because of the fact that I don't really like going out here so I spend more time at home (...) [Ella, T3]

(...) basketball was different. You meet three, four times a day. There is jokes, there is automatically lots of times spent together and then you have to because you are a team. [Gabriel, T3]

To summarise, despite some opportunities for host national interaction, this type of contact was generally described as short-lived and habitual rather than rewarding and long-lasting (Figure 1). Consequently, students compensated the lack of British ties with other types of interaction, in particular non-co-national ties with other ISs:

I feel like I practice my English every day just speaking with other international students (...) I don't really feel like I need the British and have conversation. [Lydia, T1]

I think I don't really lack the British. It's not that I have something against them but I quite enjoy the different range of nationalities and cultures that we have in CCC. It's quite my thing now. [Silvia, T2]

A summary of the patterns of host contact is provided below (Figure 8.1).

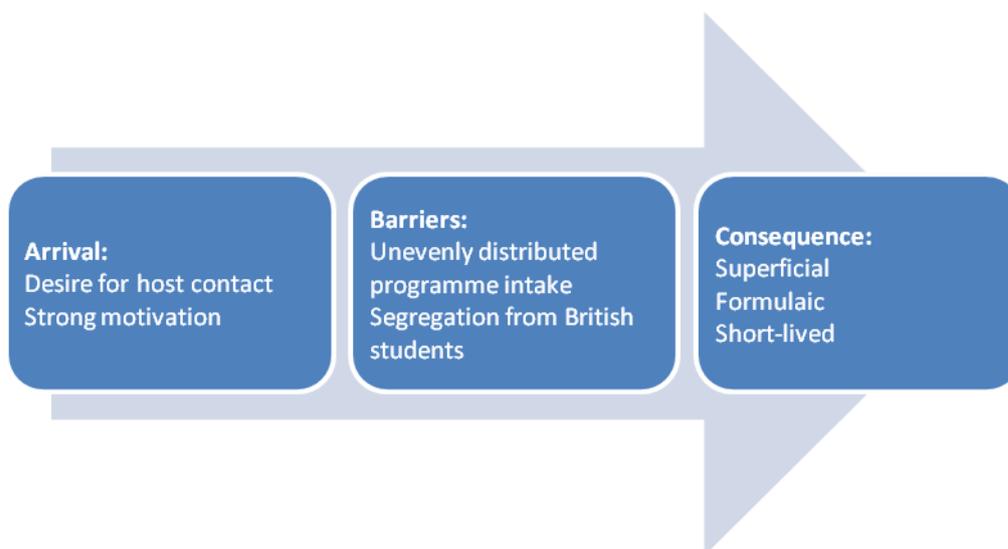


Figure 8.1 Host Contact over Time

8.3 Contact with Non-co-national International Students

Students' comments on contacts with fellow international students were overwhelmingly positive, and this type of interaction emerged as the primary form of social contact for most participants over time. Lydia's statement below is typical of the interviewee sample:

The most time I spend with international students and then probably the second is with people from my own country but that is actually just my boyfriend (...) the less time is with the native English people. [Lydia, T2]

Out of the 18 interviewees who participated in the T2 survey, 16 indicated that they spent time with non-co-national international students either 'very often' or 'often' (Table 8.4).

N = 18	BS	CN	IS	LC
Almost never	6	6	0	3
Very occasionally	6	1	0	4
Occasionally	6	3	2	4
Often	0	5	6	4
Very often	0	3	10	3

Note: BS = British students, CN = co-national, IS = international students, LC = local community

Table 8.4 Interviewees' Degrees of Social Contact

Students repeatedly emphasised the benefits of international ties for personal growth, and many highlighted the importance of learning “new things” and exploring “different views”:

We are different and there are lots of things to speak about. [Gabriel, T1]

It's just so nice to get to know new things and to have different views on things (...) it sounds boring but I actually really enjoy just talking with them (...) [Flora, T1]

Furthermore, interviewees identified the shared experience of being “foreign” in the host country as a basis for friendship formation and mutual support - the presence of a supportive ‘international community’ helped to alleviate the more distressing aspects of a sojourn abroad, in particular homesickness:

The difference is actually the common thing that we share together. You know, being so far away from home, coming here to study. [Elya, T1]

They are also foreigner so I guess when we meet most of them are also homesick, so we can "Yeah, I'm feeling homesick as well". [Mita, T1]

Support from non-co-national friends remained constant throughout the year for most students:

(...) the three of us have been together since the first semester so we've been helping each other a lot and throughout until now we've just been really great help, great support to one another. [Elya, T3]

However, although students were generally enthusiastic about intercultural friendships, they also identified challenges associated with communication across cultures and languages – some described cross-cultural interaction as “difficult”, and some explained feeling “shy”, “afraid” or “nervous” when interacting with “foreigners”, most especially in the early sojourn stages:

I am too shy to make friends with foreigners. [Chinese, female, T1 survey]

In terms of getting to know other people, people of not my nationality or my culture or my race, it's really difficult at first. [Elya, T1]

I feel a little not very safe to meet with foreign friends because quite different background and usually the communication between me and foreign friends, the communication is not like between Chinese (...) [Ting, T1]

Celik found it hard to instigate conversations as his quote below illustrates:

When I am talking to foreigners I can't say "Do you want to meet?" because I feel like it's a kind of negative face [...] they feel forced to come but I don't feel the same thing with Turkish guys, I can just ask anybody. (Celik, T1)

Despite general enthusiasm for intercultural interaction, skewed student intake, in particular the size of the Chinese international student community, created unease among some interviewees, in particular shortly after arrival:

There are too many Chinese people. I feel like I am in China. I don't have any negative attitudes about Chinese people but there are too many here. [Celik, T1]

Implications for social interaction appeared to be of particular concern for the students. Chinese students were perceived as “shy” and several interviewees felt that meaningful conversations were “difficult” to instigate and sustain, due to a lack of English language ability and the apparent formation of exclusively Mandarin-speaking social groups:

(...) it's a bit difficult here because there are a lot of Chinese people and Chinese people tend to be all together and speak Chinese. [Ella, T1]

They just stick together and talk in Chinese among themselves. [Gediz, T1]

It is really hard to make friends with the Chinese because they are just in their group. They speak only Chinese, their English is really bad, you can't communicate with them. [Kaari, T1]

It is important to note that the Chinese interviewees were very critical of their fellow compatriots and the tendency to retreat to the comfort of co-national circles which was attributed to a lack of independence and initiative:

I think the Chinese students they are not so independent because they are just too cared by their parents before they come here. [Tao, T1]

They [Chinese students] are always be taken care of by their parents and other family members very carefully and they didn't do anything in their home. [Ting, T1]

Skewed student intake gave rise to an interesting discussion in the interviews surrounding the issue of “feeling international”. For Indah, high student numbers from Asia resulted in a sense of familiarity rather than a feeling of internationality. In her quote below she points to the challenges of meeting non-Asian students and explains feeling less “international” than previously expected:

(...) at first I thought that UK is going to be exciting but now actually I have kind of a bit difficult to know the local people, to meet Western people because in the class most of them are like from Asia so it's not so different [Indah, T1]

Similarly, Silvia stated “everything is made for the international students” and pointed to a sense of normality created by the multinational study environment:

There is like three British students so I don't feel international because everyone else is foreign to everything [...]. If I would be studying something with 99% of the British, then I would feel international but here not really. [Silvia, T1]

Sarah drew comparisons between the host university and the diversity she encountered on a daily basis in her home state of California. She explained that the multinational study environment in the UK felt “normal” rather than ‘international’ to her as she had grown up in a culturally diverse society:

(...) people from the United States are from all over the world (...) you stand in line in a grocery store and you have people from all over the world and that's just normal. The person who is working there might be from Iran, the person who is driving your car in L.A. might be from Panama, I mean it's just so normal. [Sarah, T1]

Although the interviewees differed in their experiences of “feeling international”, all commented on the benefits of a culturally and linguistically diverse study environment:

The university is really, really international place. I would be bored if it consisted of mostly British people. [Celik, T1]

I love that I can interact with so many people from different cultures and I just hope that I will learn more about different cultures (...) [Flora, T1]

As time progressed, social contact with non-co-nationals emerged overwhelmingly as the students’ primary network - by the second interview round 17 out of 20 interviewees identified international ties as their principal network.

Many interviewees spoke extensively about the supportive nature of their international friendships, and students appeared to support each other emotionally as well as with the practical aspects of academic study. The academic tasks they helped each other with were various and included for example help with proofreading, practising presentations, and discussing aspects of written work. Elya, whose three closest friends were students from Italy, Indonesia and the US, described the support gained from these friendships as “very, very satisfying”. She talked extensively about the academic support provided within this international group, in particular during the assessment periods, and described how she and her friends created study groups in the university library to support one another during this time:

We've been really supportive of each other, like during our whole assignment period fiasco. We've been really kind of like helping each other, I mean we would spend time in the library just kind of like look for things that we think could help, you know, the other. [Elya, T2]

Through discussion of their academic work and proofreading of each other’s papers, the students mutually exchanged knowledge and skills which in turn benefitted their learning and academic adjustment:

(...) bouncing ideas off each other, sending each other papers to correct, so that makes a big difference, when you have someone you can trust within your programme. [Sarah, T2]

In fact, social interaction became part of students' learning experience itself as students formed study groups and motivated one another to learn:

(...) for an exam I was learning together with two of my friends from the course and we were spending the whole day at the library, that was a different kind of experience and I enjoyed it as well. [Lydia, T2]

(...) during the assignments, one of my classmates, a girl, we just communicated every day. She will ask me "How about you finish today?" I will ask her "Hoch much you finish today? Ok, we just keep the pace, and then she also provide me some suggestion how to write and I also provide her. [Tao, T2]

Anna identified academic study as "a constant topic" in her interactions with international friends, and described a feeling of solidarity among student sojourners who all had to cope with unfamiliar academic conventions and were, for the most part, studying in a second language. This sense of empathy with fellow non-UK students appeared to be an important aspect of the formation of strong bonds between international students.

It's (...) helpful for me so that I understand I'm not the only one that is struggling a bit with university and so on. [Anna, T2]

When preparing the assignments it was very important that I got to speak in the different stages (...) we were working on the same assignments, I don't know, it feels easier to share this experience with other people that have similar experience with you, so you have a lot in common for the time being and I really feel it's like a support. [Lydia, T2]

In addition to this willingness to help with academic issues and difficulties, there was also a strong sense of emotional support for each other:

(...) sometimes we have difficulties in the language and everything so we kind of support each other, like "You can do it!" if one of us loses confidence and starts feeling "Oh no, I don't think I can do, I don't know, something." [Mita, T2]

Nonetheless, some interviewees also pointed to the limits of support from their newly formed international friendships, in particular in terms of emotional support. For example Flora indicated that, although she had met "wonderful people" among the international student community, she felt apprehensive to discuss emotional difficulties with her international friends. Below, she explains the supportive role of her British boyfriend and family and friends in Germany, and points to the time constraints involved in friendship formation abroad:

I mean it's only been a few months, so I guess friendships can only go so deep. So if I had like a really, really severe problem, I would probably still refer to either my partner or to my friends and family at home. [Flora, T2]

On the scale from 1 to 10 I would rate it as 8 [social support]. The only thing I miss is that back home I have friends that are really, really close to me and that I can share pretty much everything. And here, although we are very good friends and we spend a lot of time together; I don't feel that close to those people just yet. [Victoria, T2]

Apart from providing academic and emotional support, interactions between students of different nationalities also promoted intercultural understanding. Increased intercultural awareness and open-mindedness was a recurring theme and all interviewees commented positively on the opportunities created by the international make-up of their course to learn about other cultures. Immersion into a mixed-nationality setting allowed for existing knowledge to be called into question as first-hand contact between students from different countries enabled them to discover unexpected similarities. Flora's comment below is indicative of this experience:

I met an incredibly nice guy from Iran and, I don't know, Iran, I always like connected it with war and I never thought about that there is like young people like me who wants to study and who want to have like a good job and who are like outgoing and maybe are very similar to me. I never thought about that and it's just so nice when you get to know people and you think "Wow I never thought that I would meet a person from that country who's so similar to me!" [Flora, T3]

The words “open” and “accepting” were used by the students to refer to necessary personality attributes for successful intercultural interaction. The following comment is typical:

It's about the wish to accept other cultures because for some people it's unacceptable, they are scared of that maybe, so it's very important to be open-minded and acceptable about other people. (Victoria, T1)

To sum up, the overall impression formed by the data is that students compensated the loss of home social support systems and the lack of contact with British people with ‘international ties’ - the social resources previously available to them in their home countries were replaced by a network of fellow student sojourners who, based on shared ‘foreignness’ and common experiences provided mutual emotional and academic support, resulting over time in closely-knit intercultural friendships which was the primary form of social contact for most students. A summary of the patterns of international ties is provided below (Figure 8.2).



