

The Process of Interactions among Students of Different Cultures and Nationalities at a Malaysian Public University and Its Effects on Their Academic and Personal Lives

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Abstract: *Daily interpersonal communication among students of different cultures and countries, and their personal and academic lives at the collegiate environments are among the important educational issues to be evaluated. Thus, this study aimed to assess the effects of daily interpersonal communication between local and international students of a Malaysian public university, University Malaysia Pahang (UMP) on their personal and academic lives. Findings of this research project may help the related policymakers and working-bodies at universities to improve communication and academic skills of students by increase of daily interaction opportunities among them. The quantitative survey with its 220 participants from both local and international students of UMP was applied as the main method of this study, and also qualitative interviews were conducted to enrich the data. According to the findings of this study, interactions between Malaysian and international students of UMP had positive effects on their personal and academic lives, and paved the ways for them to learn some essential communication skills, and also helped them to be happy, and have enough collaborative activities at the university campus. However, further studies may deepen the information on the related issues.*

Keywords: *Interactions; Interpersonal communication; Academic and personal lives; Malaysian universities*

I. Introduction

Interpersonal communication (IPC) is an essential factor for all university students to build their capacity, have more opportunities of daily collaborative activities at the collegiate campuses, and gain some essential communication skills through it. As argued, the ability of interactions in the multicultural backgrounds is an important skill of both private and public lives (Lusting & Koester, 2006 as cited in Gao, 2011). And, in the public education, increase of skills on interpersonal communication is the key prerequisite of cooperative learning which stated to have positive effects on the self-claimed achievements of students on knowledge attainments and resolving of their problems (Astin, 1993; Light, 2001 as cited in Aidoo, 2012). Also, Aidoo (2012) asserted that, personal and professional lives of students may advance through understanding and interactions at the university environments.

According to the above mentioned assertions of some scholars, it would be useful to evaluate the process of daily IPC among students of higher education institutions and its effects on their private and academic lives. However, some scholars and researchers (e.g. Bryant, 2012; Gibbs, 2011; Huang, 2010; Izumi, 2010; Abdulla, 2008) conducted studies on the related issues, but the themes and findings of their studies belong to geographical, social and cultural aspects and norms of those countries -like the United States -which differ fundamentally from Malaysia and some other Asian countries. Therefore, this research project designed to assess the process of daily IPCs between Malaysian and international students of a Malaysian public university, University Malaysia Pahang (UMP) and its effects on their individual and university related lives.

1.1 Aim of Study

This study aimed to highlight the effects of daily interactions between local and international students of a Malaysian public university, UMP on their private and academic lives and find out that whether daily interactions among them have effects on their life and academic successes at the university campus. \

1.2 Significance of Study

Findings of this study may be fruitful for university officials to design and commence essential programs on increasing of academic achievements of university students, and may encourage students to be more involved in the daily interactions at the university campuses.

II. Literature Review

Interpersonal communication is introduced as a process that people interact with others through their spoken or non-spoken messages; whereas the communicators' maximized attending is required (Dawson, 2008; Crowell, 2011). However, their social, academic or personal needs may encourage university students to participate in the daily interactions among students of different cultures and countries. At the same time, it is important for them to gain some essential communicative skills through their daily interactions to be involved in further IPCs at the university campuses and be more successful in their daily academic life as well. As asserted by Aidoo (2012), improvement of abilities in interactions among people was counted important, because all human beings are social. Also, Donaldson & Kurtz (1997) pointed out that, education and teaching are the dominant abilities of communication.

Furthermore, daily interactions among students of different cultures and nationalities with their different educational norms may pave the ways for the establishment of an international theme of learning process at modern universities. As argued by Hord & Hirsh (2008 cited in Bryant, 2012), discussions and interactions make an intense and successful experience of universal learning, knowledge distribution, inquiring and challenging of opinions, arguing assumptions, and accomplishment of agreement. Nowadays, all educated people and employees required to gain enough skills of IPC to be more successful in their daily works. In the new millennium, all business related and educational working bodies are concentrating on workers who have good skills in interpersonal interactions; thus, meetings and interactions of students at universities may advance these abilities while students collaborate with people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds (House, 2004 cited in Aidoo, 2012; Crowell, 2011; Aidoo, 2012).

Based on the findings from the literature, it became clear that daily IPCs among students of different ethnicities and cultures are useful for their personal and public lives, and they were asked to be involved in.

III. Method

The quantitative survey was the main method of this study, and the qualitative data through direct interviews were collected for further information.

