

STUDENTS' ACCULTURATION AND ADJUSTMENT: THE CASE OF INDIGENOUS GROUP AT PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

(Akulturasi dan Penyesuaian Pelajar: Kes Kumpulan Orang Asli
Di Pendidikan Tinggi Awam Malaysia)

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Abstract

This study aims to seek the acculturation and adjustment barriers of indigenous students at higher education based on broad literature reviews and theoretical groundings. Internationally, acculturation is often associated with adjustment and is vital issues in higher education. Literature proves that students experience difficulties in adjusting in higher education that often lead to depression and in worse cases, committing suicide. There were four areas of adjustments that reviewed in this study. The four areas were academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institution attachment. All students experience difficulties in moving out from their comfort zone and adjusting in new environment. Indigenous students may have greater risk of adjustment problem compare to non-indigenous due to different culture. According to the theory and much evidence from literature, students can successfully adjust themselves if they can survive cultural obstacles that significantly confronting the indigenous students at higher education. Academic adjustment becomes an issue when the indigenous students enrol in English medium curriculum. Furthermore, personal-emotion is associated with their psychological and physical well-being whereas institution attachment is related with the indigenous students' reaction about being in university and their specific attachment with the institutions. This paper also emphasizes the importance of the higher education institutions' responsibility in supporting the adjustment of indigenous students to ensure a more successful outcome.

Keywords *Acculturation, Adjustment, Indigenous Student, Higher Education.*

Abstrak

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mendapatkan akulturasi dan penyesuaian halangan pelajar bumiputera di pendidikan tinggi berdasarkan tinjauan literatur yang meluas dan berasaskan teoretikal. Di peringkat antarabangsa, akulturasi sering dikaitkan dengan penyesuaian dan isu-isu penting dalam pendidikan tinggi.

Litratur membuktikan bahawa pelajar mengalami kesukaran menyesuaikan diri dengan pendidikan tinggi yang sering membawa kepada kemurungan dan dalam kes-kes yang lebih teruk, membunuh diri. Terdapat empat bidang penyesuaian yang dikaji dalam kajian ini. Empat bidang itu adalah pengubahsuaian akademik, penyesuaian sosial, penyesuaian peribadi-emosi, dan penempatan institusi. Semua pelajar mengalami kesukaran untuk keluar daripada zon selesa mereka dan menyesuaikan diri dengan persekitaran yang baru. Pelajar bumiputera mungkin mempunyai risiko masalah penyesuaian yang lebih besar berbanding dengan bukan bumiputera kerana budaya yang berbeza. Menurut teori dan banyak bukti daripada literatur, para pelajar dapat menyesuaikan diri dengan baik jika mereka dapat bertahan hidup dalam halangan budaya yang menimbulkan ketegangan terhadap para pelajar bumiputera di pendidikan tinggi. Penyesuaian akademik menjadi isu ketika pelajar bumiputera mendaftar dalam kurikulum bahasa Inggeris. Tambahan itu, emosi peribadi dikaitkan dengan kesejahteraan psikologi dan fizikal mereka manakala penempatan institusi berkaitan dengan reaksi pelajar-pelajar bumiputera untuk berada di universiti dan penempatan khusus mereka dengan institusi. Makalah ini juga menekankan kepentingan tanggungjawab institusi pendidikan tinggi dalam menyokong penyesuaian pelajar bumiputera untuk memastikan hasil yang lebih berjaya.

Kata Kunci *Akulturas, Penyesuaian, Pelajar Bumiputera, Pendidikan Tinggi.*

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous students have greater risk of dropping out at the higher education than their non-indigenous counterparts due to culture differences (Miller, 2010). For many of the majority higher education students, this issue is far from their concern. From the previous literature, an adjustment to campus life seems to be great deal for the indigenous students due to culture obstacles (Pidgeon, 2008). A greater amount of interaction with host culture has been associated with better academic adjustment (Smith, 2012), fewer community complications, enhanced communication capability, and improved common adjustment to life outside their comfort zone (Silburn, Brinkman, Ferguson-Hill, Styles, Walker & Sheperd, 2009). Those indigenous students involving in structured peer programmes and spending more informal leisure time with their local peers have been found to have better social adjustment than those who did not (Pidgeon, 2008).