Figure 8.2 Development of ‘International Ties’ over Time

8.4 Contact with Co-nationals

Despite some individual variation, ties with co-nationals were on the whole less central to students' social experience, and generally remained secondary to ties with other non-co-national international students. In fact at T1, some interviewees explicitly stated that they did not wish to interact at all with fellow co-nationals during their sojourn in the UK:

I can meet Italians in Italy, why should I meet new Italians here? [Ella, T1]

I know millions of Turkish people in Turkey. [Esma, T1]

I'm not seeking friendship with Lithuanian people because that is not the reason why I came here. [Gabriel, T1]

(...) I'm running away from all Slovakian people (...) I mean that's why I'm abroad. [Silvia, T1]

Overall, only the three Chinese interviewees reported more interaction with fellow compatriots than non-co-nationals. This is best illustrated in Ying's case who reported little non-co-national interaction throughout her sojourn (Table 8.5):

	T1	T2	T3
Ying	Almost all of my friends are still Chinese [...]	Most of time I spend time with my Chinese friends but sometimes I spend my time with American friends.	The most activities is spent with my boyfriend or my classmates, my Chinese classmates. We don't have many chances to contact or to have activities with other international students [...]

Table 8.5 Ying's Co-National Contact over Time

Ting had attended an English language course at the host university prior to the start of her programme, thus by the time her classmates arrived in the UK she had already formed a core network of friends with mostly other students from China who were also doing an English language course. In her first interview Ting explained, "I meet a lot of people before I start the normal course." Consequently, she spent most of her time with co-nationals she had befriended as part of her pre-programme English language training.

This finding begs the question whether there was a more general trend towards co-national interaction among the Chinese students in the wider sample. Table 8.6 shows the mean scores for degree of social contact for the Chinese and non-Chinese group. An independent-samples t-test adjusted for equality of variance showed that the Chinese students reported significantly higher levels of interaction with co-nationals than the other students, $t(113.84) = 4.56, p < .001$, confirming the pattern suggested in the interview findings.

Moreover, the Chinese students also reported significantly lower levels of contact with non-co-national international students, $t(141) = -8.37, p < .001$, and with British students, $t(136.77) = -1.74, p = .084$.

	Group	M	SD
Local students	Chinese (N = 65)	2.15 [^]	0.75
	Rest (N = 78)	2.42	1.09
Co-nationals	Chinese	4.48**	0.73
	Rest	3.58	1.55
International	Chinese	3.34**	0.87
	Rest	4.47	0.75
Local community	Chinese	2.48	1.08
	Rest	2.79	1.27

**mean difference significant at the 99% level; [^] mean difference significant at the 90% level

Table 8.6 Mean Scores for SC for Chinese Students and Others

On the whole, the data indicated that co-national contact was inherently complex - on the one hand, students recognised the benefits of this type of contact in terms of mitigating homesickness and loneliness, on the other hand, they felt that too much co-national contact would inhibit their English language development and personal growth (Figure 8.3). Students seemed torn between wanting to seize every opportunity for intercultural interaction while at the same time not wanting to “ignore” their fellow compatriots. This tension is best encapsulated in Ting’s comment below:

(...) it's very complicated emotion. Of course I feel happy when I meet Chinese friends, no matter in life or during the class, but at the same time I also expect to make friends with British or other countries people because I want to get something different from my Chinese experience. But because the differences between the nationality you always automatically will choose Chinese. When you choose Chinese, you also will feel a little regret to choose them because it's far away from your goals. [Ting, T1]

Co-national contact seemed to play a particularly important role very early in the sojourn when students had just arrived in the UK and were most unfamiliar with the new environment - several interviewees pointed to the “comforting” nature of co-national interaction. Students often commented on the importance of a “shared culture” and a “common language”, and described feeling “a little at home”, “a sense of belonging”, “comfortable”, “relaxed” and “connected” when interacting with co-nationals - availability of co-national ties seemed to create a sense of security and familiarity for students in the early stages of their sojourn. The excerpts below are indicative of this:

There are many Turkish people so I don't feel lonely. If I feel lonely there are many people I can talk to so I feel like in my country. [Gediz, T1]

You consider people from your country more like family [...] it is very important to know that if I am sick at three in the morning I can call a Romanian friend and he or she will do something. [Anna, T1]

(...) we were all football fans and could talk about American football which is not really popular here, that to me was something so important (...) I would definitely miss that kind of communication and relationship if I didn't have anyone here that was from America. [Sarah, T1]

In her first interview, Mita emphasised her preference for Indonesian flatmates and explained feeling “scared about living with foreigners”:

I just tried searching for Indonesian people who are looking for flatmates. [Mita, T1]

Sharing a common language and similar food culture created a sense of familiarity for Mita, and it seemed that these co-national interactions also helped to alleviate feelings of homesickness:

I feel a little at home and my flatmates, we all eat rice (...) it's nice to have Indonesian friends because we can eat the same things and if we miss home sometimes we just share stories about what we like doing back home and I can speak my language. [Mita, T1]

The potential of co-national ties to ease feelings of homesickness was highlighted by a number of interviewees. This appeared to be largely connected to a shared first language:

It can reduce my homesick and maybe reduce my pressure because we can speak Chinese (...) I'm afraid of making mistakes (...) if I speak Chinese I feel much better. [Ying, T1]

(...) you feel homesick most of the time and you want to talk in your mother tongue and I think we can understand each other better than other cultures because sometimes we can have miscommunication problem with other cultures. [Gediz, T1]

Several students highlighted “understanding” as an important feature of co-national interaction. In the first interview round a number of interviewees identified co-national interaction as “easy” relative to non-co-national contact:

You share the common culture so you feel more relaxed, your conversations, jokes; everything is more meaningful with them. [Celik, T1]

It's always very comforting to know that there are people, who you share the same background with or the same nationality with, who understand you a little bit better. [Elya, T1]

On the whole, students seemed torn between the “comforting” nature of co-national ties and the opportunities for intercultural interaction available to them:

I would like to have Turkish friends but I don't want to spend too much time with them. [Celik, T1]

I think it's also ok to be friends with them [co-nationals] at some point but if we always together with them we don't have any new knowledge about culture. [Indah, T1]

Over time, students started to acknowledge more and more the downsides of co-national relationships, in particular its potentially detrimental effect on English language development:

I just decided it's better for me to spend time with my international friends than Indonesian friends. It's not that I don't want to hang out with them (...) I just want to improve my English skill. [Indah, T2]

I thought that I've come so far to England, I don't want to get together with the Indonesians again. I have to meet other people, I have to make my English improve. [Mita, T3]

(...) I always stay with the Chinese group, so I have not much more chances to speak English. [Tao, T2]

As the sojourn progressed, most students, even those who initially retreated to the safety of co-national ties became more eager and more prepared to engage with those outside of their co-national community. A number of interviewees reported an increasing desire and growing confidence to interact with non-co-nationals, and described how they had gradually found it easier to interact and communicate with people:

I think I've definitely been challenging myself to spend more time with people who are completely different than me as far as where they come from (...) just trying to challenge myself to get out of the American box. [Sarah, T2]

At first I was a little scared about the idea of being here but throughout the time I've been making great, great friends. I mean I've got to know a lot of great, wonderful people and I've spent a lot more time outside of the room. [Elya, T2]

The first time I got here I thought that maybe it's better if I live with someone from my own country because it will be easier to communicate and everything. But it turns out that it's not really that fun anyway (...) [Mita, T2]

By T3, students were able to reflect back on nine months of experience of living abroad and were able to make recommendations with regard to friendship formation for prospective students. At this point, most interviewees emphasised the value of intercultural interaction and were highly critical of students "sticking together" in co-national groups, as shown in the comments below:

(...) if you try to explore, try to find new friends, you would just learn new things. The Indonesian students, they just stick with the other Indonesian students. Why? You are here in England, you already have plenty of friends in Indonesia, why do you still find Indonesian friends here in England? [Mita, T3]

(...) do not just stay with your Chinese groups. It's not useful for your improve to your English. You just say Chinese to them and eat Chinese food. Just go out, try your best. [Tao, T3]

Overall, ‘virtual’ contact with friends and family in the home countries emerged as the most dominant aspect of co-national contact right across the sample - most interviewees contacted home at least on a weekly basis and some even spoke to friends and family several times a day (Table 8.7):

The person I speak the most back home is my mum. I tend to speak with her every day. [Anna, T2]

(...) I go on Facebook and it's like two hours every day talking to my friends in Mexico and I talk to my mum like once a week through Skype. [Mario, T2]

You know skype is not so expensive, so I can communicate with them every day. [Tao, T2]

Home Contact	Daily	Weekly	Several times/week	Monthly at most
Internet	6	2	3	1
Telephone	2	3	4	2

Table 8.7 Interviewees’ Contact with Home

Many interviewees commented on the importance of these ‘e-ties’ for their overall wellbeing - ‘virtual’ contact with home seemed to also play an important role in the students’ own sense of adjustment:

We skype every day, even if it's not for a long time, maybe sometimes it's only five or ten minutes a day but still it helps a lot to keep them up to date with my experience here, to get the news from them and it's vital for my wellbeing actually. [Lydia, T2]

I skype my family every single day (...) that is a big push for me because they know exactly everything that's going on with me day to day, and I know exactly what's going on with my family day to day. [Sarah, T2]

To sum up, co-national contact emerged as a secondary social network for most interviewees. Ties with compatriots in the UK were generally less frequent and less strong than mixed-nationality friendships but more prevalent than contact with British people as illustrated below:

I think I spend about 70 per cent of the time with international friends, yes all the time I'm surrounded by international friends. With the Romanian people I spend like 20 per cent of the time and with British people 10 per cent, let's say. [Anna, T2]

Roughly 80 per cent with my international friends, 15 per cent with my Finnish friends, or maybe a bit more, let's say 19 per cent with my Finnish friends, and 1 per cent with UK-friends. [Kaari, T2]

90% with international, then 5% on Skype with my Slovakian group and the British people is my roommate and couple that I met in the classes but that's all. [Silvia, T2]

However, one form of co-national contact - ‘virtual’ contact with friends and family back home - was of great importance to students. The data also pointed to complexities associated

with co-national contact - on the one hand, students recognised the benefits of co-national friendships, based on a shared cultural and linguistic background. Retreating to the safety of co-national circles seemed to be a way for students to find comfort among peers with similar experiences, in particular in the initial sojourn stage. Communication with co-nationals was described as “easy” and mundane activities such as sharing stories from home and familiar foods seemed to alleviate feelings of homesickness. On the other hand, students also acknowledged the limitations of co-national contact in terms of English language development and personal growth, especially as the sojourn progressed. Some interviewees explicitly stated that they did not wish to mix with fellow co-nationals in the UK; others were torn between wanting to meet people of different backgrounds while at the same time being mindful not to overlook students from their own country. Figure 8.3 illustrates the complex nature of co-national contact.

