

Cross-Cultural Contact: A Preliminary Study on the Cross-Cultural Communication between Taiwanese Undergraduates and International Students—A Case Study on the International College of Ming Chuan University

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Abstract

Based on cross-cultural theory, this study applies in-depth interviewing and focus group testing to examine the difficulties and challenges faced by Taiwanese undergraduates while communicating with international students in an English immersion instruction environment at the International College and analyze how the former should adapt themselves to the cross-cultural learning environment. This study indicates that language competence is the main factor affecting local students' adaptation to the cross-cultural environment at the International College. Low language proficiency, pertaining to either schoolwork or interpersonal communication, is the main cause of anxiety and nervousness among local students during the earlier stage of adaptation. According to the adaptation curve, the honeymoon stage experienced by local students following enrollment is extremely short and is usually accompanied by anxiety and uneasiness. Their adaptation stage comprises two aspects, schoolwork and life. Regarding the schoolwork aspect, local students face a relatively long crisis stage because only after making certain improvement in English proficiency can they gradually adapt themselves to the cross-cultural learning environment. However, in terms of the life aspect, it takes a comparatively shorter time for local students to adapt themselves to cross-cultural conflicts, and they can rapidly enter the recovery and biculturalism adaptation stages.

Keywords

cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural adaptation, International College

1. Introduction

The forceful tide of globalization is having an impact on society; it is not only affecting interpersonal, interorganizational, and intergovernmental relationships but also redefining the traditional meanings of community, language consensus, interpersonal distance, common norms, and safety awareness (Chen, 2003). The tide of globalization has not only contributed to the globalization of the human society in various dimensions but also brought forth multiculturalism, which directly restructures the current social paradigm. In response to globalization, an increasing number of countries are recognizing the need for improving national competitiveness and attracting more talent and beginning to emphasize the internationalization of higher education or try creating an international learning atmosphere, e.g., by recruiting students worldwide. The simplest and most direct reason for this is that the development of higher education is considered one of the most important indexes of a country's international competitiveness.

Taiwan is no exception. According to the statistical data gathered by the Statistics Department of the Ministry of Education, Republic of China (Taiwan), currently, the purpose of most international students aiming to study in Taiwan is to learn Chinese at a non-degree level. However, since 2005, the number of international students studying in Taiwan for academic degrees has gradually increased. By the end of 2010, the number of foreign students coming to Taiwan to study Chinese was similar to the number of international students pursuing academic degrees in Taiwan. In the 103rd academic year of the Republic of China, the number of foreign students officially studying for academic degrees in Taiwanese universities and colleges was 14,063 (Statistics Department of the Ministry of Education, 2015).

In 2002, Ming Chuan University officially established the International College. Being the first Taiwanese university to adopt English immersion instruction in Taiwan, Ming Chuan University offers four undergraduate degree courses and one graduate-level master's degree program, including International Enterprise and Management, Information Technology Application, Journalism and Mass Communication, and Tourism and Sightseeing, and established the Institute of International Affairs (Note 1). As clearly stated by the International College in its mission statement, it is committed to cater to the needs of foreign students with a view to internationalize education so as to respond to global market trends. At present, apart from Taiwanese students, more than 700 students from over 40 countries are studying in the International College. Among them, there are approximately 150 exchange students (see Table 1), over 60% of whom come from the Asia-Pacific region (students from the Asia-Pacific region, Central and South America, and North America make up approximately 63%, 11%, and 10%, respectively, of the total number of foreign students in the college). At present, Ming Chuan University ranks first among Taiwanese universities in terms of the number of international students (The Statistics Department of the Ministry of Education, 2015).

Table 1. An Analysis of the Number of Foreign Students at Ming Chuan University

The 103 rd Academic Year of the Republic of China		
	Number	National Ranking
Foreign Students	742	1

However, most of the relevant studies in the past focused on the cultural adaptation and contact of international students, since, as foreigners studying abroad, international students suffer significant cultural shock. On the contrary, Taiwanese students enrolled in the International College, who were born and brought up in Taiwan, do not have to face an unfamiliar environment with different racial makeup, language, and normative customs. Therefore, traditional studies on cross-cultural adaptation have not paid much attention on how Taiwanese students adapt themselves to having cultural contact and communicating with international students in an English immersion instructional environment. Notably, in the International College, typically more than half of the students in a class are foreign students. It seems that although the overall environment has not changed, the cross-cultural impact faced by Taiwanese students in class is actually as significant as the cultural shock experienced by foreign students. Of course, for local students, the English immersion instruction environment can not only enrich their experience of cross-cultural contact but also bolster their English skills. However, English is not the native tongue of local students. Local students are restricted by such a condition and face difficulties and challenges in the English immersion learning environment. This study focuses on Taiwanese students in the English immersion learning environment to examine their cross-cultural contact and communication with international students, the difficulties and challenges presented by the unique learning environment to local students, and how the local students can better adapt themselves to the cross-cultural learning environment in order to help Taiwanese students aiming to study in an English immersion instruction environment in the future to adapt to the learning environment and develop cross-cultural communication competence.