In addition, contact and friendships with local students is associated with emotional benefits such as the indigenous students' satisfaction (Smith, 2012) and significantly lower levels of anxiety (Pidgeon, 2008), and predicts better psychological adjustment. At the beginning, a person must make many personal adjustment which are to get used to the new surroundings, practice new impressions, build contacts and learn how to new tasks at the campus. These psychological adjustments can cause anxiety and for numerous students and a high intensity of stress (Panelo, 2010). The

changes of psychological adjustment show a person's level of comfort in their new environment over time. According to Wilson, Ward and Fischer (2013), in many cases indigenous students experience the slightest comfort upon arrival to new host-culture. Adjustment increases constantly within the first few months and finally soothes with only slight difference over the lasting stage. This suggests there is a need for those who offer support to the indigenous students to focus efforts especially in the beginning of the intercultural practices.

Compare to psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment describes the increasing ability of the indigenous students to successfully interact with members of their host society (Kus, Ward, & Liu, 2014). This includes obtaining culture specific communication and communication ability, as well as learning to converse the target language if it is unlike. Acquire information about the custom and ethics in the host society is also a part of socio-cultural adjustment. The more extensive time the indigenous students stay in the host society, the stronger their socio-cultural adjustment will be. Nevertheless, after some time, it is suggested that there may not be any additional significant learning. Like with psychological adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment significantly shows the need for significant support for indigenous students during the first few months of their intercultural practices (Wilson, Ward & Fischer, 2013).

Any student entering university can feel a bit out of place, be it indigenous or non-indigenous students. To some extent, this is normal. At its best, higher education is intended to be filled of new challenges, contributing an important of prospects to discover as well as experiments and expand new ideas. Even more, a medium sized university campus can be a puzzling but thrilling, multi-ethnic place. For many students, university is also their first experience of life as grown-ups, away from the communities where they grew up, and a step away from the potential and supports of their families and friends.

But for indigenous students, those challenges have traditionally been complicated to steer, with contradictory claims on uniqueness and at a distance from their home communities (Guilorry & Wolverton, 2008). There is a range of programs found to assist students from all backgrounds to adapt to campus life. The first special and only program in Canada has been vital in improving indigenous student success at higher institutions, and in representing the supports that can be put in place to assist indigenous students at higher education institutions across Canada. According to Gunn and Pomahac (2009), the program is to recognize and strengthen indigenous identity, promote indigenous community on campus, and value indigenous customs and ways of knowing. Based on approximately a group of student-focused programs as well as peer coaching, scholarship and aid finances, research seminars, society practicum and research novices developed with the support of the Canadian government and with input from indigenous groups. It is proven to radically enhanced student outcomes. Between 2005 and 2009, students experienced 100 per cent increase in term-to-term persistence, 20 per cent increase in graduation rates and 67 per cent lessening in withdrawal rates.

The involvement of indigenous students at higher education in Malaysia

JAKOA is the official authority that responsible of the contacts of the indigenous people in West Malaysia. Among the stated objectives of the division are to reduce poverty among the indigenous people, improving their health, encourage education and improving their overall living (JAKOA, 2014). In the area of education, JAKOA organized a scheme from primary level until tertiary level which will support them financially. Moreover, JAKOA also is accountable for organizing education program to attract every level of generation to be present at school and to graduate. For the past years, engagement of indigenous students in local tertiary level had improved gradually. Table 1 shows the engagement of indigenous students at Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for 2014 and 2015.

The first five of the universities in Table 1 are Research University in Malaysia. Rozita, Ahmad and Latifah (2011) stated that in Malaysia, the classification of a research university is according on eight standards. They are (1) the quantity and quality of researchers, (2) the quantity and quality of research, (3) the number of postgraduates, (4) the excellence of postgraduates, (5) innovation, (6) the qualified service and incentive system, (7) networking and partnership, and (8) support services specifically. English Language is the medium in all these research universities, since universities are competing in meeting this demands and producing many quality researches that recognized internationally (Kirkpatrick, 2014). It explains the reason indigenous students have small number of participation in research universities. This is because the indigenous students in Malaysia have a very low achievement in English Language in all levels of education (Sharifah, Samsilah, Aminuddin, Kamarudin, Mohamad & Jaimah, 2011).