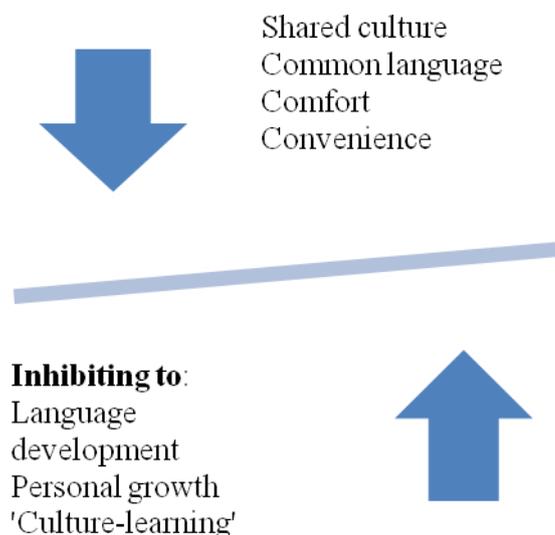


Figure 8.3 The Complexity of Co-National Contact

8.5 Summary and Discussion

To sum up this chapter on social ties, Figure 8.4 below illustrates the trajectories of interviewees’ social contact patterns over time. Firstly, it shows a rapid increase in international ties early on in the sojourn. After some initial apprehension about cross-cultural communication, these ties had become the dominant form of social contact by the start of the second semester and remained so until the end of the sojourn. Secondly, the figure shows that co-national contact increased rapidly in the early sojourn stages, when it was particularly crucial in terms of mitigating loneliness and homesickness. However, after a couple of months

degree of contact with co-nationals dropped and remained steadily low relative to contact with non-co-national international students. Finally, although there was some increase in host contact in the initial sojourn stage through initial contact with academic staff and local people off-campus, overall the degree of contact with British people levelled off quickly and remained persistently scarce for the remainder of the sojourn.

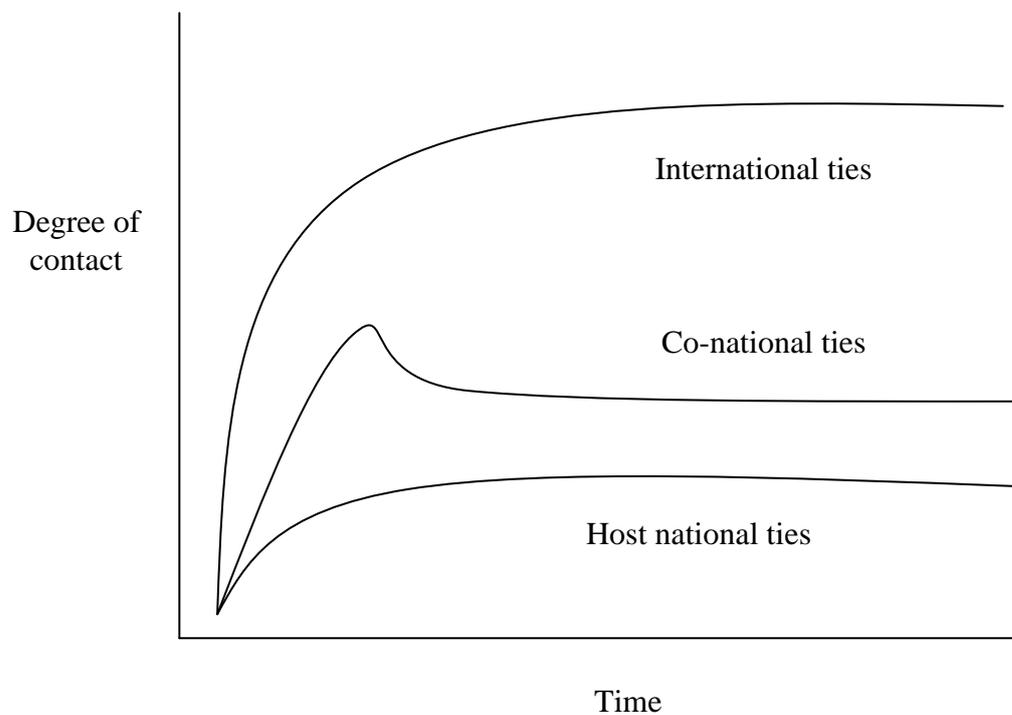


Figure 8.4 Students' Social Contact Trajectories over Time

Findings from this study make several important contributions to the international student literature, as discussed below, and further inform our understanding of student sojourners' social ties. A number of important discussion points arise from this study which may have implications for educators, administrators and those responsible for recruiting students from overseas.

8.5.1 Lack of host ties

Although ties with host nationals were desired by the students and valued for their capacity to evoke cultural and linguistic learning (Furnham and Bochner, 1986), instigating and maintaining meaningful contact with British people was perceived as difficult which resulted in discontentment and frustration on the part of the international students, providing further corroborative evidence that student sojourners often encounter less host contact than they

initially expected (Ward et al., 2001), and that motivation alone does not automatically guarantee host interaction (Brown, 2009b). This finding is not new and mirrors previous UK-based studies which reported segregations of international students from their local counterparts and the wider host community (UNITE, 2006; Brown, 2009b; Brown and Richards, 2012).

Difficulties in forming host national ties were attributed to indifference on the part of the hosts, as well as to more structural factors such as high international student numbers on the host campus and residence in university accommodation. The perception of indifferent host students is echoed in previous studies which have found that British students show little inclination to interact with their international counterparts (Peacock and Harrison, 2009). The repeated mention of structural issues in the interviews points to a ‘ghettoization’ of international students (Deardorff, 2009) and raises the question in how far host universities can act as strategic agents to encourage interaction between international and domestic students. Prior research in the UK HE context has shown that international students desire more opportunities to mix with British people and expect host institutions to assist them in this endeavour (UKCOSA, 2004). Thus, researchers have recently called on host universities to create social spaces where meaningful interaction between local and international students can occur (Robinson et al., 2007; Sovic, 2009). This includes calls for efforts to house international students with home students in order to increase opportunities for host national contact (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Although living arrangements are believed to be the most important space for students to form friendships (Wilcox et al., 2005), it is doubtful whether strategic housing management can be effective on campuses with a highly skewed international student intake⁴⁰. Alternatively, it has been suggested that interaction between home and international students can be encouraged in the classroom which provides proximity and regular contact (Kudo and Simkin, 2003). However this might be difficult to achieve in practice on programmes with low numbers of local students such as taught postgraduate programmes in the UK. While host institutions may be able to tackle some of the structural forces underlying the reported segregation, an exploration of the host perspective is paramount if initiatives such as ‘buddy-schemes’ (Neri and Ville, 2008) and multicultural intervention programmes (Sakurai et al., 2010) are to be effective. This warrants research into

⁴⁰ Many British host universities, including the one under study here, have a high intake of students from the People’s Republic of China, the largest sending country of international students to the UK (UKCISA 2013)

the perceptions and attitudes of domestic students and the wider local community toward international education and growing international student numbers (Brown, 2009b).

In sum, although host national ties were characterised largely by functional and utilitarian contact, as suggested by Bochner et al. (1977), host national contact constituted a tertiary network on the outermost fringes of students' social lives (Figure 8.5). This stands somewhat in contrast to the FMFN which puts host national contact in a secondary position after co-national contact.

8.5.2 The complex nature of co-national ties

While much of the prior international student literature highlights the centrality of co-national contact (Bochner et al., 1977; Furnham and Alibhai, 1985; Neri and Ville, 2008), findings from this study do not replicate this trend. Although some gravitation towards compatriot circles occurred in the early sojourn stages when instances of homesickness and loneliness were most salient, over time co-national contact emerged as a secondary network. Perhaps the most striking finding relates to the complexities that seem to be associated with co-national contact. It appears that the students felt they 'ought to' avoid contact with co-nationals. This resulted in a dilemma of, on the one hand, wanting to spend some time with compatriots but at the same time fearing its implicit disadvantages for English language development and personal growth. To the best of the author's knowledge, this study is the first to report on the complexities associated with co-national contact.

This has important implications for the discourse surrounding the international student experience, and raises the question whether we should put less emphasis on the integration of international students with the host community, and perhaps encourage, instead, co-national contact in the host country (McKinlay, Pattison and Gross, 1996). As Bochner et al. state in their 1977 study, "co-national bonds are of vital importance to foreign students, and should therefore not be administratively interfered with, regulated against, obstructed, or sneered at. On the contrary, such bonds should be encouraged" (p. 292). Moreover, we need to recognise the impact of the internet on student sojourners' social lives (Coleman and Chafer, 2011). Over the past few decades, communication technology has evolved immensely, and the introduction of e-mail, Skype and social networking sites such as Facebook has resulted in increased 'virtual' contact with friends and family back home (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Findings from this study suggest that these 'e-ties' were the most dominant form of co-national contact for the students. Research has begun to explore the role of computer-

mediated communication in the study abroad experience (Coleman and Chafer, 2011), and further investigations are needed to fully understand the social dimensions of an academic sojourn abroad.

8.5.3 The centrality of international ties

A third key finding from this study is the centrality of non-co-national international contact which was characterised by close ties that fulfilled a vital support function throughout the sojourn. This finding stands in direct opposition to the FMFN – Bochner et al. (1977) claim that international ties are the least important social network. However, the evidence found in this study for highly supportive and closely-knit international friendships calls this into question. The data indicates that international ties go well beyond the recreational function suggested by Bochner and colleagues, providing social support and a sense of belonging among those going through the sojourn experience. This is in line with recent evidence from UK-based studies which suggests that student sojourners form close, strong ties among themselves (Montgomery and McDowell, 2009; Young et al., 2013). It may be that the highly internationalised course environment of this sample, one largely devoid of British students, encouraged the formation of international ties. This raises the question whether international ties are formed by default, as a consequence of the high international student intake on UK taught postgraduate degrees, rather than as a result of students' conscious choice. It seems though, as evidence from this and other studies suggests, that international students generally have a great desire for cross-cultural interaction (Brown, 2008a), and that international friendships are highly important for students' sense of wellbeing and social connectedness, making a fulfilling social life, independent of the host community, possible. Thus, this type of contact warrants further research, and interactions among international students should be fostered and encouraged by host institutions inside and outside of the classroom (Young et al., 2013).

The interviewees generally reported contact with a multiplicity of nationalities; however, social contact remained largely confined to compatriots for the three Chinese interviewees, a trend also found by Young et al. (2013) in their study of student sojourners in the UK. An independent-samples t-test showed that Chinese students reported significantly more contact with compatriots than the other students. This corresponds to research suggesting that student sojourners from Asian countries tend to build strong compatriot networks in the host environment (e.g. Rosenthal et al., 2006; Hendrickson et al., 2011). It is

likely that the high numbers of international students from China at the host university provided these students with more opportunities to form co-national friendships as opposed to students from countries with comparatively fewer compatriots represented at the host campus (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Receiving institutions could prevent the formation of co-national enclaves by actively placing students into mixed-nationality accommodation or by avoiding the clustering of students from the same country in the same accommodation, although this might be difficult to achieve practically as China is the main sending country of international students to the UK (UKCISA, 2013).

In sum, and despite some individual variation, three distinct trajectories with regard to the three social groups suggested in the FMFN could be teased apart in the data and thus a new model of student sojourners' social ties is proposed below (Figure 8.5, Table 8.8), with international ties as the primary network, co-national ties as a secondary network, and host national ties as a tertiary network.

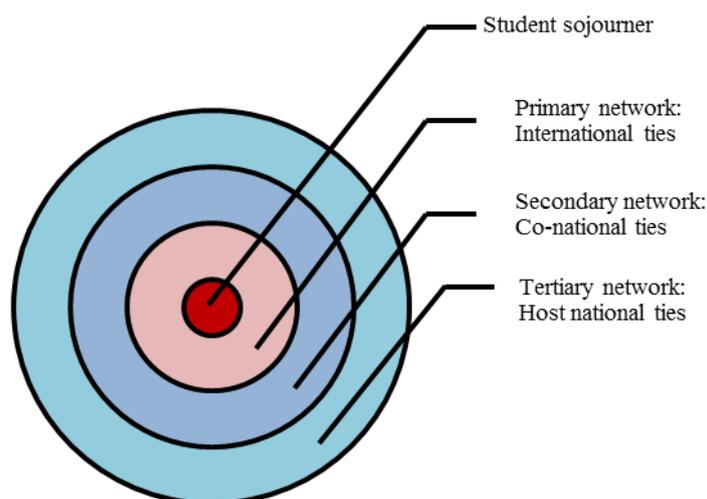


Figure 8.5 A Model of Student Sojourners' Social Ties

Network	Members	Characteristics
Primary <i>International</i>	Non-co-nationals, including fellow international students	Close friendships; providing academic and emotional support
Secondary <i>Co-national</i>	Contacts with other sojourning compatriots; e-ties with home	Emotional support-function in the early sojourn stage; complex
Tertiary <i>Host nationals</i>	Ties with host nationals, incl. local students	Short-lived; formulaic; habitual

Table 8.8 A Model of Student Sojourners' Social Ties

Chapter 9. Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter revisits the aims of this study and the research questions (Chapters 1 and 2), offers conclusions and discusses some of the theoretical and practical implications of the findings presented above.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment and adaptation of a multinational group of international postgraduate students undertaking one-year taught MA degrees at a single UK university. More specifically, the focus, as set out in Chapter 1, was twofold. Firstly, to understand how a range of contributory factors affect adaptation across these three domains of enquiry. This was considered important in light of the widely reported individual variation in adjustment outcomes (Ryan and Twibell, 2000; Masgoret and Ward, 2006). Following Kim's (2001) notion of 'preparedness for change', the study sought to examine whether and, if so, how dispositional 'pre-arrival' factors impinge on an individual's adaptation potential. Additionally the impact of factors that develop during the sojourn abroad (Berry, 2006), such as social ties and social support, was also considered. Secondly, the study sought to monitor students' academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment processes over time. This follows calls for more qualitative longitudinal research exploring the student perspective (e.g. Pitts, 2005; Montgomery and McDowell, 2009). Together, these two foci on contributory factors to adaptation on the one hand, and adjustment processes over time on the other resulted in a holistic study, combining predictive and monitoring approaches as suggested by Zhou and Todman (2009).