The study has the following two objectives:

- 1) Analyze the difficulties and challenges faced by Taiwanese students studying at the International College of Ming Chuan University while communicating with international students.
- 2) Analyze how Taiwanese students studying at the International College adapt themselves to the cross-cultural learning environment.

2. Literature Review

Using the cross-cultural communication theory as its basis, this study explores the cultural contact and communication between Taiwanese and international students in a multicultural environment and the relevant influences and difficulties caused by cross-cultural communication in their studies, life, and cultural communications. The cross-cultural communication theory and research mainly probe into the

interaction between individuals or organizations from different cultural backgrounds. It maintains that people identify with other ethnic groups through verbal and nonverbal interactions. By reviewing relevant literature at both home and abroad, we find that foreign and domestic researches mainly analyze the phenomena and effects of interpersonal interaction between different cultures from the perspective of two theoretical models, that is, the Intercultural Adaptation Theory and Cultural Identity Theory. The two theories are explained as follows.

2.1 The Intercultural Adaptation Theory

The Intercultural Adaptation Theory mainly explores the influences of culture on communication patterns. Kim (2002) divided relevant researches on cross-cultural adaptation into two orientations, adaptation-as-problem and adaptation-as-learning/growth. Similar to the concept of cultural shock proposed by Oberg in 1960, adaptation-as-problem maintains that cross-cultural adaptation is a series of accumulated anxieties caused when individuals lose the signs and symbols of social interaction that they are familiar with (Oberg, 2006, p. 142). This research orientation considers the experience of the parties involved in adapting to a new environment as an experience of encountering difficulties and focuses on relieving the uneasiness and troubles of the parties.

Adaptation-as-learning/growth emphasizes the traits of learning and growth during the adaptation process. This orientation is represented by the U-curve Theory of Adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955). Such researches regard adaptation as a periodical and dynamic process that will lead to different results in different stages. Such a fluxing process is similar to a U-curve, which declines from high to low and then gradually rises from low to high (Chen, 2003). Smalley (1963) and Deutsch et al. (1963) further divided the U-curve Theory of Adjustment into four stages: The honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and biculturalism adaptation stages. As illustrated by the curve, the honeymoon stage at the very beginning is at the highest point of the curve, and the crisis stage declines to the lowest point of the curve. Subsequently, after the recovery stage and final biculturalism adaptation stage, the curve gradually rises back to the highest point, featuring an obvious U shape. However, the study differs from most domestic researches on cross-cultural adaptation, for although the local students study in an English immersion learning environment in the International College, they go back to a familiar social and cultural environment once they leave the classroom.

2.2 The Cultural Identity Theory

Cultural identity refers to individuals' sense of belonging to a specific culture or ethnic group. According to the research performed by Phinney (1993), the formation of cultural identity has three sequential stages: The unexamined cultural identity stage, cultural identity search stage, and cultural identity achievement stage. Though cultural identity manifests itself in three forms, individual, relational, and communal (Collier, 1994; Collier & Thomas, 1988), it is predicated by avowal or ascription. A person becomes a part of a group after the formation of mutual understanding and trust through verbal and nonverbal interactions. Thus, by studying the verbal and nonverbal interaction

patterns of an ethnic group, we can learn the group's cultural identity (Chen, 2003). Scholars emphasize that cultural identity is an individual's sense of belonging to a group, where individuals believe that they are a part of one distinct group. Such an awareness of we-group distinguishes between ego and non-ego cognitively. Therefore, classification and belonging were extrapolated from this theory. Many similar researches have been carried out in China, as well. For example, Liu Shuwen (2013) applied quantitative scale analysis and the interview method to explore new Taiwanese children's identity based on the native culture of their Southeast Asian mothers.

This study employs Taiwanese students of the International College of Ming Chuan University as its research subjects. It begins by examining cross-cultural adaptation to understand the difficulties and challenges faced by Taiwanese students in and how they adapt to a cross-cultural English immersion instruction environment. The study explores the following questions:

- 1) What are the difficulties and challenges faced by Taiwanese students at the International College of Ming Chuan University while communicating with international students?
- 2) How do Taiwanese students at the International College adapt themselves to the cross-cultural learning environment?

3. Research Methods

3.1 The Qualitative Research Method

The study applies the semi-structured interview method (see Appendix II for the interview outline) to interview Taiwanese students of the International College on their adaptation to the new environment. This interview method has two characteristics. First, it has a unified theme. Though the structure of the questions seems to be loose, questions are targeted rather than boundless. Second, an outline will be drawn before the interview so that the interviewer can guide the interviewees in making in-depth statements about the theme with different forms of open-ended questions. The study also categorizes people into focus groups according to certain specific conditions to conduct interviews effectively. By creating a comfortable interactive atmosphere within a group, the researcher enables the group's members to express freely their experience, opinions, or viewpoints on the topic being discussed. Therefore, this study hopes to encourage the group members to elaborate on their rich experience of and ideas on cross-cultural adaptation with the interactive process among the members of a focus group.