Table 1 shows the highest involvement of indigenous students among all the public higher education institutions (HEIs) is University Teknologi MARA (UiTM). The UiTM is predominantly being preferred by the indigenous people because this institution helps disadvantaged students with poor academic results and there are pre-diploma programmes for them (Intan Farahana et. al., 2014). Additionally, UiTM is being chosen most by the indigenous because low education fee compare to other university (Norasmah, Aminuddin & Mazura, 2011). This advantage has help students from poor family and unaffordable to persist in their studies and pursue their ambitions to help their family. UiTM is also capable of providing multi-campus support services for indigenous students all over Malaysia. In fact, UiTM has developed a specific program called '*Changing the Orang Asli's Destiny Programme*' [Mengubah Destini Orang Asli] that was launched in 2013 to develop higher education access and outcomes of indigenous students.

Table 1: The number of Indigenous Students at Higher Education Institution in 2014 and 2015

No	Public Higher Education Institutions	2014		2015	
		Diploma	Bachelor	Diploma	Bachelor
1	Universiti Malaya (UM)	5	9	5	12

2	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	-	7	-	8
3	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	-	10	-	14
4	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	7	7	7	14
5	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	4	5	3	6
6	Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)	-	-	-	10
7	Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS)	-	12	-	10
8	Universiti Sarawak Malaysia (UNIMAS)	-	7	-	13
9	Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM)	-	5	-	4
10	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI)	19	17	38	4
11	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK)	-	4	-	6
12	Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)*	185	48	201	59
13	Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA)	3	17	2	7
14	Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM)	6	19	5	9
15	Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM)	4	6	6	5
16	Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP)	8	7	7	8
17	Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT)	-	6	-	8
18	Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP)	-	-	1	5
19	Teachers' College	-	2	-	-
20	Polytechnic	91	-	86	-
21	Community College	-	-	-	-
Total		334	201	361	202

Source: JAKOA (2015)

ADJUSTMENT AMONG INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Abdul Kadir, Yusliza, Muhammad Iskandar and Mohd Zulkifli (2014) found that

cognitive adjustment is the most significant predictor of academic performance. They sampled the minority students studying in four public universities in Malaysia. Besides, family support was found to enhance the relationship between emotional adjustment and academic performance and the relationship between cognitive adjustment and academic performance. Peer support, on the other hand, moderates the relationship between attitude adjustment and academic performance. These group of researcher also stated that educator support was found to influence the relationship between emotional adjustment and academic performance and the relationship between attitude adjustment and academic performance.

The administrators should arrange programs such as adopted family system, mentor-mentee program, or participation of academic advisors where these indigenous students can have an important person to confer various academic as well as non-academic materials (Abdul Kadir et al., 2014). Besides, when these students' degree of attitude adjustment is high, they seriously need friends' support to show them in living in the new environment. The administrators can give assistance in establishing an organization for them so that they can get together regularly encouraging each other, organizing enjoying activities and partaking in various programs that develop their wellbeing and consequently contribute to their academic excellence (Hardisons-Stevens, 2014).

Other than that, financial support also plays a part among the indigenous students academic adjustment in higher education. Ford (2013) in her research stated that many students' chances of academic success were reduced due demographic background such as poverty. Ford (2013) believed that the influence of family earnings, the professions of parents, and the common family arrangement contributing to indigenous students' school attainment. Consequently, parents' socio-economic status (SES) had a significant and constructive result on students' academic attainment. Students from higher socio-economic status, experienced greater parent involvement in their education (Suresh Kumar, 2012), which enabled these students to receive the necessary skills, knowledge, behaviour and values that were needed by their children for academic success.