In light of claims in the theoretical and discursive literature for the transformative nature of study abroad (Brown, 2009; European Commission, 2013), a secondary research aim of the present study was to understand whether and, if so, how an academic sojourn abroad impinges on students' intercultural competence (IC). As noted by Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002), the effects on IC of prolonged exposure to multicultural settings are under-explored. This study was the first to use the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ, Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2000) at two points in time in order to explore possible changes in IC after an extended stay abroad.

Finally, given a lack of theoretical models specific to the international student sojourn (Chapters 1 and 2), the conceptual aim of this study was to develop a model of student

sojourner adjustment and adaptation by refining and extending in scope Ward et al.'s (2001) acculturation model. This responds to calls for more theoretical sophistication in studies on student sojourner adjustment (Zhang and Goodson, 2011) and for more empirical research into the applicability of general sojourner adjustment models for the adjustment of student sojourners (Smith and Khawaja, 2011).

The chapter proceeds as follows. The next sub-section (9.2) revisits the research questions and briefly summarises the main findings from this study. The following sub-section (9.3) considers theoretical implications arising from this project and introduces a new model of student sojourner adjustment and adaptation. Practical implications for host universities are then detailed in sub-section 9.4. The limitations of this study and directions for future research are outlined in sub-section 9.5. Finally, there is a brief section of concluding remarks (9.6).

9.2 Revisiting the Research Questions

9.2.1 Research questions 1 to 3

Research questions 1 to 3 followed a predictive aim (Chapter 2). Here, the research interest was in the effects of a range of contributory factors on student sojourners' adaptation. The contributory factors were considered in line with Kim's (2001) idea that sojourners' adaptation potential is determined by their level of 'readiness' or 'preparedness for change'. The findings support Kim's (ibid.) notion by suggesting that, indeed, dispositional pre-arrival factors impinge on the level of adaptation achieved. Moreover, the findings provide strong evidence for the importance of social connectedness for student sojourner adaptation. Analyses showed that, overall, IC and degree of social contact explained the greatest amount of variance across academic, psychological and sociocultural adaptation. More specifically, cultural empathy (CE), social initiative (SI), and degree of contact with non-co-national international students emerged as significant predictors of all three adaptation domains. Next, in order of variance explained, degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad, socio-emotional support, and pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK were also significant predictors of all three domains. For English language ability (ELA), the findings were more nuanced. ELA measured at T1 showed predictive validity for academic and psychological adaptation but not for sociocultural adaptation, while ELA measured at T2 was predictive of all three adaptation domains. Overall, analyses showed that ELA was a better predictor when measured at exit-point as opposed to when measured at entry-point. Finally, prior overseas

experience had a positive effect on academic achievement – it seems that students who had previously dealt with the challenges of cross-cultural transition were better able to adjust to the demands of their degree programme (Melnick et al., 2011).

Based on these findings it is possible to draw a tentative portrait of potentially successful student sojourners. Firstly, these students feel ready for study abroad. They independently make the decision to embark on a sojourn abroad because it is important to them – external factors such as peer or familial pressure do not influence their decision. Before leaving their home countries, they spend some time learning about the host country in order to prepare for their time abroad. Secondly, these students are proficient in the host language or the language of instruction. Thirdly, they are proactive and emotionally stable individuals who have the ability to empathise with other cultural groups. Fourthly, they interact with a multiplicity of nationalities in the new environment and establish a network of close non-co-national friends on whom they can rely for socio-emotional support.

9.2.2 Research questions 4 to 6

Research questions 4 to 6 followed a monitoring aim (Chapter 2). Here, the research interest was in the dynamics of students' academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment trajectories over time. Analyses showed that all three trajectories followed an ascending curve with academic, psychological and sociocultural difficulties greatest in the early sojourn stages, followed by a subsequent increase in adjustment. Despite this similarity, the three trajectories also showed some distinct patterns. While academic adjustment seemed to follow a steady upward curve (Chapter 5), reflecting the development of 'academic cultural competence' (Brown, 2008) over time, the psychological adjustment curve was more variable (Chapter 6), reflecting drops in student wellbeing during busy assessment periods and pointing to a close connection between academic stress and student wellbeing (Ward et al., 2001). The sociocultural adjustment trajectory (Chapter 7) was similar to Ward et al.'s (ibid.) conceptualisation in that it followed an ascending curve. However, some sociocultural adjustment difficulties persisted over time, most especially difficulty in making British friends. While students did achieve sociocultural competence over time and were able to carry out daily tasks successfully (e.g. where to shop, how to use the transport system), interactions with British people beyond the purely instrumental remained challenging throughout (Chapter 8).

9.2.3 Research question 7

The aim of research question 7 was to understand whether and, if so, how an academic sojourn abroad impinges on student sojourners IC. Analyses of entry and exit MPQ-scores revealed significant changes in aspects of IC though perhaps not in the expected direction. Contrary to findings from the international high school and study exchange context (cf. Straffon, 2003; Engle and Engle, 2004; Jackson, 2010), participants' IC was *not* found to improve over time. After nine months of study in the UK, mean scores for cultural empathy and open mindedness had dropped significantly whereas the mean score for emotional stability showed a marginally significant increase (Chapter 4). It is difficult to draw definite conclusions from these findings, but they do provide some indication for the malleability and dynamic nature of IC (Fantini, 2005). Future research could very usefully employ the MPQ at multiple points in time to monitor the dynamics of IC during an extended stay abroad – international undergraduate or doctoral students would provide a much needed longer-term timeframe for this type of research.

Interestingly, and contrary to the quantitative findings, the interview data provided evidence for a 'qualitative transformation' (Kim, 2001) over time. Exposure to a multinational study setting and frequent intercultural interactions seemed to induce a great deal of reflexivity in the students, challenging fixed ways of thinking, and ultimately leading to an evolution in personal and intercultural outlooks. These findings have important practical implications for the orientation and training offered to international students (9.4).

9.3 A Model of Student Sojourner Adjustment and Adaptation

In response to the paucity of theoretical models of cross-cultural transition in higher education (Chapter 2), the conceptual aim of this project was to develop a conceptual model of adjustment and adaptation specific to the international student context. The suggested model is presented in Figure 9.1 below. It shows some similarities with other models in the sojourner adjustment literature, but it also refines and extends these models in scope.

Firstly, the notion of cross-cultural transition has been unpacked to make it more suitable for empirical testing. In this process, constructs which are often used interchangeably in the sojourner adjustment literature were refined – this model is the first to make a clear distinction between 'adjustment' as a process that can be monitored over time, and 'adaptation' as the measurable outcome of this process (see 1.3.2). This is an important distinction conceptually and empirically as it allows for predictive and monitoring approaches

in empirical testing, combining qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry.

Secondly, the model extends that of Ward et al. (2001) in aiming to gauge a range of adjustment outcome indices beyond the purely psycho-social. Ward et al.'s (ibid) conceptual distinction between psychological and sociocultural adjustment has been expanded in this model by including a third adjustment domain which is of high salience to student sojourners – academic adjustment. Unusually, the model includes a fine-grained conceptualisation of academic achievement (i.e. taught and research-based performance, detailed in section 3.4.7) as indices for the degree of success in academic adjustment (cf. Young et al., 2013). Moreover, the study has shown that academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment processes are very much intertwined and are not easily separable (see 5.4.8). Significant associations were found between academic achievement, satisfaction with life and sociocultural adaptation. This indicates that students' academic adjustment should not be considered in isolation from the psychological and social aspects of an international student sojourn (Zhou and Todman, 2009). It may well be that higher academic achievement results in higher satisfaction with life, or vice versa. It also seems plausible that students who adjust well to the new sociocultural environment will perform better academically (cf. Melnick et al., 2011), not least because the new 'academic culture' might well be seen as forming part of the broader sociocultural environment (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). Likewise, better academic performance may result in increased feelings of sociocultural competence therefore impacting positively on sociocultural adaptation. Thus, the three adjustment domains are portrayed as overlapping processes in the conceptual model below (Figure 9.1).

Thirdly, the model incorporates a range of contributory factors as predictors of adjustment outcomes. It distinguishes between 'pre-sojourn' factors, including students' 'readiness' for study abroad, and factors that develop during the sojourn such as social contacts and social support (Berry, 2006). The study has shown that Kim's (2001) concept of 'preparedness for change' is highly relevant for the study of student sojourner adjustment – the extent to which students were 'ready' for study abroad ultimately impinged on their adaptation potential. Moreover, the degree of social connectedness in the host country was found to be crucial for students' overall adaptation and their own sense of wellbeing (Chapter 8).

Fourthly, the model recognises the complementarity of culture-learning and stress and coping frameworks, and proposes that they are both equally relevant for the study of student sojourners' academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment. The study has shown a

close link between students' adjustment and culture-learning. More specifically, the validity of the culture-learning and social skills framework (Furnham and Bochner, 1982) was reflected in the association between development of academic and sociocultural competence and an increase in academic, psychological and sociocultural adjustment. However, it is worthwhile mentioning that the notion of acquiring culture-specific skills and knowledge as originally conceptualised in the culture-learning approach (Furnham & Bochner, 1986) might take an overly narrow view of both acquisition and, most especially, of 'culture' (Chapter 7). Nonetheless, it provides a useful gateway for the study of student sojourner adjustment, most especially academic adjustment. It seems that accommodation to the norms and practices of the host university was the only viable tactic for the students to achieve academic success (Chapter 5). Thus, it seems appropriate to advocate culture-learning in the context of pre-departure preparation for students (9.4).

Stress coping approaches were needed to deal with acculturative stress (Berry, 2006) induced by a loss of familiar social support structures and the academic demands of the degree programme. Most importantly, culture-learning seemed to constitute an important coping strategy for the students – learning the characteristics of the host environment led to increased confidence among the students and impacted positively on their own sense of psychological wellbeing (Chapter 6). Thus, the suggested model recognises the complementarity of culture-learning and stress coping frameworks, and their equally important role in student sojourners' cross-cultural adjustment.

In sum, it is important to acknowledge that this model was developed as part of a study on medium-length sojourners (i.e. those undertaking one-year taught PG degrees). However, it will hopefully also find applicability in the study of more short-term (i.e. exchange students) and longer-term (i.e. international undergraduate or doctoral students) student sojourner groups, although it is acknowledged that students' experiences might differ considerably (Pitts, 2005).