3.2 Research Subject

The study considers Taiwanese students who study International Enterprise and Management and Journalism and Mass Communication at the International College of Ming Chuan University as the research subjects. Altogether, 142 Taiwanese students are enrolled in these two courses. The study applies the purposive sampling method to select 12 students from the group to conduct an interview in order to gain information that cannot be obtained by other sampling methods. The in-depth interview and

focus group methods are used in the study. The main data to be analyzed are statements made by the interviewees based on their own experiences. In addition, 11 Taiwanese students at the International College will be selected to form the focus group for the second interview. To maintain research ethics and the privacy of the interviewees, their identities will be safeguarded and they will be referred to by their code names in this study.

4. The Cultural Contact Course of Taiwanese Students at the International College

Based on the research objectives, the researcher applies the qualitative research method to objectively describe the cross-cultural adaptation course of local students at the International College. The following eight sections examine the Taiwanese students' motivations for enrolling in the International College, their perceptions of foreign students at this college before enrollment, their observations in the class, their interactions with foreign students outside the class, the main sources of their pressure, their need for social support, factors that contribute to their cross-cultural adaptation, and their cross-cultural adaptation course, respectively.

First of all, it is motivations for Taiwanese Students to Enter the International College. After synthesizing the data gathered by the interview, we find six motivations for Taiwanese students to enter the International College, including:

- 1) Parental pressure and wishes: After being admitted to Ming Chuan University, local students receive an admissions brochure, which will usually be accompanied by a general overview of enrollment in the International College. After learning this information, some parents will require that their children apply for this college. Apparently, local students who entered the International College under this motivation applied for this specific college because of the persuasion or pressure from their parents, rather than their own free will. But students with such motivations are very few in this research.
- 2) Personal willingness and interest of parents: These students discussed with their parents before deciding whether to enter the International College or not. They entered the International College because of their personal willingness and the encouragement and support of their parents.
- 3) Confidence in English proficiency: These students took part in the English proficiency test in high school, and most of them were admitted to the university because of their excellent performance on the test. They are quite confident about their English proficiency and think that they can handle the English immersion instruction environment at the International College.
- 4) Interest in making foreign friends and learning in a multicultural environment: These students seek a cross-cultural learning environment and hope to use this opportunity to make more friends from different countries.
- 5) Recommendations from upperclassmen: Some local students might have heard about the International College from their upperclassmen peers prior to being admitted by Ming Chuan University. They have a basic understanding of the environment, and they enter the International

College due to the recommendations of upperclassmen.

6) Expectation of future benefits: Students with this motivation comprise the largest proportion among the interviewees. They believe that they can improve their English skills after entering the International College. As expressed by these students, English proficiency will help them in both their future careers and social lives. Thus, they want to enhance their English skills in such a learning environment.

Students need to pass the English test prior to being admitted by the International College. This ensures that they are equipped with essential English skills prior to admission. Although a few students said that they entered the International College because of parental request or pressure, most interviewees entered the college because they wanted to. These students are quite positive about the learning environment at the International College. As maintained by them, they can improve their English proficiency by studying in the cross-cultural learning environment at this college, which will benefit their future prospects.

Secondly, as to Taiwanese students' expectations and perceptions of foreign students, most local students have read the recruitment brochure they received from the university before enrolling in the International College. However, the interview indicates that the students did not know much about the International College prior to their actual attendance in the college.

Most local students entered the college through their own will. Their expectations of the International College prior to actual attendance were mostly positive. They thought they could make many foreign friends, and the learning environment would be as free and open as that in foreign countries.

Compared with the local students' positive perceptions of the International College, their impressions of foreign students before entering the college are quite different, which can be divided as follows: no specific impression, positive impression, and negative impression. While some local students have no specific impression of foreign students, the number of local students with a positive impression is nearly the same as that of local students with a negative impression of foreign students.

As indicated by the interview data, not many local students have communicated even once with foreigners prior to entering the International College. Regardless of whether their impressions of foreign students are positive or negative, these perceptions are formed based on the media's description and presentation of foreigners. Local students with a positive impression of foreigners think that most foreigners are creative and have their own independent ideas or are good-looking. Those with a negative impression mention discrimination. They think they might be discriminated by foreigners because of the language barrier.

Thirdly, there are some observations made by local students in class after entering the International College. It is divided into two subsections.

1) Interaction between foreign students and the instructor: In a multicultural classroom, the first aspect noticed by local students is that there are significant differences between foreign students' and local students' interactions with the instructor. First, there is a difference between foreign and local students

in terms of seat selection. Foreign students usually choose seats in the front in order to be closer to the instructor, while local students try to sit relatively far from the instructor.

It is noted that foreign students usually take the initiative to interact with the instructor. They not only actively answer questions raised by the instructor but also take the initiative to ask questions to the instructor and express their own ideas; sometimes, they even question or challenge the instructor.

On the contrary, Taiwanese students mostly remain silent when the instructor asks questions in class. Further, they neither proactively speak out nor express their ideas.

In addition to the language barrier, local students realize that such a phenomenon is determined by the differences in norms of education and cultures, as well. Although local students do have doubts in class, most of them choose to remain silent in fear of making mistakes and in awe of the instructor's authority.