With the increasing number of indigenous students in higher education, an understanding of the psychological factors that facilitate adjustment is becoming ever more important (Hunt & Harrington, 2008). The aim of the indigenous research was to consider elements facilitating or impeding indigenous students' adjustment to their host-culture. The variables of psychological distress, satisfaction with social support, and cultural identification were measured to know the struggle of adjustment among indigenous students in higher education. According to Lee and Chen (2014), attachment with the institutions was moderated by psychological distress and was found to be relevant to the process of adjustment. Overall, attachment issues appeared to be of greater significance to the indigenous students compared to their host.

Indigenous students at higher education in both Canada and the United States have the lowest completion of higher education degrees, and their higher education dropout rates are higher than for any other minority (Miller, 2010). Miller (2010) also added that there is a research that has been done indicates that one challenge for indigenous students is the difficulty in steering the cultural differences between higher education and their indigenous cultures. She suggests that the indigenous students must

have the ability to adapt two cultures at the same time or biculturalism. Institutional support for transition to higher education, racism, types of relationships to native culture, career issues, and family issues are the indigenous students' of experience in biculturalism.

Harrington and Harrington (2012) suggested that adjusting to a new culture while retaining one's native culture can be a challenging transition. The institutions of higher education in this study had an impact on the indigenous students' process of adopting a bicultural identity. When the indigenous students' were asked what was helpful in making the transition from their home community setting to the setting of higher education easier, they expressed that the institutions or individuals within the institutions were supportive in a variety of ways.

Moreover, Liu (2012) stated that dealing with racism was identified as a common experience they encountered. The indigenous students attempting to identify with the new culture of higher education often experienced resistance, in the form of injustice or racism, from individuals who were part of that new culture. The indigenous students were aware that their experiences with racism were not unique to the transition to higher education, but admitted that it made their transition more complicated. Quite a lot of them uttered disappointment with racism, which made it more difficult for them to recognize with the new culture. Those resilient had over time developed a patience and acceptance of the racism.

The indigenous students' career selection appeared to reflect the difficulty in transitioning to a new culture (Mensah, 2010). Some careers paths were familiar to them due to their upbringing on the hometown. However, those paths were very different than the careers paths they were exposed to in university. Several indigenous students' areas of study did not seem to be similar with their profession intents, which could have been a result of the new exposure to majors/career that were not available in their hometown. This may have led to confusion about career paths and how one might navigate their higher education experience.

Moreover, developing bicultural characteristics in higher education engages in deciding a major to profession path that could fit both cultures (Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012). Family support plays significant role for the indigenous students to endeavour in the higher education world. Some indigenous students felt a great deal of support departing to university, because some family members had preceded them. Other indigenous student, who was first generation university students, also felt support from their families. Family support was often expressed verbally or financially. Indigenous students who experienced a lack of family support appeared to be struggling against a lack of understanding about higher education institution. Yue and Le (2012) added that the lack of support from family experienced by these indigenous students made adopting a bicultural identity more complicated. They were frequently the first persons in their families to attend college. Such families were often caught in the dilemma of wondering how a child going to university would change the culture in the family. They would feel everything from indecision to absolute disagreement from their family members.

In Malaysia, discrimination and ethnic identity issues also have been verified by the Students' Affairs Officer in one of the public higher education institutions in

Malaysia. He added that because of the feeling of being discriminated due to different ethnicity in their host-culture, the indigenous students suffered from low self-esteem and social limitations. The counsellor in the public higher education institutions support the evidence by giving many examples of indigenous students have problem in socializing. However, some of the indigenous students with low self-esteem do not contribute to their academic achievement and adjustment. Deficiency of support from their parents contributes to their failure in adjusting and surviving in higher education. The counsellor of this institution gives many evidence and occurrence where many indigenous parents prefer their children to work rather than pursue their studies in higher education. He believes that parents' encouragement plays a significant role and support to ensure their children adjusting well in campus and succeed in academic.