3.1 Participants

For the quantitative survey, 220 students of UMP equally from both local and international were participated, as 110 participants were local and 110 of them were international students. At the same time, based on their personal agreements, 12 participants with equal numbers from Malaysian and foreigner students of UMP were interviewed for the qualitative data. International participants of this study belonged to 21 different countries, and mostly were male and post-graduate students. Also, Malaysian participants belonged to almost all parts and ethnicities of this country, but mostly under-graduate students with the higher percentage of female ones.

3.2 Instruments

The quantitative questionnaires were designed based on the Likert's scale, and a package of interview questions was prepared as the main instruments of this research project. Also, the questionnaires were arranged by researcher of this study with reference of instruments and questionnaires of some previous works (e.g. Aidoo, 2012; Gao, 2011; Izumi, 2010).

IV. Results

Both of the quantitative and qualitative data of this research project were analyzed separately, as the quantitative data was examined through the related options of SPSS program, and the qualitative data were analyzed under the categories and sub-categories according to themes which found from answers of the participants.

4.1 Quantitative Results

The descriptive test of SPSS was conducted to find out frequencies and percentages of all participants for the demographic information. Based on the results of descriptive test, participants of the quantitative survey included 220 participants as 110 Malaysians and 110 international students of UMP. Furthermore, from 220 participants of this study, 147 were male and 73 of them were female students. At the same time, two questions of the quantitative questionnaire belonged to the subject of this paper which were questions 7 as (I know that my daily interpersonal communication with international/Malaysian student(s) is very useful for my private and public lives), and question 8 as (I learned many communicative skills at UMP, because of my interpersonal communication with international/Malaysian students of UMP). Also, each of these questions had 4 options from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree) and to weigh data positively, codes of all items were reversed by using of Transform option of SPSS and became 1(Strongly agree) to 4(Strongly disagree). A descriptive test

was applied to find out the frequencies and percentages of participant's answers for these questions and the level of their agreements as well.

According to the descriptive results, from 220 participants, 197 of them accepted that their daily IPCs were very useful for their private and public lives, and 83.1% of them agreed that they learned many communicative skills from their IPCs with local/international students during their stay and study at UMP. Also, the mean/standard deviation scores for these two questions were 3.14/.63 for Q 7 and 3.00/.68 for Q 8. As each item has 4 options and the average mean for each item is 2, therefore the mean scores which found from descriptive test are positive and higher than the average mean scores.

Furthermore, an independent-samples T-test was applied to compare the means scores of Malaysians to international participants, and from male to female participants for the above mentioned questions. Based on results of the T-tests, no significant differences were found between Malaysian and international, or between male and female participants of this study as $T(218) = -.212, p > .05$, and $T(218) = .441, p > .05$ respectively.

4.2 Qualitative Results

The qualitative data were collected through direct interviews of 12 interviewees from both Malaysian and international students of UMP as 6 local and 6 international. During the data collection, all interviewees were asked either to choose their code names or agree on use of their real identifications, and all participants agreed on use of their identifications except one, who was a Chinese student and chose his code-name.

In the results of qualitative data, the participants will be mentioned as MSX(X for number of the student) for Malaysian participants and ISX for international students. And, both local and international participants of this study been coded as 1) MS1, a Master's Malay-Malaysian student, 2) MS2, a degree Malay-Malaysian student, 3) MS3, a degree Indian -Malaysian student, 4) MS4, a degree Indian-Malaysian student, 5) MS5, a degree Malay-Malaysian student, and 6) MS6, a senior degree Chinese-Malaysian student. And international interviewees as 1) IS1, a master's student from Afghanistan, 2) IS2, a PhD student from India, 3) IS3, a PhD student from Algeria, 4) IS4, a senior degree student from China, 5) IS5, a degree student from Yemen, and 6) IS6, a master's students from Nigeria.

In the qualitative results, interviewees will be written as MSX(X for number of the student) for Malaysians and ISX for international students and this coding system was adapted from AinolHaryati Bt. Ibrahim (2011). Also, answers of the qualitative interviewees were analyzed separately and based on themes which found from their answers. At the same time, according to research-, and interview-questions, the qualitative results were categorized to categories and sub-categories, and one of the main themes and categories was Social and Academic aspects of IPC which covers the qualitative results for this paper.

4.2.1 Social and Academic Aspects of IPC

Statements of all interviewees of the qualitative data showed that their daily IPCs had some positive effects on their personal and academic lives, and also they learned many communicative skills when interacted with people of different cultures and countries at the UMP. At the same time, their daily IPCs with people of different cultures and nationalities helped all participants to have good academic achievements at the university campus as well. For example, as participant IS4 asserted "It [IPC] helped me too much, at first when I came, I had many problems, I wasn't able to go [to] Kuantan [city] or ask question from a lecturer or classmate, but my interactions helped me to solve these problems." And his statement was supported by views of IS2 as said "My communications with local students help me a lot, when I learn some few words from their language from them, it helps [me] when I go for shopping, or in the offices also I ask them anything that I want."