In addition, they observed that foreign students' courage to speak up in class is not necessarily related to their advantage in terms of English proficiency. Many foreign students whose mother tongue is not English also actively express their ideas in class; in the interview, many students attributed this to the way foreign students were raised and their culture. Compared to Western students, Eastern students seem to be relatively passive in class.

Most local students are positive toward the activeness of foreign students in class. They think the foreign students have their own independent ideas and thoughts. However, local students have a negative attitude toward the fact that foreign students debate, challenge, or question the instructor in class. According to most local students, although foreign students can express their different ideas in class, they should always respect the instructor. Although the local students are dissatisfied with the behavior of foreign students, they do not confront the foreigners in class. Most local students prefer to keep this discontent private.

2) Interactions between local and foreign students: Interactions between the students occur mostly when the instructor asks them to give a presentation or do assignments in groups. According to the interviewees, most instructors at the International College force local students to work with foreign students as group members in order to prevent the formation of cliques comprising local students. However, while selecting group members, local students continue to prefer foreign students who are from Asian countries and whose mother tongue is not English or those who are proficient in speaking Chinese. This tendency reveals that local students lack confidence in using English and usually avoid communication in English by choosing foreign students whose mother tongue is not English as their group members.

While cooperating with foreign students in groups, most local students feel that the former are relatively more aggressive and always desirous of occupying a leadership position in the group. Foreign students usually assume the role of leaders in group projects, deciding the direction of a report, assigning work, guiding, supervising, making the final presentation, and answering questions. In

comparison, local students, who are restricted by their limited language proficiency, seem much quieter. They are usually passive and do not elucidate their independent ideas. As a result, they do not actually participate in such collaborative processes.

Quite a few interviewees said that they are sometimes discriminated or attacked by foreign students during group work or while cooperating to make presentations. Especially when giving presentations in class, foreign students will directly express their criticism or discontent, which often cause the local students giving the presentation on stage to feel self-conscious or even humiliated.

Nevertheless, even when foreign students criticize local students during collaborative processes or while delivering oral reports, most local students continue to avoid direct confrontation with the latter. In most cases, they will complain in private or try to communicate privately with foreign students in the hope of maintaining a harmonious relationship with the foreign students.

However, many local students said that they have benefitted greatly from getting along with foreign students in class. This relationship not only helps them learn many different ideas but also stimulates their curiosity and motivation to excel so that they can compete with foreign students in terms of academic performance.

Fourth, regarding the interactions with foreign students outside the class, apart from interacting with foreign students inside the class, local students have the chance to form relationships with foreign students outside the class, as well. As indicated by the interview results, many local students do not interact with foreign students frequently outside the class, and their interaction is often limited to discussions about schoolwork. Some local students prefer not to talk with foreign students because of their inadequate skills in English. According to them, it is very difficult to chat with others and elaborate on a topic in an unfamiliar language.

As revealed by the interview, most local students recognize the opportunity to interact with foreign students, although most of them prefer to interact with the foreign students who can speak Chinese. Thus, it is clear that language continues to be the biggest barrier between local and foreign students.

In addition, outside the class, local students have the opportunity to engage in nonverbal interaction with foreign students. According to most local students, they were at first extremely unused to the excessively enthusiastic nonverbal behaviors of foreign students, such as hugging and even kissing. However, after getting along with them over time, most local students accept these foreign behavioral norms. Nonverbal communication not only refers to bodily gestures or movements but also includes concepts like temporal and spatial scales. As observed by several interviewees, there are notable differences between local students and the foreign students from certain cultures regarding the concept of time. Initially, such differences lead to misunderstandings and difficulties. However, over time, students tend to adapt themselves to other cultures, and both foreign and local students readily make concessions for the other's behavior.

Fifth, as indicated by the interviews, the main pressure felt by most local students during the adaptation

process comes from schoolwork, rather than interpersonal communication difficulties. The lack of adaptation of local students in schoolwork mainly originates from their inadequate proficiency in using English. In the English immersion instruction environment, local students need to both try extra hard at understanding the instructor's commands and compete with foreign students who can speak English fluently at the same time, which increases the pressure of many local students in terms of adaptation. As mentioned by many interviewees, they need to improve on oral English the most, for they feel extremely stressed when they need to speak English or make a presentation before their peers.

Sixth, local students will seek social support. Earlier, social support was a proper noun used by sociologists. It refers to the behavior of individuals aiming to gain emotional, cognitive, or material support from one specific member, group, or environment; individuals can rely on these support systems while overcoming setbacks and pressure (Shi, 2006). As shown by the interviews, local students seek mainly two types of social support during the adaptation process. First, they seek support from their peers, e.g., their classmates from high school, classmates in the university, or friends. When suffering from pressure or setbacks, most local students will complain to their peers or seek guidance from them.

The second type of social support sought by them comes from family. A small percentage of local students said that they seek emotional support from their family members when they suffer setbacks or feel stressed. However, local students seek social support from their family members less often than they do from their peers.