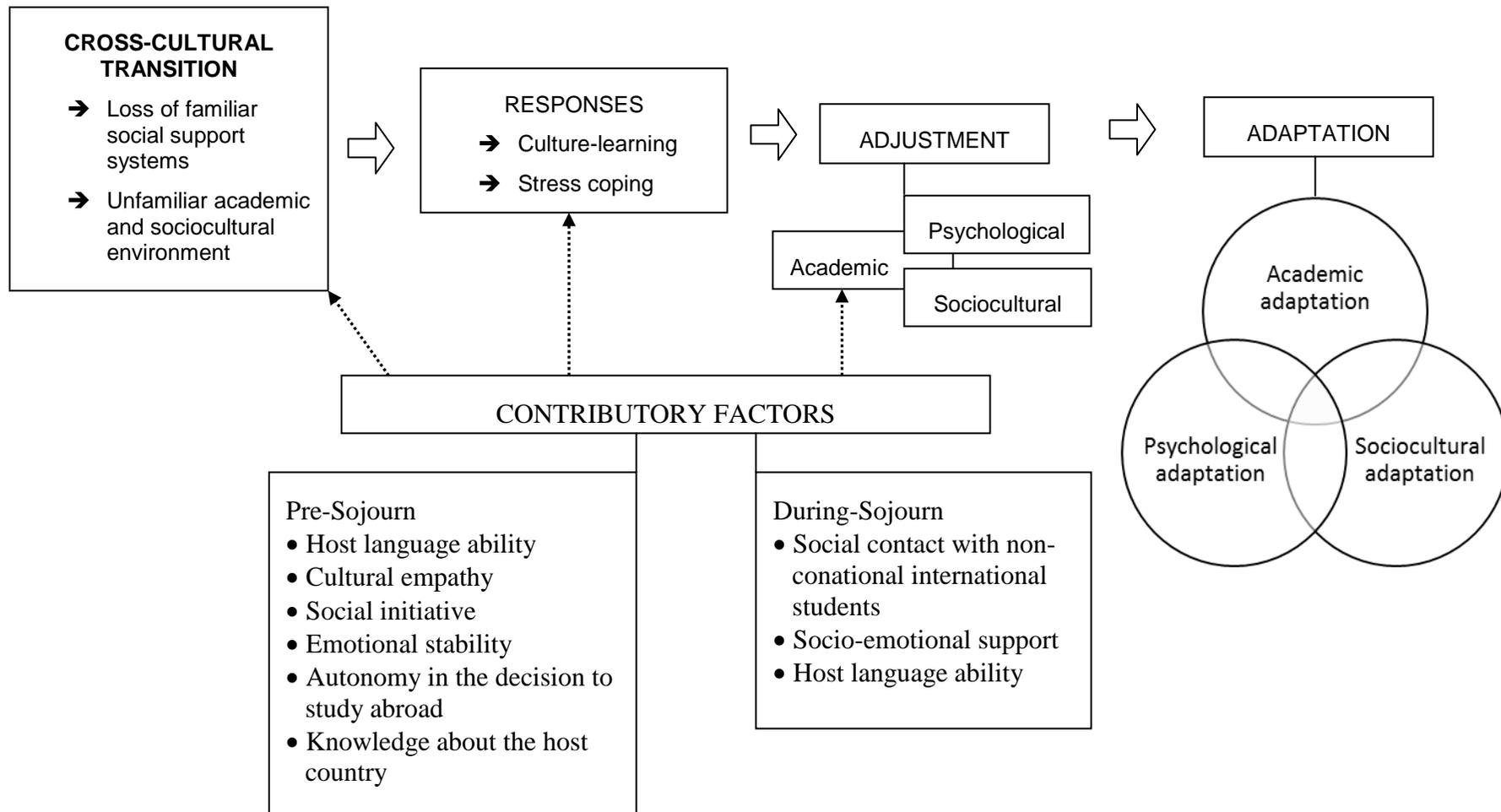


Figure 9.1 A Model of Student Sojourner Adjustment and Adaptation

9.4 What Host Institutions Can Do

The findings from this study suggest that students' 'readiness' (Kim, 2001) for study abroad and their degree of social connectedness in the host environment influence the extent to which they experience a successful sojourn. This has important implications for the training and support offered to international students by their host universities. Although student sojourners are generally seen as an active and highly motivated sojourner group (Russell et al., 2010) and have been portrayed in the literature as strategic agents of their own adjustment process (Montgomery, 2010), host university support is needed and can aid the students in their adjustment and enhance their learning experience (Trice and Yoo, 2007). Ramsay et al. (2007) point out that university support is generally strategically focused on the early sojourn period. While this seems to be a time of particular stress and nervousness (see Chapter 5), a combination of early pre-departure orientation and ongoing long-term support seems most desirable as detailed below.

9.4.1 Intercultural training

The importance of IC for student sojourners' adjustment has implications for the orientation and training offered to international students, and calls for the provision of intercultural training, either pre-arrival or as part of the sojourn. Intercultural training is widely used in the preparation of expatriate business personnel (Bennett, Aston and Colquhoun, 2000), but thus far remains a neglected feature in the pre-departure training of student sojourners, if this is offered at all. Pre-arrival preparation tends to be confined to purely linguistic preparation for language tests such as IELTS or TOEFL to fulfil the host universities' language entrance requirements (Gu et al., 2010; Young et al., 2013). However, as findings from this study have shown, host language ability is not the sole determinant for students' cross-cultural adaptation. Given the inextricable relationship between language and culture (Saville-Troike 1989; Kramsch 1998), training aimed at developing IC could very usefully be incorporated into pre-sojourn language preparation (Byram and Feng, 2004) or, alternatively, host universities could offer reflective in-session intercultural training. This could be offered as part of induction week or could be incorporated into existing support structures provided to incoming students. The 'multicultural campus' (Valverde and Castenell, 1998) would certainly provide a fruitful setting for applied intercultural training techniques such as critical instances, case studies and role playing (Fowler and Blohm, 2004).

It must be noted though that the 'trainability' of some IC dimensions may be limited and there is no clear consensus in the literature as to which competencies can be acquired or improved through training (Kealey, 1996; Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999). It might be that dimensions such as social

initiative and cultural empathy may be more trainable than for example emotional stability which is widely seen as a more stable personality trait (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997). In the future, the MPQ could very usefully be used as a diagnostic tool to establish the training needs of international students (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee, 2000). Results from this study suggest that not all dimensions of IC are equally essential for cross-cultural adaptation – cultural empathy, social initiative and emotional stability seem to be especially vital. This is an important finding that needs to be disseminated as host institutions and training providers would benefit from a framework which allows them to determine which competencies will be most effective in aiding student sojourners' adjustment (Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999).

As part of intercultural training, host institutions in the UK and elsewhere should also contemplate the benefits of community placement schemes for their international students. As Byram and Feng (2004) state, “culture learning needs to be experiential” (p. 152), thus placements with local organisations such as charities or neighbourhood associations could facilitate the development of IC through experiential learning, and would additionally facilitate meaningful engagement with the host society, which was so desired by the students in this study and others (cf. Wright and Schartner, 2013; Young et al., 2013). The centrality of experience in the development of IC is also emphasised by Deardorff (2006) who points to the importance of involvement in a process of exposure through which student sojourners not only learn factual information about the new environment and improve their language, but also become more flexible, open minded and empathetic to other cultures in general. Host universities could very usefully offer accredited community-based learning as part of their degree programmes or at least encourage community placements as an extra-curricular activity. This would also help to enhance relationships between the university and the local community by ‘internationalising’ the local community while at the same time ‘localising’ the international community (Green and Finn, 2010).

9.4.2 English language support

The study has shown that English language ability (ELA) played a crucial role in students' adjustment and emerged as a significant predictor of all three adaptation domains, although the relationship between ELA and adaptation might be more nuanced than previously suggested. The finding that ELA measured at exit-point was a stronger contributory factor than ELA measured at entry-point could be an indication that self-concept of language ability is best measured at a mid-point in the sojourn or indeed at exit-point when students are able to relate their ability to the experience of studying and living abroad.

Overall, the findings indicate that language support should be further strengthened but this should be less standardised than preparation for the IELTS or TOEFL tests. A sufficiently high score on a standardised pre-programme language test does not necessarily equate to confidence in using the language once students have entered the host environment (Takahashi, 2009). Thus, student sojourners would certainly benefit from more applied communicative pre-sojourn language training, including exposure to local varieties of English and informal language (Lewthwaite, 1996). Most especially, host institutions should consider the linguistic merits of homestays with local families as part of their ongoing language support.

Moreover, it is doubtful whether passing a TOEFL or IELTS test will necessarily guarantee that students will perform well academically (Melnick et al., 2011). The interview findings have shown that although students fulfilled the English language requirements of their host university, language ability and its impact on academic performance was a key concern for the students. This shows that it is the “specialised nature of academic discourse” (Schmitt, 2005: 65) rather than general English language ability that causes problems for international students. Although English language centres (e.g. INTO) at many universities aim to provide “contextual study skills that acclimatise you to the culture of a UK university” (INTO, 2013), it is doubtful whether these courses are specific enough to prepare students adequately for the demands of their chosen programme of study. Course-specific terminology and academic language might differ quite considerably across disciplines and departments within the ‘culture of a UK university’ (Scudamore, 2013). Thus, academic language support is probably most usefully provided at course-level and, in light of international student recruitment, should be offered at the host department as part of an ‘after-sales service’ (Addison and Cownie, 1992). Other language support services often either involve additional costs⁴¹ for the students or are too generic and thus of limited use to students on their degree programmes.

9.4.3 Knowledge (in-action) training

Pre-sojourn knowledge about the UK was predictive of all three adaptation domains and although the effect was moderate, this provides some indication for the importance of pre-departure orientation and preparation. Factual knowledge about the host country’s history, politics, institutions and social conditions (Bird et al., 1993) could very easily be integrated into orientation offered to international students prior to departure from home in the form of a course-specific pre-arrival website and/or as part of induction week at the host university, and should most

⁴¹ A six-week pre-session course at INTO Newcastle currently costs £2,370, excluding accommodation (INTO, 2013)

appropriately be specific to the immediate host environment (i.e. the host university and host city). This type of knowledge can help prospective student sojourners to establish realistic expectations about the host environment (Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1999) and can provide them with factual information necessary to successfully carry out daily tasks. Moreover, information is key for facilitating adjustment to new learning and teaching approaches at the host university. This is all the more vital for student sojourners on one-year degree programmes as they are confronted with an evaluation of their academic adjustment, in the form of assessed assignments, very early on (Brown, 2008a). It is important that host universities are explicit in their communication with international students (Carroll, 2005), pre-arrival and during induction week, and expectation-management (QAA, 2012) is crucial. For example, concepts such as 'independent learning' and 'criticality' are highly ambiguous and can mean "different things to different people" (Scudamore, 2013). Thus, these concepts should be explored and unpacked for student sojourners so that they know what is required of them on their degree programme. Training needs can be easily identified in the form of an internet-based or paper-and-pencil knowledge test (Heneman, Heneman, and Judge, 1997).

However, it is important to note that merely providing students with factual information might be inefficient as presenting 'facts' about the host environment could lead to cultural stereotyping and might not represent an accurate picture of the host society (Louie, 2005). There is also a danger that specific cultural expectations and behaviours could be imposed on student sojourners (Turner, 2006). Thus, a less ethnocentric approach through more generic cultural training programmes encouraging cultural empathy and open mindedness among students prior to their arrival could be more useful. Deardorff (2006) believes that it is through a widening of perspective that students engage in cultural learning, rather than through a mere assumption and transmission of 'facts' and behavioural conventions. However, that is not to say that certain factual, practical information about the immediate host surroundings (i.e. where to eat, how to use the transport system) cannot be helpful to student sojourners, but it is important that content knowledge is transformed into 'knowledge in action' (Etherington and Spurling, 2007). In other words, factual knowledge alone might not be sufficient for successful adjustment – some researchers suggest that if one lacks experience in applying existing knowledge, considerable anxiety may result (e.g. Black and Mendenhall, 1990). Host universities should therefore go beyond handbooks and leaflets, and offer knowledge in-action training where incoming students can practice their newly acquired knowledge in structured and 'safe' environments. Examples may include guided shopping-tours of local supermarkets or organised journeys on the public transport system.

9.4.4 The motivational variable

The finding that degree of autonomy in the decision to study abroad was a significant contributory factor for all three adaptation domains points to the importance of motivational variables in student sojourners' adjustment. It seems plausible that students who fully endorse their decision to study abroad will be more proactive socially and will work harder academically than those who feel they were pushed to study abroad by external factors (Chirkov et al., 2007). This contributes to our understanding of why some international students adapt better to the host environment than others (Ryan and Twibell, 2000), and can assist host institutions in providing tailored support services to those students who are studying abroad not because of their own choosing but due to external factors such as parental pressure. Institutional interventions may be necessary to enhance the adaptation potential and experiences of these students. There are indications in prior research that international students from East Asian countries might be particularly susceptible to external pressure in their decision to study abroad (Bodycott and Lai, 2012) thus future research could explore differences in the degree of self-determined motivation between student sojourners from different countries.

