

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Understanding friendship and learning networks of international and host students using longitudinal Social Network Analysis

Bart Rienties^{a,b,*}, Eimear-Marie Nolan^c^a Department of Higher Education, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK^b Institute of Educational Technology, Open University UK, Milton Keynes, UK^c Faculty of Business, Economics and Law, University of Surrey, Guildford, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 May 2013

Received in revised form

13 December 2013

Accepted 16 December 2013

Keywords:

Social network analysis

Longitudinal study

Quantitative

Pre-post testing

International students

Friendship

Learning

Host students

ABSTRACT

While the number of international students travelling abroad for higher education constantly increases, it has been recognised among educators that international students have difficulty adjusting to their host educational environment. Past research indicates that international students' personal ties with other international, home and host students can influence their cross-cultural adjustment to their new environment. Drawing from cross-cultural, educational science and social network research, we conducted a longitudinal study using dynamic social network analyses into how 485 international and 107 host students build learning and work relationships at both bachelor and post-graduate level.

Results indicate that students from different cultural backgrounds develop dissimilar national and international friendships and learning relationships over time. Additionally, in contrast to previous findings our MRQAP and multiple regression analyses indicate that social interactions among international and host students did not become more intertwined over time. However, active (mixed) group activities (temporarily) increase cross-cultural interaction, indicating that institutions can play an active role in improving cross-cultural adjustment.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

As an increasing number of students are opting to study abroad (Gu, Schweisfurth, & Day, 2009; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013; Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010), it is important to understand how international students learn and interact with each other and host-national students. Successful adjustment to the various aspects of a host culture (i.e., work, general living, and social interaction) and interaction with other international and host students have been linked to positive outcomes such as increased task performance, satisfaction, and reduced intent to quit prematurely (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013; Rienties, Beusaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, & Kommers, 2012; Russell et al., 2010; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008).

A large body of research on internationalisation has focussed on determining how individual characteristics, such as academic integration (Rienties et al., 2012; Zepke & Leach, 2005) or psychological and socio-cultural factors (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) influence international students' adjustment and learning to the host-institution. However, a limited number of studies (e.g., Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Rienties, Hernandez

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 1908332671.

E-mail address: B.rienties@surrey.ac.uk (B. Rienties).

Nanclares, Jindal-Snape, & Alcott, 2013) have focussed on how social (learning) relations of international and host-national students influence students' ability to interact both in- and outside the classroom. A common assumption held by many teachers is that some groups of international students tend to stick together and seem hesitant to interact with host students. The degree to which students are able to develop friendship, working and learning relations influences their ability to cope with the complex demands of higher education (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Rienties et al., 2012; Rienties, Heliot, & Jindal-Snape, 2013; Rienties, Hernandez Nanclares, et al., 2013).

Recently, several researchers (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Neri & Ville, 2008; Rienties, Heliot, et al., 2013; Rienties, Hernandez Nanclares, et al., 2013) have adopted a methodological approach called Social Network Analysis (SNA) to measure, visualise and predict how international and host students develop social interactions. SNA can be considered as a wide-ranging strategy utilised to explore and predict social structures while uncovering the existence of social positions of (sub)groups within a network (Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, & Labianca, 2009; Curşeu, Janssen, & Raab, 2012; Katz, Lazer, Arrow, & Contractor, 2004).

For example, research by Hendrickson et al. (2011) on social friendship networks of 84 international students at the University of Hawaii found that having more relations with host students was positively correlated with satisfaction and connectivity. Our own research (Rienties, Heliot, et al., 2013; Rienties, Hernandez Nanclares, et al., 2013) in two post-graduate business modules in the UK indicates that students at the start of the modules primarily established friendships with students from similar cultural backgrounds. However, we noticed an increase in cross-cultural friendship and learning links over time when students were randomised into small-groups and “forced” to work together on a range of group tasks. Nonetheless, substantial social segregation in friendship, learning and working networks of international and host students remained present for some groups of international students (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Neri & Ville, 2008; Rienties, Hernandez Nanclares, et al., 2013), in particular for international students with a large cultural distance relative to host students, such as Confucian Asian students.

According to a recent literature study by Volet and Jones (2012, pp. 255–256), “[c]hange in international and local students' engagement in intercultural interactions over a period of time has attracted limited empirical attention. . . Intervention studies aimed at enhancing intercultural engagement among local and international students tend to be small scale, descriptive, and lacking methodological rigor”. Therefore, we will adopt a dynamic longitudinal social network analyses study (SNA: Rienties, Hernandez Nanclares, et al., 2013), whereby we compare the social network developments of international and host students at ten different time intervals across five modules during a bachelor and post-graduate business programme. Within the academic year 2011–2012, 247 students across three modules participated in a pre-post test design (i.e., start and end of each module) after one and three months, after 12 and 15 months, and 30 and 33 months during their Bachelor programme. Furthermore, 345 post-graduate students participated in a pre-post test design after one and three months, and seven and nine months.

In this study, we explore how international students over time build, develop and maintain friendship, learning and working relations with co-national, multi-national and/or host-national students. Three fields of literature that have been historically separated are drawn upon, namely cross-cultural expatriate literature (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Black, 1988; Selmer & Leung, 2003), educational science (Gu et al., 2009; Volet & Jones, 2012; Ward et al., 1998), and research in social network science (Curşeu et al., 2012; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Krackhardt & Stern, 1988; Neri & Ville, 2008). Although we acknowledge that the reasons and drivers for “going abroad” for sojourners and expatriates may vary, we anticipate that combining the two separate research fields with recent insights in social network theory can provide a new perspective on the development of friendship and learning links of international students.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Findings from expatriate literature

Black (1988) presents three facets of adjustment when looking at expatriate assignments: interaction adjustment, work adjustment, and general adjustment. *Interaction Adjustment* refers to the degree of interaction an expatriate has with host-nationals and the comfort they feel interacting with supervisors, peers and subordinates in the host culture (Black & Stephens, 1989). Black et al. (1991) articulate that interaction adjustment is the most difficult dimension of adjustment, as differences in mental maps and rules (perceptions, beliefs and values) become evident when expatriates interact with host-nationals. Different cultures generally have certain norms that guide the proper functioning of individuals within the society. As a result of these differences, expatriates can initially experience conflict and misunderstandings in the host culture with host-nationals. Social learning theory suggests that individuals learn appropriate behaviours through interaction and observation of host-nationals during the adjustment process (Black et al., 1991; Caligiuri, 2000).

Work Adjustment is conceptualised as the degree of adjustment an individual has about the job, responsibilities and working conditions in the host-country (Black & Stephens, 1989; Black, 1988). Hechanova, Beehr, and Christiansen (2003) meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of expatriate adjustment found that interaction with host-nationals was positively correlated with work adjustment. We anticipate that host-nationals can supply the international students with important information about the education system and the behaviours and practices that are expected from them within the host culture, thus aiding their overall adjustment.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/946978>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/946978>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)