As indicated by the interviews, on encountering difficulties in schoolwork, local students tend to try solving the problems by themselves. They seek outside help only when they feel they cannot resolve these difficulties by themselves. However, according to most interviewees, they rarely seek professional assistance or counseling from the university and, often, they are not even aware that such resources exist in the university. As maintained by some students, even if they know that relevant assistance in this respect is provided by the university, they will not ask for such help, because they do not think their problems serious enough to warrant such recourse. It is obvious that local students consider seeking the help of the university as the last resort, and they prefer to solve their problems by themselves or seek help from their peers.

Next, the research found that the factors that contribute to local students' adaptation to the cross-cultural learning environment can be divided into the following four aspects. The first factor is their experiences of living in an English-speaking environment or using English in their daily life prior to entering the International College. Local students with such experiences said that it is easier for them to adapt to the English immersion learning environment, and they are more courageous in expressing their ideas compared to other local students without such experiences.

The second factor is the substantial efforts taken by local students in schoolwork. As mentioned above, the pressure faced by most local students studying at the International College comes from schoolwork.

The time and effort devoted by local students to their schoolwork also affect their adaptation speed. Some local students face a crisis situation on entering the International College because of their realization that they cannot catch up with the foreign students in schoolwork. Thus, they understand that they can adapt themselves to the cross-cultural learning environment only by working harder.

Extracurricular work experience or cross-cultural contact is the third factor that contributes to local students' adaptation to the cross-cultural learning environment. Some local students work during their spare time on jobs related to their courses. According to them, such work experience is of great help in enhancing their professional knowledge and skills, as well as English communication skills. Some local students participate in the Learning Companion System during their spare time. Being the learning companions of foreign students not only helps local students practice their English but also facilitates their understanding of different cultures.

Local students' personalities comprise the fourth factor. As mentioned in Section 2, in a cross-cultural learning environment, different people have different reactions to their environment. Therefore, the adaptabilities of individuals are affected by their personalities. As expressed by some students, they are relatively proactive and this personality trait prompts them to take the initiative in communicating with or be sufficiently brave to seek advice from foreign students.

Finally, according to the majority of the interviewees, local students' adaptation process at the International College is a measure of their efforts. Most interviewees do not think that local students should rely on others or the university to solve their problems. Instead, they are supposed to work harder to adapt themselves to the new environment. Some interviewees also explicitly pointed out that some students in the class find it hard to adapt themselves to the new environment because they are not sufficiently proactive and do not work sufficiently hard, as, otherwise, it is not that hard to adapt to the environment at the International College.

Lastly, the study explores the course of cross-cultural adaptation with the four stages differentiated by scholars such as Smalley (1963) and Deutsch and Won (1963) based on the U-curve theory. The four stages include the honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and biculturalism adaptation stages.

1) The honeymoon stage: Although scholars have not reached a consensus on the standard to divide the four stages, the honeymoon stage usually occurs within the first several days or weeks or even the complete six months after individuals are immersed in a new environment. As indicated by the interviews, the honeymoon stage for local students after entering the International College usually lasts anywhere from several weeks to a semester. During this stage, the interviewees universally feel excited, fresh, and interested about the new environment. They are eager to meet or make new friends of different nationalities and take a tolerant attitude toward the cultural differences that they face. However, it is worth noting that most interviewees also suffer from fear and anxiety while feeling excited during the honeymoon stage on immediately entering the International College. Since local students have to face the English immersion learning environment once the school starts and there is no

transitional period, they have to endure directly uneasiness and pressure with respect to schoolwork, as well as dealing with the impact of different cultures in class. Therefore, the honeymoon stage for local students at the International College is universally short.

2) The crisis stage: Most local students will enter the crisis stage shortly after they are admitted by the International College. During this stage, they feel anxious, nervous, and afraid. They feel different from others, and they cannot adapt to the new environment. For example, they become extremely anxious when required to speak in class or go in front of the class to give a presentation.

During this stage, the conflict between local and foreign students gradually becomes prominent, as well. Such conflict is obviously manifested in group projects. According to some interviewees, local students are usually rejected by foreign students in groupings because the latter doubt the ability of local students and assume that locals will be a burden to the other group members.

To ensure that local students have more opportunities to communicate with foreign students, some instructors at the International College will forcibly arrange local and foreign students in the same group. As mentioned above, foreign students will usually take a dominant role in the group at this time. Though local students remain relatively passive within the group, conflicts still occur sometimes during the discussion process. For instance, there may be quarrels between local and foreign students when they disagree with each other in their opinions or work. However, as shown by the interviews, local students try to avoid such quarrels by peacefully communicating with foreign students in order to avoid direct conflicts. Once conflicts arise, most local students prefer not to be in the same group as foreign students next time and even avoid contacting them.

In addition, local students are not used to the manner in which foreign students directly express their opinions and preferences. For example, foreign students sometimes directly criticize the reports made by local students in class or engage too aggressively in the discussion process. Some interviewees said that they were once unable to find a way out of the embarrassing situation caused by foreign students' harsh and direct criticism in class. Nevertheless, most local students prefer to avoid or endure such embarrassment in the hope of maintaining a harmonious relationship with foreign students.

When conflicts occur or the relationships between local and foreign students deteriorate, local students will stereotype the two sides. They might think that foreign students are too aggressive and have too many subjective opinions or that local students are relatively even-tempered and easygoing.

