

**UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**CROSS-CULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES  
AMONG INTERNATIONAL  
SOJOURNERS IN MALAYSIAN  
UNIVERSITIES**

**MASSILA HAMZAH**

Thesis submitted in fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**

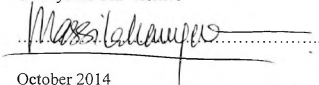
**Faculty of Communication and Media Studies**

**October 2014**

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. I also declare that this thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, University Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

Name of Student	:	Massila Hamzah
Student I.D. No	:	2009550867
Programme	:	Doctor of Philosophy ( MC990)
Faculty	:	Communication and Media Studies
Thesis Title	:	Cross-cultural Communication Experiences Among International Sojourners in Malaysian Universities
Signature of Student	:	
Date	:	October 2014

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study focuses on cross-cultural communication experiences among international sojourners (IS) in Malaysian universities. Four research objectives were addressed : 1) to identify the transition shock symptoms in cross-culture communication faced by the international sojourners in Malaysian universities, 2) to determine the building blocks faced by international sojourners in cross-cultural transition, 3) to identify the aspects of perceived similarities or differences by international sojourners in their manifestations of culture 4) to ascertain the adaptation strategies embraced by international sojourners in overcoming cross-cultural communication challenges. Salient discoveries were obtained through in-depth interview with fifteen IS residing in Malaysian universities. The findings painted a vivid picture of the sojourning experiences. Firstly, the symptoms of transition shock were highly characterized by initial sojourning experiences, home separation struggles, emotional distress, initial communication-related stress and acclimatizing to surrounding. Initial sojourning anticipations contributed to themes of: i) unexpected encounters ii) felt differences iii) influences of past experiences. Home separation verify various struggles along the themes of : i) homesickness, ii) attachment need and iii) nostalgic feeling. Indications of emotional distress derived to themes of: i) affective upheavals, ii) yearning to leave and iii) challenged by strangeness. Initial communication-related symptom were salient in themes of : i) initial engagement challenges ii) interaction gap, and iii) withdrawal. Acclimatizing to the surroundings contributed to themes of : i) weather condition, and ii) food acceptance. Secondly, findings warranted the building blocks in cross-culture transition were associated to communication tribulations, language barriers and cross-cultural disputes. Communication tribulations contributed to themes of : i) predicaments in forming relationships, ii) arousing suspicion iii) nonverbal cues. Language barriers derived to themes of : i) interaction difficulties, ii) code substitute and iii) differences in the representation of meanings and pronunciation. Cross-cultural disputes persists in themes of: i) adapting to differences, ii) treatment against IS, iii) socially inappropriate behavior. Thirdly, aspects of perceived similarities or differences were manifested in value orientation and, cultural norms and rules. The themes were associated with : i) familial attachment, ii) society conformity and iii) interpersonal engagement. Likewise, cultural norms and rules subscribed to themes of i) appropriate standards of behavior and ii) attitude towards time and work commitment. Fourth, the strategies to overcome cross-cultural communication challenges were adjustment approach, cross-cultural resilience approach and passive-defensive approach. The adjustment approach uncovered four emerging themes: i) seek balance while preserving cultural identity, ii) negotiating cultural differences, iii) building relationships through communication and iv) local language acquisition. Cross-cultural resilience approach contributed to themes of: i) receptive personality, ii) managing cross-cultural adversities and iii) avoid being judgmental. Passive-defensive approach revealed two salient themes of : i) submission to circumstance and ii) seeking shared-group support. In conclusion, across the nexus of cultural diversity lies the challenge to fathom the nuances between home and host culture. Nonetheless, regardless of various ramifications, making adjustments to attain cross-cultural liberation demonstrated a life-changing journey and a rewarding experience.

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

	Page
<b>AUTHOR'S DECLARATION</b>	ii
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b>	iv
<b>TABLE OF CONTENT</b>	v
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	x
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xi
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xii

### CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

1.1	Background of the Study	1
1.2	Problem Statement	2
1.3	Research Objectives	5
1.4	Scope and Rationale of Study	6
1.5	Significance of Study	7
1.6	Summary of Chapter	9

### CHAPTER TWO : LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1	Introduction to Chapter	10
2.2	Important Concepts	10
2.2.1	Sojourners	10
2.2.2	Cross-culture Communication	11
2.2.3	Transition Shock	13
2.2.4	Cross-cultural Communication Building Blocks	14
2.2.5	Manifestations of Culture	15
2.2.6	Perceived Similarities or Differences	17
2.2.7	Cross-cultural Adaptation	19
2.3	Anthology of Past Research	20