9.4.5 Social connectedness

The importance of camaraderie in student sojourners' adjustment experience was obvious in the interview data. Moreover, degree of social contact was a major contributory factor for all three adaptation domains. The study uncovered three identifiable types of social ties and this thesis devoted a whole chapter to these social networks (Chapter 8). What stands out from the findings is (1) the crucial role of contact with non-co-national international students which emerged as a significant predictor across the adaptation domains, and (2) a persistent lack of host national contact. In light of these findings, links among student sojourners (i.e. 'international ties') should be actively fostered by host institutions by encouraging peer interaction in the classroom through, for example, group activities in mixed-nationality teams. Outside the formal classroom setting, interaction among student sojourners could be encouraged by setting up more informal multicultural reading groups or, for oral assessment, practice sessions for group presentations. Postgraduate teaching assistants could very usefully contribute to these activities as tutors or teaching assistants. The dearth of host contact might be more difficult to tackle on degree programmes with an already low number of domestic students, as tends to be the case on UK taught PG degrees (see 1.2.2). Nonetheless, there are some strategies that host universities could more actively pursue, including expanding 'buddy-schemes' from the campus to the wider local community, and encouraging home

students more aggressively to interact with their international peers. The latter is especially important in light of discussion surrounding the ‘internationalisation’ of HE where inter- or cross-cultural communication competence is increasingly seen as an objective for all students, whether they are ‘international’ or not (Sanderson, 2008; Stier, 2006). This warrants research into the perceptions and attitudes of domestic students and the wider local community toward growing international student numbers and the internationalisation of HE (Brown, 2009b). Only if the perceptions of members of the host society are fully understood can host institutions offer an effective impetus for interactions between the hosts and the student sojourners.

9.4.6 Social support

Closely related to social contact, socio-emotional support emerged as a significant predictor of all three adaptation domains and there were strong indications in the interview data of the importance, to students’ own sense of adjustment, of the social support derived from interaction with peers who were also going through the sojourn. Challenges associated with study abroad such as lack of language confidence and homesickness were moderated in supportive mixed-nationality groups, mainly through a sense of a collective group-solidarity based on shared experiences. It seems that close links with fellow international students temporarily replaced the familiar support systems that students had left behind in their home countries, a finding also reported in previous research on student sojourners (e.g. Montgomery and McDowell, 2009; Moores and Popadiuk, 2011).

Nonetheless, emotional compatriot support, in the host country and via telephone and internet with family members, should also be recognised (Lewthwaite, 1996). There were indications in the interview data that co-national contact in the UK fulfilled a particularly important support function in the initial sojourn stage in terms of mitigating loneliness and homesickness by sharing a common language and cultural characteristics (Chapter 8). Moreover, it seems that links to home and family can function as an important source of emotional support to student sojourners (Rosenthal et al., 2006), and the interview findings suggest that students generally had strong connections with ‘home’ throughout the sojourn. Future research could very usefully explore the impact of online communication technology (e.g. Skype, Facebook) on student sojourners’ adjustment, and the role of virtual ‘e-ties’ (Coleman and Chafer, 2011). In light of the importance of socio-emotional support for student sojourners’ adjustment, there is also a need to make counselling services more sympathetic to international students’ adjustment issues and provide intercultural training for wellbeing-advisers and counsellors (Arthur, 2004). In the academic domain, access to responsive and culturally-aware tutors is equally desirable (Young et al., 2013). Thus, intercultural training should be offered to academic and administrative staff with the aim of offering practical

strategies for working with a diverse student population.

9.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

There are several limitations to this study which open a number of interesting possible directions for future research. Firstly, this study focused on a very specific group of student sojourners, namely those undertaking one-year taught PGT degrees in the humanities and social sciences. All students in this study had previously obtained at least an undergraduate degree and many had previous work and/or overseas experience. Consequently, they were likely to be older and potentially more autonomous in their decision to study abroad than international undergraduate students. Future research could therefore very usefully compare the adjustment and adaptation of different student sojourner groups (i.e. international PGT students vs. international undergraduate students vs. international exchange students vs. international doctoral students). A comparison of this kind would be worthwhile as the nature of the academic sojourn might well impact upon contributory factors and outcome indicators (Young et al., 2013). Moreover, this study was limited to two cohorts of students studying Cross-cultural Communication, and Applied Linguistics and TESOL. It might be fruitful to investigate the adjustment and adaptation of international PGT students in other subject areas to see whether the suggested conceptual model fits other disciplines.

Secondly, this study was conducted in the UK and it might be difficult to generalise beyond this context as host-country specific aspects such as the climate and attitudes of the host society might impact on student sojourners' adjustment and adaptation (Ward et al., 2001). While a comparison across locations was beyond the scope of the present study, future research could very usefully pursue comparative studies of international students in different host countries. Additionally, it might be worthwhile for researchers to consider the internationalisation agenda of the specific host university when researching adjustment and adaptation. Most acculturative stress for the students in this study was caused by academic demands, indicating a great necessity to accommodate academic cultural diversity into British HE (Brown, 2008a). Many host universities now have a commitment to 'internationalisation at home' (e.g. Newcastle University, 2012), defined as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (Knight, 2003: 2). However, in reality the learning and teaching environments at many host institutions still tend to place the responsibility for adjustment on the student sojourner who is often viewed as in some way deficient and is expected to adjust to the educational philosophy of the host environment (Forland, 2006).

Thirdly, it is important to remember that the adjustment difficulties experienced by student sojourners are likely to vary depending on their demographic background (Ward et al., 2001).

While cross-gender or cross-nationality comparisons were not the focus of the present study, future research could very usefully compare the adjustment experience and adaptation across genders and nationalities.

Fourthly, international students' acculturation strategies (Berry, 2006) are another factor that may be at work in their adjustment and adaptation. While there is ample research on the impact of acculturation strategies on the adaptation of long-term immigrants (Berry, 1997), future research could investigate this relationship in the international student context.

Fifthly, an investigation of inter-correlations between the contributory factors was beyond the scope of the present study. However, some of the contributory factors might well be employed as outcome variables. Future studies could for example explore interrelationships between, for example, IC and social contact patterns.

Sixthly, longitudinal measures of adaptation indicators, for example wellbeing measures or sociocultural adaptation, could very usefully be taken at different time stages throughout the academic sojourn to track possible changes in these outcome indices over time and monitor possible time-of-year-effects.

Finally, contrary to the notion of early 'honeymoon' euphoria (Oberg, 1960) this study found evidence of anxiety and nervousness in the initial sojourn stages. Future research could undertake in-depth investigations of the 'pre-arrival' stage and the first few weeks in the host environment in order to understand the full trajectory of the 'international student experience'.

9.6 Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude this thesis with the following quote by one of my interviewees. It encapsulates and echoes the experience of most of the students who participated in this study, and illustrates that although cross-cultural transition in HE may involve challenges and adjustment difficulties, it also induces a great deal of learning, personal growth and relationship-building:

I'm ready to go home but I feel like it's been a life changing experience, the whole time I've been here. I've definitely grown as a person, I've learned a lot, developed a lot of skills that I probably wouldn't have been able to develop if I didn't come, and I've made a lot of friends and good lifetime contacts. It's really interesting about people you study abroad with because [...] when you live in another culture together, that's like a lifetime bond. (Robin, T3)

I hope that this doctoral thesis has made a small contribution to our understanding of how student sojourners experience cross-cultural transition, and what the outcomes of these processes may be. In light of increased efforts for 'internationalisation at home' I also hope that the findings from this project will be helpful resources for the development of curricula designed specifically for

international students. If British HE is to become truly 'internationalised', then it is vital that policy makers and host universities shift their focus from marketing strategies and international student recruitment to engaging with their international student population on a deeper-level. This involves not only providing tailored support-services but also acknowledging that this student group brings an immense cultural richness to the classrooms, campuses and communities across the UK. Perhaps it is time for British universities to 'adjust' to their international students rather than the other way round.

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Appendix A: T1 Survey

Project Information

The aim of this project is to explore the adjustment process and experiences of international students at Newcastle University. This questionnaire includes questions about yourself, your motivations and reasons for your stay abroad, as well as your overall wellbeing. There are 124 short questions. The survey usually takes about 15-20 minutes to complete. Before you start, please read and sign the following consent form.

Consent Form

- ✓ I have been informed about the purpose of this study and I have understood the information given to me.
- ✓ I voluntarily agree to participate in this project.
- ✓ I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.
- ✓ I understand that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and any personal details which would reveal my identity will not be published.
- ✓ I understand that the results of this questionnaire will be used as part of a PhD-thesis at Newcastle University as well as for subsequent publications in academic journals and presentations at academic conferences.
- ✓ I understand that as part of this study the researcher will gain access to my academic grades and that this information will also be treated in the strictest confidence.
- ✓ I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the total confidentiality of the data.
- ✓

Full Name

Date

Researcher Contact: alina.schartner@ncl.ac.uk

Thank you for your participation!

Part 1: To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

(Please mark the answer that is most applicable to you)

I am the kind of person who...

	totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
1 Likes low-comfort holidays	1	2	3	4	5
2 Takes initiative	1	2	3	4	5
3 Is nervous	1	2	3	4	5
4 Makes contacts easily	1	2	3	4	5
5 Is not easily hurt	1	2	3	4	5
6 Is troubled by conflicts with others	1	2	3	4	5
7 Finds it difficult to make contacts	1	2	3	4	5
8 Understands other people's feelings	1	2	3	4	5
9 Keeps to the background	1	2	3	4	5
10 Is interested in other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
11 Avoids adventure	1	2	3	4	5
12 Changes easily from one activity to another	1	2	3	4	5
13 Is fascinated by other people's opinions	1	2	3	4	5
14 Tries to understand other people's behavior	1	2	3	4	5
15 Is afraid to fail	1	2	3	4	5
16 Avoids surprises	1	2	3	4	5
17 Takes other people's habits into consideration	1	2	3	4	5
18 Is inclined to speak out	1	2	3	4	5
19 Likes to work on his/her own	1	2	3	4	5
20 Is looking for new ways to attain his/ her goal	1	2	3	4	5
21 Dislikes travelling	1	2	3	4	5
22 Wants to know exactly what will happen	1	2	3	4	5
23 Remains calm in misfortune	1	2	3	4	5
24 Waits for others to initiate contacts	1	2	3	4	5
25 Takes the lead	1	2	3	4	5
26 Is a slow starter	1	2	3	4	5
27 Is curious	1	2	3	4	5

Continue on the next page...

		totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely completely applicable	completely applicable
28	Takes it for granted that things will turn out right	1	2	3	4	5
29	Is always busy	1	2	3	4	5
30	Is easy-going in groups	1	2	3	4	5
31	Finds it hard to empathize with others	1	2	3	4	5
32	Functions best in a familiar setting	1	2	3	4	5
33	Radiates calm	1	2	3	4	5
34	Easily approaches other people	1	2	3	4	5
35	Finds other religions interesting	1	2	3	4	5
36	Considers problems solvable	1	2	3	4	5
37	Works mostly according to a strict scheme	1	2	3	4	5
38	Is timid	1	2	3	4	5
39	Knows how to act in social settings	1	2	3	4	5
40	Likes to speak in public	1	2	3	4	5
41	Tends to wait and see	1	2	3	4	5
42	Feels uncomfortable in a different culture	1	2	3	4	5
43	Works according to plan	1	2	3	4	5
44	Is under pressure	1	2	3	4	5
45	Sympathizes with others	1	2	3	4	5
46	Has problems assessing relationships	1	2	3	4	5
47	Likes action	1	2	3	4	5
48	Is often the driving force behind things	1	2	3	4	5
49	Leaves things as they are	1	2	3	4	5
50	Likes routine	1	2	3	4	5
51	Is attentive to facial expressions	1	2	3	4	5
52	Can put setbacks in perspective	1	2	3	4	5
53	Is sensitive to criticism	1	2	3	4	5
54	Tries out various approaches	1	2	3	4	5
55	Has ups and downs	1	2	3	4	5
56	Has fixed habits	1	2	3	4	5
57	Forgets setbacks easily	1	2	3	4	5
58	Is intrigued by differences	1	2	3	4	5
59	Starts a new life easily	1	2	3	4	5
60	Asks personal questions	1	2	3	4	5
61	Enjoys other people's stories	1	2	3	4	5
62	Gets involved in other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
63	Remembers what other people have told	1	2	3	4	5

		totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
64	Is able to voice other people's thoughts	1	2	3	4	5
65	Is self-confident	1	2	3	4	5
66	Has a feeling for what is appropriate in another culture	1	2	3	4	5
67	Gets upset easily	1	2	3	4	5
68	Is a good listener	1	2	3	4	5
69	Worries	1	2	3	4	5
70	Notices when someone is in trouble	1	2	3	4	5
71	Has good insight into human nature	1	2	3	4	5
72	Is apt to feel lonely	1	2	3	4	5
73	Seeks contact with people from different backgrounds	1	2	3	4	5
74	Has a broad range of interests	1	2	3	4	5
75	Is insecure	1	2	3	4	5
76	Has a solution for every problem	1	2	3	4	5
77	Puts his or her own culture in perspective	1	2	3	4	5
78	Is open to new ideas	1	2	3	4	5
79	Is fascinated by new technological developments	1	2	3	4	5
80	Senses when others get irritated	1	2	3	4	5
81	Likes to imagine solutions for problems	1	2	3	4	5
82	Sets others at ease	1	2	3	4	5
83	Works according to strict rules	1	2	3	4	5
84	Is a trendsetter	1	2	3	4	5
85	Needs change	1	2	3	4	5
86	Pays attention to the emotions of others	1	2	3	4	5
87	Reads a lot	1	2	3	4	5
88	Seeks challenges	1	2	3	4	5
89	Enjoys getting to know others deeply	1	2	3	4	5
90	Enjoys unfamiliar experiences	1	2	3	4	5
91	Looks for regularity in life	1	2	3	4	5

Continue on the next page...

Part 2: Living abroad & studying in the UK

There might have been different reasons why you were motivated to move to the UK to study and to live here for a certain period. Please indicate to what extent each of the following reasons applied to you. Some statements may seem very similar to each other but despite this please rate all of them.

I came to study abroad because...

		totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
92	I thought I would enjoy it	1	2	3	4	5
93	This is what I really want to do with my life	1	2	3	4	5
94	I wanted other people to approve of me	1	2	3	4	5
95	I thought it would be an exciting thing to do	1	2	3	4	5
96	It was one of my life goals	1	2	3	4	5
97	I would be criticized for not doing so	1	2	3	4	5
98	I would have gotten into trouble if I did not	1	2	3	4	5
99	I wanted to avoid the shame and guilt of not doing so	1	2	3	4	5
100	I expected to get respect and recognition from others for doing so	1	2	3	4	5
101	Others (relatives and friends) forced me to do this	1	2	3	4	5

Part 3: Satisfaction with life

(Please mark the answer that is most applicable to you)

		totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
102	In most ways my life is close to my ideal	1	2	3	4	5
103	The conditions of my life are excellent	1	2	3	4	5
104	I am satisfied with my life	1	2	3	4	5
105	So far I have gotten the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5
106	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5

Part 4: Psychological well-being

These questions are about how you feel and how things have been with you during the past 4 weeks. For each question, please give the one answer that comes closest to the way you have been feeling.

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
107 I have felt full of energy	1	2	3	4	5
108 I have been a very nervous person	1	2	3	4	5
109 I have felt depressed	1	2	3	4	5
110 I have felt calm and peaceful	1	2	3	4	5
111 I have had fun	1	2	3	4	5
112 I have felt tired	1	2	3	4	5
113 I have felt worn out	1	2	3	4	5
114 I have been a happy person	1	2	3	4	5
115 I have felt emotionally stable	1	2	3	4	5
116 I have felt like crying	1	2	3	4	5
117 I have been anxious and worried	1	2	3	4	5

Part 5: Some final questions

118 At this point, how satisfied are you with your ability to communicate in the English language? (please use the scale below to rate your satisfaction)

If English is your first language, please tick this box:

	not at all satisfied			very satisfied	
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5

119 Excluding holidays, how much time of your life have you spent living abroad? (please tick one)

- 0 – 5 months
- 6 – 11 months
- 1 – 2 years
- 3 – 5 years
- More than 5 years

120 Was the UK your first choice for this year abroad? Yes No

120a If no, please list the countries you would have preferred:

121 Have you received any pre-sessional English language training (e.g. INTO Newcastle) before you started your course? Yes No

122 Is this the first time you are studying in the UK? Yes No

122a **If no**, what kind of course(s) have you previously studied in the UK?

123 Have you ever lived in the UK for a purpose other than studying (e.g. work, au-pair)?

Yes No

123a **If yes**, how long have you lived in the UK and what was the purpose of your stay?

124 How much did you know about the UK before coming here? (*use the scale to rate your knowledge*)

very little knowledge

a lot of knowledge

1

2

3

4

5

Part 6: Personal details (**will not be published*)

Please provide your personal details here. They will be needed for statistical purposes. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications. If you feel uncomfortable providing your name, please state your student number only.

- Name*:
- Student number*:
- Age:
- Gender: Female Male
- Programme of study:
- Country of origin:
- First/native language(s):
- Month & Year of arrival in the UK:

Are there any other comments you would like to make about yourself and your year in the UK?

Please feel free to write as much as you like below:

That is the end of the survey. Thanks again for your help!

Appendix B: T2 Survey

PhD Project Information

The aim of this PhD project is to explore the experiences of international students in the UK. You have previously participated in a survey in October last year. This is a follow-up questionnaire about your year in the UK. The survey usually takes about 20 minutes to complete. Before you start, please read and sign the following consent form.

Consent Form

- ✓ I have been informed about the purpose of this study and I have understood the information given to me.
- ✓ I voluntarily agree to participate in this project.
- ✓ I understand that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and any personal details which would reveal my identity will not be published.
- ✓ I understand that the results of this questionnaire will be used as part of a PhD-thesis at Newcastle University as well as for subsequent publications in academic journals and presentations at academic conferences.
- ✓ I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the total confidentiality of the data.

Name or Student Number

(will not be published)

Date

Researcher: Alina Schartner (alina.schartner@ncl.ac.uk)

Thank you very much for your participation!

Please start the questionnaire on the next page...

Part 1: Social Situations

Thinking of your time in the UK, please indicate how much difficulty you experienced overall in each of these areas:

	no difficulty	slight difficulty	moderate difficulty	great difficulty	extreme difficulty
1 Making British friends	1	2	3	4	5
2 Making friends with other international students	1	2	3	4	5
3 Making friends with people from your own country	1	2	3	4	5
4 Meeting people from the local community	1	2	3	4	5
5 Finding food that you enjoy	1	2	3	4	5
6 Going into restaurants or cafes	1	2	3	4	5
7 Going into pubs or bars	1	2	3	4	5
8 Being introduced to new people	1	2	3	4	5
9 Getting to know people in depth	1	2	3	4	5
10 Seeing a doctor	1	2	3	4	5
11 Following rules and regulations	1	2	3	4	5
12 Dealing with people in authority	1	2	3	4	5
13 Using the transport system	1	2	3	4	5
14 Dealing with bureaucracy	1	2	3	4	5
15 Understanding the UK value system	1	2	3	4	5
16 Making yourself understood	1	2	3	4	5
17 Seeing things from a British person's point of view	1	2	3	4	5
18 Going shopping	1	2	3	4	5
19 Dealing with someone who is unpleasant	1	2	3	4	5
20 Understanding jokes and humour	1	2	3	4	5
21 Adapting to accommodation	1	2	3	4	5
22 Going to social gatherings	1	2	3	4	5
23 Dealing with people staring at you	1	2	3	4	5
24 Communicating with people from a different culture	1	2	3	4	5
25 Understanding cultural differences	1	2	3	4	5
26 Dealing with unsatisfactory service	1	2	3	4	5
27 Worshipping (church, temple, mosque)	1	2	3	4	5
28 Relating to members of the opposite sex	1	2	3	4	5
29 Finding your way around	1	2	3	4	5

Please continue on the next page...

		no difficulty	slight difficulty	moderate difficulty	great difficulty	extreme difficulty
30	Understanding the UK political system	1	2	3	4	5
31	Talking about yourself with others	1	2	3	4	5
32	Dealing with the climate	1	2	3	4	5
33	Understanding the UK's world view	1	2	3	4	5
34	Getting used to the pace of life	1	2	3	4	5
35	Being able to see two sides of an intercultural issue	1	2	3	4	5
36	Understanding the local accent	1	2	3	4	5
37	Living away from family members	1	2	3	4	5

Part 2: Social Support

The statements below relate to certain helpful behaviours that might make your stay in the UK easier or more pleasant. Read each description carefully and indicate how often people you interacted with in the UK performed these behaviours towards you.

		almost never	very occasionally	occasionally	very often	often
1	Listen and talk with you whenever you feel down	1	2	3	4	5
2	Help you with language or communication problems	1	2	3	4	5
3	Explain things to make your situation clearer	1	2	3	4	5
4	Spend some quiet time with you	1	2	3	4	5
5	Help you understand the local culture and language	1	2	3	4	5
6	Share your good times and bad times	1	2	3	4	5
7	Help you deal with local institutions and rules	1	2	3	4	5
8	Accompany you somewhere	1	2	3	4	5
9	Provide necessary information to help orient yourself	1	2	3	4	5
10	Comfort you when you feel homesick	1	2	3	4	5
11	Help you interpret things that you don't understand	1	2	3	4	5
12	Tell you what can and cannot be done in the UK	1	2	3	4	5
13	Visit you to see how you are doing	1	2	3	4	5
14	Tell you about available choices and options	1	2	3	4	5
15	Spend time chatting with you	1	2	3	4	5
16	Reassure you that you are supported and cared for	1	2	3	4	5
17	Show you how to do something that you didn't know	1	2	3	4	5

Please continue on the next page...

Part 3: Academic Life

Thinking of your current MA degree, please indicate how much difficulty you experienced overall in each of these areas:

	no difficulty	slight difficulty	moderate difficulty	great difficulty	extreme difficulty
1 Studying in English	1	2	3	4	5
2 Understanding what is required of you	1	2	3	4	5
3 Dealing with academic staff (e.g. lecturers)	1	2	3	4	5
4 Dealing with administrative staff (e.g. secretaries)	1	2	3	4	5
5 Expressing your ideas in class	1	2	3	4	5
6 Working in groups	1	2	3	4	5
7 Writing academic essays	1	2	3	4	5
8 Referencing and citations	1	2	3	4	5
9 Reading academic texts	1	2	3	4	5

10 *From the feedback you received so far, how satisfied are you with your academic performance?*

	not at all satisfied	hardly satisfied	moderately satisfied	very satisfied	extremely satisfied
Written assignments	1	2	3	4	5
Presentations	1	2	3	4	5

Part 4: Social Contact

Please indicate the degree of overall contact you had with each of the following groups in the UK?

	almost never	very occasionally	occasionally	often	very often
1 British students	1	2	3	4	5
2 Students from your own country	1	2	3	4	5
3 Other international students	1	2	3	4	5
4 British people outside of university (non-students)	1	2	3	4	5

Part 5: Satisfaction with life

Please circle the answer that is most applicable to you.

		totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
1	In most ways my life is close to my ideal	1	2	3	4	5
2	The conditions of my life are excellent	1	2	3	4	5
3	I am satisfied with my life	1	2	3	4	5
4	So far I have gotten the important things I want in life	1	2	3	4	5
5	If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	1	2	3	4	5

Part 6: Psychological well-being

These questions are about how you feel and how things have been with you during the past 4 weeks. For each question, please give the one answer that comes closest to the way you have been feeling.