3) The recovery stage: As revealed by the interviews, most local students gradually adapt to the English immersion instruction environment and regain their confidence within half a year or one year after entering the International College due to the improvement in their language proficiencies and knowledge in various aspects.

During this stage, as the interaction between local and foreign students becomes more and more frequent, they gradually begin to understand their mutual cultural differences and familiarize themselves with the means of expression and behavioral patterns of each other. For instance, by taking

part in extracurricular activities, local and foreign students gain the opportunity to communicate with each other further. Extracurricular activities are relatively more relaxed and contain less competitive pressure than classroom activities. Besides, students take the initiative to participate in such activities on their own interest; thus, it is easier for local students to have common interests with foreign students. After making gradual improvements in English skills, local students also begin to express their ideas and opinions while cooperating with foreign students rather than unequivocally allowing the latter to take all leadership positions. Moreover, they begin to learn to cope with the conflicts and nervousness present in the previous stage.

Since local students have gained more time and opportunities to get along with foreign students, they gradually come to understand the correlations between the means of expression and culture of foreign students, and local students begin to take a relatively positive attitude toward the behaviors of foreign students. For example, during the crisis stage, local students maintained that foreign students express their opinions so directly that it often leads to conflicts between local and foreign students. However, in the recovery stage, local students begin to realize that foreign students' manner of expression might be determined by their habits or culture, and there is no absolute right and wrong way regarding expression. As gleaned from the interviews, in the aspect of schoolwork, local students need to make certain improvements in English before they can truly adapt to the new environment. Nevertheless, it is much easier for them to enter the recovery stage when it comes to getting along with foreign students in daily life. In other words, for local students, adaptation in interpersonal association is easier than that in schoolwork.

As indicated by the interviews, during this stage, foreign students also begin to positively respond to local students and encourage the latter because of their excellent performance in schoolwork. Such interaction makes local students feel stimulated and acknowledged; thus, they become more confident about themselves.

4) The biculturalism adaptation stage: As depicted in the interviews, senior local students have entered the biculturalism adaptation stage. They have gotten used to the English immersion instruction environment and lifestyle. As their anxiety disappears gradually, they become proficient in handling their schoolwork and interpersonal relationships with foreign students.

5. Analysis and Conclusions

Based on the above description and interpretation of the cross-cultural adaptation process of Taiwanese students in the International College, this study further compares the process by which Taiwanese students adjust to the cultural impact with the research questions, conducts a dialogue regarding the theoretical and actual findings, and thereby enumerates the research conclusions. The following analysis is divided into two parts, the difficulties and challenges faced by local students during the adaptation process and manner in which these students adapt to the new environment at the

International College.

5.1 Difficulties and Challenges Faced by Local Students during the Adaptation Process

Taiwanese students in the International College face numerous difficulties and challenges while adapting themselves to the new college environment due to their limitations in terms of language proficiency. Therefore, the most significant pressure on most local students during the earlier period after entering the International College comes from schoolwork since their lack of adaptation in schoolwork is caused by their inadequate English skills. As expressed by the majority of local students in the interviews, inadequate English skills were the cause of their anxiety and nervousness in both schoolwork and interpersonal communication during the initial stage of adaptation because while interacting with foreign students, various aspects such as diction, grammar, idiomatic expressions, and dialects all lead to difficulties in cross-cultural communication. Thus, students with comparatively limited English skills may consider communication with foreign students a difficult or stressful undertaking and thereby avoid all opportunities to communicate with foreign students. However, it is not possible to become proficient in a foreign language overnight. It takes from half a year to one year on average for most local students to adapt themselves to the English immersion instruction environment. This is another reason why local students find it harder to adapt to the new environment in schoolwork than in interpersonal communication.

Besides, local students' stereotypes of foreign students are very likely to impose barriers in communications during the early stage when they are exposed to different cultures. A stereotype refers to a fixed, oversimplified, overgeneralized, or exaggerated image that is believed by many people to represent a particular type of person or thing (Chen, 2003). It often misguides people in ignoring either consciously or unconsciously the differences between individuals in a group. Although stereotypes sometimes help us better understand the world, their distortion of facts often causes communication barriers between different cultures. Most local students had preconceived notions, both positive and negative, about foreign students before entering the International College. However, such stereotypes mostly originate from the media rather than personal experience. During the early stage of adaptation, due to the lack of personal experience, many local students judged the behaviors of foreign students based on their stereotypes. However, on entering the recovery stage, local students began to understand the existence of differences inside a cultural community. They began to realize that the behavioral patterns of foreign students might have been shaped by individualistic, rather than overall cultural, factors. Therefore, though it is hard to change stereotypes or prejudices, the increase in local students' personal experiences with foreign students helps to improve or correct the former's stereotypes about the latter.