ACCULTURATION MODEL

Moving from one academic environment to another and relocating to a new country or states to study is becoming an increasingly ordinary event for many including the indigenous students. As well as providing cultural and academic enhancement, this occurrence also presents challenges and complications. Berry (2005) stated that when the indigenous exposed to an international environment, they experience an acculturation process that may impact their well-being and educational experience. It is stated that acculturation lead to its outcome, adjustment. The results show that indigenous students suffered from acculturative stress in terms of physical, social and psychological problems. In addition, intercultural experience can be a transitional and transformative learning process leading to a journey of personal growth (Abotossaway, 2005).

Acculturation describe the process of cultural change and psychological change that results subsequent meeting between cultures (Berry, 2005). The effects of acculturation can be seen at numerous levels in both interrelating cultures. At the group level, acculturation often results in changes to culture, traditions, and social organization. Larger group level demonstrate of acculturation regularly include changes in food, clothing, and language. O'Shea, Onsmann and McKay (2011) stated that at the individual level, dissimilarities in the way individuals acculturate have been shown to be connected not just with changes in everyday activities, but with various means of psychological and physical well-being. As enculturation is used to explain the development of first-culture knowledge, acculturation can be considerate of as second-culture learning.

Table 2: Acculturation Model

	Cultural maintenance	Cultural maintenance
	YES	NO
Contact participation YES	Integration	Assimilation
Contact participation NO	Separation	Marginalization

Adapted from Berry, J. (2005)

According to the acculturation model in Figure 1, integration or bi-culturalism happens when the indigenous students retain many personal and cultural values but adapts the dominant culture by acquiring necessary skills and values. In separation part of the model explains when the indigenous students identify their culture exclusively. Marginalization happens when the indigenous students perceiving their own culture as negative but at the same time unable to adapt the dominant culture in the host-society. Lastly, assimilation occurs when the indigenous students seeks to become part of the dominant society to the exclusion of their own cultural group. In order to survive in the higher education, the indigenous students need to make efforts to make and maintain relationship with the dominant culture (Berry, 2005).

The model of acculturation has been studied methodically since 1918. As it has been come close to at different times from the fields of psychology, anthropology, and sociology, several theories and description have materialized to explain fundamentals of the acculturative process (Berry, 2005). Regardless of definitions and evidence that acculturation involves a two-way process of change, research and theory have mainly focused on the adaptation made by minorities such as indigenous peoples in response to their contact with the dominant majority. Modern research has principally purposeful on diverse strategies of acculturation and how disparities in acculturation affect how well individuals adapt to their society (Triste, 2013).

The most important verdict of this model dealt with the importance of a developing a bicultural identity. For indigenous students the transition to the culture of higher education takes with it the potential of loss of their native culture (Babae, 2011). Going to university frequently requires leaving their home environment where native culture is the strongest. Furthermore, most higher education is based on western ideals and traditions that do not always mix well with native cultures. Transitioning to the culture of higher education and subsequent transitions into the workplace may lead to a loss of connection with native culture. Many indigenous students attempted to adapt to this new culture, while maintaining their native culture. These indigenous students expressed feelings of academic confidence and motivation to graduate. There is some evidence that students with a bicultural identity have better academic achievement than students who identify with only one culture or with no culture (Abotossaway, 2005). Other indigenous students struggled to develop a bicultural identity and experienced opposition, both internally and externally. Those indigenous students experienced difficulty integrating into the culture of higher education. At times the opposition from the new culture kept some indigenous students from pursuing a higher educational degree.

Another important finding in the model is that the indigenous students have benefited from going to higher education institutions that support their transition to a new culture (Parrish, Klem & Brown, 2012). Many staffs and lecturers from these institutions appeared to understand the unique difficulties indigenous students faced when they go to university. These staffs and lecturers offered support, appropriate help to those students who were struggling, and were willing to work with the students towards success, not against them. The staffs and lecturers understood that these students are competent; however, they may need extra help to transition to the culture of higher education.