		None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
1	I have felt full of energy	1	2	3	4	5
2	I have been a very nervous person	1	2	3	4	5
3	I have felt depressed	1	2	3	4	5
4	I have felt calm and peaceful	1	2	3	4	5
5	I have had fun	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have felt tired	1	2	3	4	5
7	I have felt worn out	1	2	3	4	5
8	I have been a happy person	1	2	3	4	5
9	I have felt emotionally stable	1	2	3	4	5
10	I have felt like crying	1	2	3	4	5
11	I have been anxious and worried	1	2	3	4	5

Part 7: To what extent do the following statements apply to you?

(Please circle the answer that is most applicable to you)

	I am the kind of person who...	totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
1	Likes low-comfort holidays	1	2	3	4	5
2	Takes initiative	1	2	3	4	5

I am the kind of person who...		totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
3	Is nervous	1	2	3	4	5
4	Makes contacts easily	1	2	3	4	5
5	Is not easily hurt	1	2	3	4	5
6	Is troubled by conflicts with others	1	2	3	4	5
7	Finds it difficult to make contacts	1	2	3	4	5
8	Understands other people's feelings	1	2	3	4	5
9	Keeps to the background	1	2	3	4	5
10	Is interested in other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
11	Avoids adventure	1	2	3	4	5
12	Changes easily from one activity to another	1	2	3	4	5
13	Is fascinated by other people's opinions	1	2	3	4	5
14	Tries to understand other people's behavior	1	2	3	4	5
15	Is afraid to fail	1	2	3	4	5
16	Avoids surprises	1	2	3	4	5
17	Takes other people's habits into consideration	1	2	3	4	5
18	Is inclined to speak out	1	2	3	4	5
19	Likes to work on his/her own	1	2	3	4	5
20	Is looking for new ways to attain his/her goal	1	2	3	4	5
21	Dislikes travelling	1	2	3	4	5
22	Wants to know exactly what will happen	1	2	3	4	5
23	Remains calm in misfortune	1	2	3	4	5
24	Waits for others to initiate contacts	1	2	3	4	5
25	Takes the lead	1	2	3	4	5
26	Is a slow starter	1	2	3	4	5
27	Is curious	1	2	3	4	5
28	Takes it for granted that things will turn out right	1	2	3	4	5
29	Is always busy	1	2	3	4	5
30	Is easy-going in groups	1	2	3	4	5
31	Finds it hard to empathize with others	1	2	3	4	5
32	Functions best in a familiar setting	1	2	3	4	5
33	Radiates calm	1	2	3	4	5
34	Easily approaches other people	1	2	3	4	5
35	Finds other religions interesting	1	2	3	4	5
36	Considers problems solvable	1	2	3	4	5
37	Works mostly according to a strict scheme	1	2	3	4	5
38	Is timid	1	2	3	4	5
39	Knows how to act in social settings	1	2	3	4	5
40	Likes to speak in public	1	2	3	4	5

I am the kind of person who...		totally not applicable	hardly applicable	moderately applicable	largely applicable	completely applicable
41	Tends to wait and see	1	2	3	4	5
42	Feels uncomfortable in a different culture	1	2	3	4	5
43	Works according to plan	1	2	3	4	5
44	Is under pressure	1	2	3	4	5
45	Sympathizes with others	1	2	3	4	5
46	Has problems assessing relationships	1	2	3	4	5
47	Likes action	1	2	3	4	5
48	Is often the driving force behind things	1	2	3	4	5
49	Leaves things as they are	1	2	3	4	5
50	Likes routine	1	2	3	4	5
51	Is attentive to facial expressions	1	2	3	4	5
52	Can put setbacks in perspective	1	2	3	4	5
53	Is sensitive to criticism	1	2	3	4	5
54	Tries out various approaches	1	2	3	4	5
55	Has ups and downs	1	2	3	4	5
56	Has fixed habits	1	2	3	4	5
57	Forgets setbacks easily	1	2	3	4	5
58	Is intrigued by differences	1	2	3	4	5
59	Starts a new life easily	1	2	3	4	5
60	Asks personal questions	1	2	3	4	5
61	Enjoys other people's stories	1	2	3	4	5
62	Gets involved in other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
63	Remembers what other people have told	1	2	3	4	5
64	Is able to voice other people's thoughts	1	2	3	4	5
65	Is self-confident	1	2	3	4	5
66	Has a feeling for what is appropriate in another culture	1	2	3	4	5
67	Gets upset easily	1	2	3	4	5
68	Is a good listener	1	2	3	4	5
69	Worries	1	2	3	4	5
70	Notices when someone is in trouble	1	2	3	4	5
71	Has good insight into human nature	1	2	3	4	5
72	Is apt to feel lonely	1	2	3	4	5
73	Seeks contact with people from different backgrounds	1	2	3	4	5
74	Has a broad range of interests	1	2	3	4	5
75	Is insecure	1	2	3	4	5
76	Has a solution for every problem	1	2	3	4	5

I am the kind of person who...		totally not	hardly	moderately	largely	completely
		applicable	applicable	applicable	applicable	applicable
77	Puts his or her own culture in perspective	1	2	3	4	5
79	Is open to new ideas	1	2	3	4	5
79	Is fascinated by new technological developments	1	2	3	4	5
80	Senses when others get irritated	1	2	3	4	5
81	Likes to imagine solutions for problems	1	2	3	4	5
82	Sets others at ease	1	2	3	4	5
83	Works according to strict rules	1	2	3	4	5
84	Is a trendsetter	1	2	3	4	5
85	Needs change	1	2	3	4	5
86	Pays attention to the emotions of others	1	2	3	4	5
87	Reads a lot	1	2	3	4	5
88	Seeks challenges	1	2	3	4	5
89	Enjoys getting to know others deeply	1	2	3	4	5
90	Enjoys unfamiliar experiences	1	2	3	4	5
91	Looks for regularity in life	1	2	3	4	5

Part 8: Some final questions

1 On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your knowledge about the UK?

no	hardly any	moderate	good	a lot of
knowl.	knowl.	knowl.	knowl.	knowl.
1	2	3	4	5

2 Is English your first language? Yes No

Please continue on the next page...

If no, how satisfied are you with your ability to communicate in the English language? (please use the scale below to rate your satisfaction)

	not at all	hardly	moderately	very	extremely
	satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	satisfied
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5

3 Have you taken part in any extra-curricular activities during your stay in the UK? Yes No

If yes, please specify below (you may tick more than one box).

- Volunteering
- Sports clubs/gym
- Students Union Societies

- Church/mosque/temple
- Student representative
- Other _____

Part 9: Personal details (*will not be published*)

Please provide your personal details here. They will be needed for statistical purposes. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications. If you feel uncomfortable providing your name, please state your student number only.

- Full name:
- Student number:
- Age:
- Gender: Female Male
- Programme of study:
- Country of origin:
- First/native language(s):

Are there any other comments you would like to make about yourself and your year in the UK?

Appendix C: Interview Consent Form

I confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have been informed about the purpose of this study and I have understood the information given to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I voluntarily agree to participate in this project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand that all responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and any personal details which would reveal my identity will not be published.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	I understand that the results of this study will be used as part of a PhD-thesis at Newcastle University as well as for subsequent publications in academic journals and presentations at academic conferences.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the total confidentiality of the data.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	I, along with the researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant:

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Researcher:

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix D: Interview Guide T1 (October)

Pre-arrival

- Please tell me about your last few weeks in your home country and your journey to the UK.
- When did you decide to come to the UK to study and what were your motivations for study abroad?

Initial sojourn stage

- Now that you are at the start of your year in the UK, how are things going for you at the moment?
- What are your expectations/goals for this year?
- How do you feel about the academic aspect of your year in the UK?
- How do you feel about the social aspects of your year in the UK?
 - How important is it to you to form friendships with British people?
 - How important is it to you to form friendships with other international students?
 - How important is it to you to form friendships with people from your home country?
- What are you most looking forward to for this year in the UK?
- What are your impressions of Britain and the British people so far?
- Is there anything from your side that you would like to add?

Appendix E: Interview Guide T2 (February)

Introduction

- Have there been any changes since our last interview in terms of your accommodation and programme of study?
- How did you spend the winter break?

The first semester

- Please tell me about how you experienced the first semester.
- How, would you say, have you been feeling over the last few months?
- How have things been going for you academically so far?
- How, would you say, has your English language ability developed over the last few months?
- How have things been going socially for you so far?
- Please outline or describe your current social circle. Who do you spend most of your time with and what kinds of activities do you do with these people?
- Could you describe to me the dynamics of your social circle? How did it evolve since the last interview?
- How much time, would you say, do you spend with each of these groups:
 - People from your own country?
 - British people?
 - Other non-co-national international students?
- How satisfied are you with the social support you receive from the people around you? Who do you turn to for academic support? Who do you turn to for emotional support?
- Please tell me about your interactions with British people.
- What are your impressions of the local environment and the local people?
- Is there anything from your side that you would like to add?

Appendix F: Interview Guide T3 (June)

The second semester

- Please tell me about how you experienced the second semester?
- How have things been going for you academically?
- How, would you say, have you been feeling over the last few months?
- How have things been going socially for you?
- Please outline or describe your current social circle. Who do you spend most of your time with and what kinds of activities do you do with these people?
- Could you describe to me the dynamics of your social circle? How did it evolve since the last interview?
- How, would you say, has your English language ability developed over the last few months?
- Please tell me about your interactions with British people.
- What are your impressions of the local environment and the local people?
- Has this year in the UK changed you in any way?
- Looking back over the last nine months, please outline for me your experiences over time.
- How did this year in the UK compare to the expectations you had pre-arrival?
- What recommendations would you give to prospective international students?
- What are your plans after graduation?
- Is there anything from your side that you would like to add?

Appendix G: Interviewee Follow-Up Survey

Short Follow-Up Questionnaire about Your Year in the UK

This short questionnaire contains questions about your year in the UK. Please click the boxes to indicate your answer. For some questions, you may click more than one box.

1. Links with home (click to put an x in the appropriate box)

1a. When I first arrived in the UK, I felt

not homesick at all a bit homesick very homesick

1b. Later on, I felt

not homesick at all a bit homesick very homesick

1c. Internet use: I would typically contact my home country by internet

monthly at most weekly several times a week daily

1d. Telephone: I would typically contact my home country by telephone

monthly at most weekly several times a week daily

1e. Did going to the UK mean leaving a partner in the home country?

yes no

1f. Did anyone visit you during your stay in the UK?

yes no

1g. How often did you visit your home country during your stay in the UK?

never once twice three times more than three times

1h. Any other comments: e.g. how you handled long-distance relationships, how it felt to host visitors from home, or how you handled coming back to the UK after visits to your home country:

2. Social networks

2a. In the early days, my friends were

- mostly people from my country mostly other non-British people
- mostly British people (please click the one box that applies)

2b. Towards the end of my programme of study, my friends were

- mostly people from my country mostly other non-British people
- mostly British people (please click the one box that applies)

2c. During your stay in the UK, you will have met people/students from your home country. Among this group, did anyone become

- a friend with whom you socialised?
- a close friend with whom you could discuss private issues?
- a partner?

(click all the boxes which apply)

2d. During your stay in the UK, you will have met other non-British people from countries other than your own. Among this group, did anyone become

- a friend with whom you socialised?
- a close friend with whom you could discuss private issues?
- a partner?

(click all the boxes which apply)

2e. During your stay in the UK, you will have met British people. Among this group, did anyone become

- a friend with whom you socialised?
- a close friend with whom you could discuss private issues?
- a partner?

(click all the boxes which apply)

2f. Any other comments, e.g. how your social contacts and relationships changed during your stay in the UK:

3. Language ability (if your native language is English, please go to section 4)

Overall, I feel that my English has

- improved a lot improved a bit neither improved nor got worse
got worse

3i. Any other comments about language use during your year in the UK:

4. Outcomes of your stay in the UK

4a. Was academic learning a significant outcome of your stay in the UK?

- yes no

4b. Was insight into the local ways of life a significant outcome of your stay in the UK?

- yes no

4c. Was understanding of aspects of professional life a significant outcome of your stay in the UK?

- yes no

4d. Was being able to operate effectively in different cultural contexts a significant outcome of your stay in the UK?

- yes no

4e. Was personal development a significant outcome of your stay in the UK?

- yes no

4f. Any other comments on what you got out of the year in the UK:

Thank you very much for helping me (again) with my research project!