Here, this study applies the Cultural Value Orientation Model put forward by Hall et al. to analyze Taiwanese students' adaptation process at the International College. Hall (1976) divided culture into high-context and low-context cultures from the perspective of communication. The former emphasizes

an indirect way of expression. The message conveyed is relatively simple. A high-context culture emphasizes group consciousness and places a high value on establishing long-term friendships or interpersonal relationships. China, Japan, and Taiwan belong to this type. A low-context culture expresses messages via direct communication. Featuring an individualistic orientation, it adopts a linear way of logical thinking. Countries like the United States, Canada, and Germany belong to this type of culture. As indicated by the interviews, local students at the International College also displayed the characteristics of their high-context culture during their adaptation process. Instead of directly expressing their advices or ideas, they prefer indirect ways of expression, preferring individuals' internality or expressing their opinions via body language. Thus, the messages they express are usually vague or simple, and sometimes they even prefer to remain silent. On the contrary, foreign students attach importance to explicit verbal messages. Emphasizing self-expression, they directly express their ideas and try to persuade others to accept their ideas. As a result, in the very beginning, most local students were not acclimated to or found it hard to accept the foreign students' way of expression. The second characteristic of a high-context culture is that it strongly emphasizes harmony. When there are conflicts between local and foreign students, most local students choose to remain silent or withhold their temper, trying to avoid direct conflicts. Moreover, they avoid or reduce contacts with foreign students after such events. Local students also regard harmony as a positive trait, believing it important to maintain a peaceful atmosphere and a mutually harmonious relationship.

According to the analysis predicated on the Cultural Value Orientation Model presented by Hofstede, the study reveals that local students at the International College tend to emphasize collectivism during the adaptation process. They universally acknowledge the cultural values of collectivism. In class, local students are inclined to gather in groups. They have their own cliques. In particular, when they are required to make reports or take part in class activities, local students are used to cooperating with a fixed set of classmates, and they agree with the quality and effectiveness of group learning. After adapting to a new environment, local students will affiliate themselves with one specific group and strengthen collective actions within the group. In other words, local students at the International College developed a sense of belonging to a group. They regard themselves as a part of this group and classify foreign students as the members of the "they-group", who do not belong to the "we-group", that is, they belong to the "non we-group". Therefore, the interviewees sometimes used expressions like "we local students..." and "they foreign students..." to distinguish between local and foreign students. This phenomenon was fully exposed when the local students talked about their opinions on "the relationship between foreign students and instructors". According to local students, the behavior of foreign students regarding their direct expressions of dissatisfaction about or doubting the instructor in class is a type of disrespect, and "Taiwanese students will definitely not do this". Apparently, while stating their opinions on "the relationship between foreign students and instructors", local students differentiated themselves as a group opposite to foreign students. The isolation between we-group and

they-group extends from inside to outside the classroom. While performing extracurricular activities, local students rarely communicate with foreign students. Even if there is any contact, they prefer to interact with foreign students who are relatively proficient in Chinese. Thus, it is clear that language remains the main factor affecting the interaction between local and foreign students.

In addition, the relationship between local students and instructors reveals the phenomenon of a high power distance. In societies with a high power distance, people strictly follow a hierarchy where everybody has a niche. The power and obligations of superiors and subordinates are clearly stipulated, and it is mandatory for subordinates to obey their superiors. Taiwan is a country with a high power distance. However, in societies with low power distances, people attach less importance to differences in terms of etiquette, status, and gender and believe professional ability to be more important than a hierarchical structure. As revealed by the interviews, local students respect instructors in class, and the latter take the leading role, while the former are in a passive position. As maintained by local students, students are supposed to follow and respect what the instructor says. Even if they doubt the instructor or are dissatisfied about what the instructor says, they dare not directly express their dissatisfaction or challenge the authority of the instructor in class. Foreign students directly address instructors by their names in class, whereas local students regard instructors in an authoritative role and address them “Sir or Madam”. Besides, local students rarely question the instructor proactively. Most of them prefer to solve the problems themselves or ask their classmates for help. If there is no option other than asking the instructor for help, they will choose to do so after class or in private. As far as foreign students are concerned, instructors are only experts who teach them knowledge and help them solve problems. This does not mean that instructors should not be doubted or challenged; students are not obliged to obey the instructors, either. Therefore, when foreign students doubt the viewpoints of instructors or put forward different opinions in class, local students mostly regard this as a behavior that is disrespectful to the instructors. In their eyes, even if they want to express different ideas, they should do it in a more polite way, rather than embarrassing the instructors by speaking out bluntly in class. This is another difference between local and foreign students caused by the differences in their cultures.

5.2 How Local Students Adapt to the New Environment at the International College

First, for local students at the International College, adaptation is an inevitable result. Since they have already chosen to enter such an environment, they have to change themselves appropriately to adapt to the new environment for survival. Of course, many factors affect the adaptation process of local students at the International College. This study reveals the following main factors:

The first factor is the intention and motivation of school attendance. As implied by the interviews, local students with stronger personal willingness to enter the college, who are clearly intent on entering the International College, will work harder to adapt to the new environment and be more willing to devote themselves to schoolwork. Local students who are more willing to learn about different cultures in an open-minded manner find it easier to integrate themselves into the multicultural environment and get

along well with foreign students. Thus, it is seen that if local students have a clear cognition of their intentions of entering the International College and are willing to make certain adjustments, they can adapt themselves well to the new environment at the college. Hence, local students with higher individual levels of intention of internal adjustment will experience better external adjustment and interact better with their peers.