At the same time, participant MS4 told that "interacts with international students help me to learn some new things". And participant MS5 pointed out that "As we have different ideas and cultures, therefore, my communication with international students will help me to learn more things and also improve my English [language] by talking with them." Also, their views were supported by participant IS1 as said "I want and can learn something about their [Malaysian's] culture and environment". Also, participant IS2 said that "During my daily studies, I interact with many Malaysian and international students in the lab and other areas and it helps me a lot and we exchange experiences and help one another and our communication is good".

Furthermore, participant IS3 had to say that "We do have some collaborative activities with some Malaysian students. Mostly our interpersonal communication with Malaysian students solves our university related problems." And IS6 asserted as "I have enough collaborative works with my Malaysian classmates and also I learn many things from them." Meanwhile, participant MS3 told that "I have some collaborative activities with my international classmates and this process helps us to understand each other." And he said "My daily interpersonal communication with international students helps [me] to improve my English and learn easily" MS3.

V. Discussion And Recommendations

This study was conducted to examine the effects of daily IPCs between local and international students of a Malaysian university (UMP) on their personal and academic lives at the university environment. Based on the descriptive results, this study had 220 participants equally from both Malaysian and international students of UMP, and according to the demographic information, they belonged to the different cultures, ethnicities, lifestyles, and nationalities.

Also, based on the findings of both quantitative and qualitative data daily IPC between local and international students of UMP had positive effects on their daily life at the university environment. As from all 220 participants of quantitative survey, 197 of them reported that their daily interactions with people of different nationalities and different cultures were very useful for their personal and academic lives, and at the same time the vast majority (83.1%) of them accepted that they learned many essential communicative skills from their daily IPCs at the UMP campus as well.

At the same time, results of this study showed that the vast majority of participants of this study accepted that their daily interactions with students of different cultural and geographical backgrounds had good effects on their daily life at the university campus. Also, this study confirmed the positive effects of daily IPCs among students at the collegiate environment on the quality of their academic life as well. Therefore, the regulatory bodies and related officials of modern universities with their students from different cultures and countries must count daily IPCs among them as an important factor and improve the quality of academic life of students through it. At the same time, according to the statements of participants of the qualitative interviews which stated during their direct interviews, their daily IPCs at the university campus with other people paved the ways for them to gain new skills, improve their English language proficiency, and have enough collaborative learning at the university campus.

Furthermore, it is clear that good communicative skills of students, their good language proficiency, and their university related team work help them to be more happy and successful at the university environment and leave the university after their graduation with good personal and academic skills and eligibilities. And it is clear that, nowadays educated people with good communicative skills and language proficiency have better chances to find good jobs and be more successful in daily works as well. However, as there were no enough studies on daily interactions between local and foreigner students of Malaysian universities, thus findings of this study are among the new information on the related issues and may be useful for universities and university students to tackle the related issues and gain some of their communicative and academic aims by help of the results this study.

5.1 Recommendations

As daily IPCs among university students of different backgrounds and their personal and academic lives are always among important factors of academic environments, therefore more studies on this issue may highlight more aspects of these topics. Also, as this study was conducted at a quite young university which is far from the cosmopolitan areas, thus the same studies at the universities with long academic history and good multicultural environment may have better results on the related issues to daily interactions and academic life of students. At the same time, the process of daily interactions between faculty and university students and its effects on daily life of students and universities' popularity may be an interesting issue to be evaluated.

VI. Conclusion

To conclude it, effects of daily interpersonal communication (IPC) between local and international students of a Malaysian public university, UMP were examined through this research project. Results of this study confirmed that daily interactions among students of different cultures and nationalities had positive effects of their personal and academic lives and helped them to learn some essential communicative skills and have more collaborative activities at the university campus. At the same time, it became clear that presence of students from different cultural and geographical backgrounds at modern universities is useful for both local and international students, and their daily IPCs help them to be happier and more successful in their university related life. However, although many questions are still open to be answered, but findings of this study may answer some questions on the related issues and may help and encourage both students and officials of universities to gain benefits from presence of people of different cultures and nationalities at the university campuses.

Acknowledgement

This research project was sponsored by SHEP project in the Higher Education Ministry of Afghanistan with the collaboration of University Malaysia Pahang (UMP).

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