In addition to support from specific persons in the higher education institutions, the indigenous students benefitted from the institutional support during their transition to higher education (Parrish, Klem & Brown, 2012). One way to facilitate their transition process was through a centre or program such as a social support group for indigenous students in the higher education institutions. The institutions represented must establish these types of centres due to their understanding of the unique challenges indigenous students face. These centres provide mentors, tutors, advisors, social support, and a safe place for the students to gather and share their experiences. They often organize and fund native cultural events on campus and work with the staff to address the needs of their students. Miller (2010) stated that many indigenous students expressed gratitude for these centres and found them to be supportive of their academic goals. Based on their response, it is recommended that in order for indigenous higher education students to succeed, institutions need to have these types of centres and programs in place to help students develop a bicultural identity.

Another concern that the indigenous students faced while making the transition to the culture of higher education was that the extended family system would also need to change (Berry, 2005). The present study suggests that students who receive family support for their transition to higher education make this transition more easily. It appears that some of these families may have already incorporated biculturalism into their family systems. These families likely have someone who has attended or graduated from a higher education institution. Indigenous students, who came from a family without a lot of experience with higher education, alluded to changes made by parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members to support their decision to go to higher education institutions.

Miller (2010) added that the indigenous students who experienced resistance or opposition to their pursuit of higher education from family or friends had a more difficult time at university. They felt unwanted by their families and friends back home. Often, misunderstandings and jealousy would cause emotional, social, and financial difficulty for these participants. It is understandable that these family members and friends viewed a transition to the culture of higher education with suspicion, especially when it appears to lead an individual away from their native culture.

Many indigenous students' higher education experience is complicated by racism. Racism is not unique to this group of students or to higher education (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012). However, racism experienced during university years complicates the indigenous students' journey. Current study suggests that due to the indigenous students' unique cultural backgrounds, they often encountered prejudice, stereotypes, and racism that students of majority do not. The demands of higher education are difficult enough without the added pressures and stress caused by racism. It seems that the indigenous students who had a more developed bicultural identity were better able to address situations that involved racism (Miller, 2010). Higher education institutions that have a population of indigenous students could develop an educational outreach program for both the institution and community concerning racism and prejudice.

CONCLUSION

There are many reasons for the high dropout rate of indigenous higher education students due to adjustment issues. Previous studies suggest that one difficulty these students may have is to steer the culture in higher education (Abotossaway, 2005). From the previous qualitative researches, the themes that stood out were (a) institutional support for transition to higher education, (b) racism, (c) types of relationships to native culture and (d) family issues (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew & Kelly, 2012). Each of these themes represents struggles in adjustment and experiences that indigenous higher education student's face due to the demand of living in two cultures.

Persons of the majority culture are routinely exposed to the culture of higher education (Miller, 2010) stated the indigenous persons attending schools in their village or in border towns have far less exposure to this culture. The indigenous students' lack of exposure to and experience with higher education can make the transition more complicated. In addition to beating the complex transition to cities and towns where universities are typically located, these students' tribal cultures can make demands that conflict with educational demands (Oliphant & Templeman, 2009).

Additionally, it appears that almost all first generation higher education students have to adjust to the culture of higher education (Preston, 2008). There are many indigenous students whom were the first in their families to seek higher education. Previous studies have shown that American Indian students may take an indirect route to graduation due to this lack of experience (Oliphant & Templeman, 2009). The indigenous students' abilities to adjust to the new culture of higher education, while holding on to their native culture posed a unique challenge. They expressed concern and worry that they would not be able to find an appropriate balance between the two cultures. In some cases, the fear of losing one's culture kept them from fully engaging in their university, while others gained a new appreciation for their native culture by attending a university (Reynolds, 2012).

Finally, the indigenous students' career and major choices seemed to be limited by their experience growing up in their hometown and affect their adjustment in higher education. Minimal exposure to vocational opportunities had a significant influence on the indigenous students' areas of study and selection of career paths. Indigenous students who had been exposed to a variety of careers both on and off the hometown seemed to have a wider-range of educational goals and career aspirations. Based on the literature review in this paper, it is suggested that secondary schools that have an indigenous student population could create more opportunities and programs to expand student's knowledge of careers and life in university (Lee, 2009) to facilitate them adjusting better in their future undertakings in higher education. High school counsellors and administrators could work together with former graduates who went onto higher education to create job shadowing opportunities and mentor programs for current indigenous high school students.

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