The second factor is the language incompetence of local students. Though local students do not experience too many cultural differences in the university and overall social environment and they can still use the language they are familiar with, on entering the International College, they have to face the English immersion instruction environment. Because of the language barrier, most interviewees said that their main pressure after entering the college comes from schoolwork, which is caused by the fact that they are not familiar with English. It takes about one year for local students to adapt completely to the English immersion instruction environment and be able to express their ideas and opinions fluently in English. Moreover, due to the language barrier, local students rarely take the initiative to communicate with foreign students and even avoid communicating with them in the early stages of adaptation. Therefore, if local students can use English effectively, their adaptation process will certainly be much smoother.

The third factor comprises differences in personality traits. As mentioned in the Literature Review section, a person's behavior is determined by his or her innate personality. In a cross-cultural learning environment, different students respond differently to their surroundings. Thus, their different personality traits also affect students' adaptability. Local students who are relatively proactive are more likely to take the initiative to communicate with foreign students and accept different cultures. It is easier for them to get along well with foreign students and better adapt to the new environment.

The fourth factor refers to the effort taken by local students in language skills development, schoolwork, and interpersonal relationships. According to most of the local student interviewees, whether local students can adapt to the new environment at the International College is strongly related to their effort level. If they act more proactively in asking classmates or instructors for help in schoolwork, they will better adapt to the environment; regarding interpersonal relationships with foreign students, local students who take the initiative to communicate and interact with foreign students find it much easier to get along with them and adapt to the multicultural environment.

As indicated by this study, the main pressure on local students comes from schoolwork, for which the fundamental reason is that their English lacks proficiency. For local students, it is easier to adapt to a cross-cultural environment and get along with foreign students compared to coping with the pressure of schoolwork. Local students who have just entered the International College are curious about or unused to various foreign cultures and customs; however, within a short time frame, these students usually adapt to these customs or understand that they are caused by different cultural backgrounds. However, it takes on average one year for local students to master English or adapt to the English immersion

teaching environment. Consequently, local students gradually feel anxious about speaking or making oral reports in class. As shown by the adaptation curve, the honeymoon stage experienced by local students after entering the International College is extremely short. They are usually anxious and uneasy during this stage because they have to face the English immersion teaching environment immediately and there is no transition period at all. The adaptation of local students can be divided into two aspects, schoolwork and life. Local students face a comparatively long crisis stage with respect to schoolwork because they can gradually adapt to the new environment only after improving their English proficiency. However, when it comes to the aspect of life, local students need only a short time to adapt to cross-cultural conflicts, and they can rapidly enter the recovery and biculturalism adaptation stages.

Since relevant studies in the past seldom focused on the cross-cultural adaptation of local students, this preliminary study tries to fill this research gap by exploring the perspectives of local students regarding their cross-cultural activities in an English immersion teaching environment and revealing the challenges experienced by these students under such circumstances. It is expected to develop relevant research in the future, provide reference for educational organizations in Taiwan that apply English immersion teaching, and offer help for future education internationalization. Although this study applies a qualitative research method, relevant studies in the future can attempt to integrate a quantitative questionnaire survey in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the values and ideas of local students and strengthen the foundation of in-depth interviews. This study focuses on Taiwanese students alone at the International College of Ming Chuan University. Future studies can expand the research objective to include undergraduates or postgraduates from other universities with similar programs, or even include to make a comparative study or further analyze the influences of different systems, geographical locations, or environments on cross-cultural adaptation.

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Note

Note 1. Now International Affairs and Diplomacy Program and Fashion & Innovation Management are included now.

Appendix I

Table 3-1. Proportions of Taiwanese Students and International Students Who Major in Journalism and Mass Communication at the International College

Grade	4	3	2	1	Total
International Students	14 (58.3%)	17 (56.7%)	18 (45%)	9 (30%)	58 (46.8%)
Taiwanese Students	10 (41.7%)	13 (43.3%)	22 (55%)	21 (70%)	66 (53.2%)
Total	24	30	40	30	124

Table 3-2. Proportions of Taiwanese Students and International Students Who Major in International Enterprise and Management at the International College

Grade	4	3	2	1	Total
International Students	86 (86.0%)	44 (77.2%)	42 (63.6%)	60 (70.6%)	232 (75.3%)
Taiwanese Students	14 (14.0%)	13 (22.8%)	24 (36.4%)	25 (29.4%)	76 (24.7%)
Total	100	57	66	85	308

Appendix II

An outline of the questions to be asked in the in-depth interviews:

1. What is your original motivation for enrolling in the International College?
2. How do you interact with international students in class?
3. How do you interact with international students outside class?
4. What difficulties have you encountered while interacting with international students?
5. What suggestions do you have for interacting and communicating with international students?
6. As a student of the International College, what do you think you have learned from the cross-cultural contact with international students?
7. Do you enjoy the English immersion teaching environment at the International College? What kind of positive or negative impacts does it have on your learning?
8. What suggestions do you have for the English teaching environment at the International College?