Social Inclusion and International Students

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The Research:
This research aims to create a framework for social inclusion among international students. International students continue to be an important stakeholder in the Australian higher education sector and a growing proportion of these students enter Australian universities through alternative pathways of entry (university-backed, guaranteed entry foundation study programs). Enrolments into guaranteed entry foundation studies are appealing to international students as they enable students to enroll into tertiary education with lower English language requirements as well as academic entry scores.

However, previous research shows that the low level of language fluency and literacy skills that characterize many of these students, as well as their concomitant interactions with the larger University student community tend to become barriers of success. This is further confounded often with high levels of pressure from their families to do well in these courses. This is alarming, as prior international research found that acculturative stress, social exclusion, as well as both academic and financial pressures are linked with depressive symptoms and lower life satisfaction among international students.

Drawing from the sojourner adjustment, self-efficacy, and positive organisational behaviour literatures, I test the influence of acculturative factors, personal dispositions, and perceived support structures as key drivers for students’ success. The study found support for the idea that social inclusion, through perceived organisational and social support, is positively related with students’ academic and social outcomes.

Why this topic is important:
Despite the increasing popularity and numbers of international students being accepted through alternative pathways, there is still a lack of understanding of the academic and social needs of the international students’ community, as well as how educators can better cater for and facilitate their learning. Further, the academic literature on international students, while diverse, still lacks direction (Bierwiczzonek & Waldzus, 2016). As international students are important stakeholders in the Tertiary education sector, this research has significant impact potential in providing valuable insights into the challenges that both international students and academics face. The potential findings may also offer solutions to increase the quality of life and social inclusion for international students.

From a learning perspective, this presents a challenge for academics and their pedagogical approaches. Extant research indicates that current pedagogical approaches adopted in Australian and “western” universities need to be adapted to fit the needs of international students, many of whom come from Asian or Confucian learning backgrounds (Saravanamuthu & Yap, 2014; Cadman & Song, 2012). The current study provides an empirically-based framework to enhance students’
success in tertiary settings. Further, this topic is also important from a funding and business perspective – as funding pressures for Australian Universities continue to increase, this market segment becomes more important as a stream of revenue (Robertson, 2011).

**How the session will run:**

I will start the session with a 5-minute reflective exercise where participants are asked to reflect on and share their experiences of trying to adjust to new environments. I will ask participants to choose one or two words that describe what they felt via Poll Everywhere, an interactive live polling.

This will be followed by a 10-minute presentation of the results of the study. The presentation will focus mainly on the key findings of my first study. This will also set the stage for the remaining session.

Subsequently, participants will then be asked to reflect on the results of the study in groups of approximately 5, focusing on their personal experiences in teaching either international students or diverse student groups. (20 minutes)

In their respective discussion groups, participants will be asked to reflect on the following:

- Key challenges and skill gaps faced by students and academics
- Strategies and techniques that have been adopted, or might be adopted to enhance social inclusion of international students

I will then ask participants to share some of their reflections and conclude the sessions with an exploration of future research agenda – specifically designing research that can be used to inform practice. (10 minutes)

Q&A (5 minutes)

**References**


