

**EXPLORING THE INTERACTIONS AND ATTITUDES
OF INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC STUDENTS
IN A NEW ZEALAND TERTIARY INSTITUTION**

Justine C Brown
Amanda J Daly
School of Business
Christchurch College of Education
March 2004

Contact Details

Justine Brown
School of Business
Christchurch College of Education
P O Box 31 065
Christchurch 8030
NEW ZEALAND

justine.brown@cce.ac.nz

Phone: +64 3 343 7748

Fax: +64 343 7749

Submission Topic Area

Business Education

Abstract

In the last decade there has been rapid growth of the New Zealand export education industry. This, combined with the current environment where tertiary classroom interaction and friendships may lead to future global business relationships, has meant that understanding interactions and attitudes between local and overseas students has become particularly relevant. This paper explores the nature and level of interaction between international and domestic students both within a tertiary classroom environment and a social context. Eighty-eight students enrolled in a business school at a New Zealand tertiary institution were surveyed to determine their current level of interaction with students from the same and different ethnic groups. Additionally, attitudes that the student groups held towards each other were analysed as moderating factors of cross-cultural interaction. It was found that interaction primarily occurred between students of the same student group and when students did interact with those from different ethnic backgrounds, it tended to be for academic rather than social activities. As expected, the attitudes and perceptions of both student groups regarding each other were established to be generally positive, suggesting the lack of interaction is not attitudinally based. Thus additional examination of factors limiting student interaction is warranted. Moreover, it is proposed that future research should investigate the impact of interventionist strategies implemented by tertiary institutions to encourage interaction between different student groups.

Introduction

In the last decade there has been rapid growth in the New Zealand export education industry. In 2002, over 80,000 foreign students travelled to New Zealand for educational purposes (Education New Zealand, 2004; Statistics New Zealand, 2004). In the Ministry of Education's report (2001) it was revealed that approximately NZD\$700 million was contributed to the New Zealand economy by the education industry. This figure rose to over NZ\$2.2 billion in 2003 (Education New Zealand, 2004), confirming that export education is one of New Zealand's largest industries.

The current global marketplace environment, combined with the prevalence of global travel and increased permanent migration to other nations, suggests no country can refute international education is now a reality (Schwellnus, 2001). This has meant that understanding interactions and attitudes between local and overseas students has become particularly relevant, for "in our increasingly global world, knowledge of other cultures, cross-cultural communication skills and international linkages are essential" (Maharey, p.7, 2001).

Current literature (see Ward, 2001 for a review) discusses the nature of interactions and attitudes between international and local students and reasons relating to why students study abroad. Suggested explanations for low interaction levels between these two student groups include personal efficacy, cultural differences and learning preferences. Ward (2001) identified that the quantity of interaction between international and domestic students is normally low and that international students anticipate and desire greater contact. Such interaction by international students with local students generally benefits the international student on a psychological, social and academic level. Far less is known about the impact on domestic students from interaction with international students. As Ward acknowledges, the majority of existing research has been undertaken "almost exclusively from the perspective of the international students" (2001, p. 2), hence necessitating domestic student views to be researched.

Beaver and Tuck (1998) identified many diverse factors influencing why foreign students choose to study in New Zealand. Of the four main aspirations they identified, 'development of proficiency in English' and 'building business and social contacts amongst the local people', are the two most relevant to this study. International students also contribute to the development of New Zealanders' interpersonal links with people from other countries including their Asia-Pacific neighbours (Asia2000 Foundation, 2003). However cross-cultural

interaction is not likely to occur spontaneously, hence the classroom environment context is relevant to how such contact can be encouraged. Ward (2001) proposes that predominantly, tertiary level educators make little change to the process or content of their educational activities when international students attend their classes. This suggests a platform for international students to communicate their experiences in class may not currently exist. A consequence of this may be non-adaptive lecture settings that are not conducive to cross-cultural interaction, such as the sharing of international experiences and non-local case studies for discussion.

Additionally awareness regarding learning preferences of Asian students and domestic students is a significant factor influencing interaction between these two groups. Better awareness of learning preferences may lead to increased understanding of cross-cultural classroom behaviour. Staff and peer study groups providing academic support and information are a social form of learning favoured by Asian students (Cameron & Meade, 2001). In contrast, local students believe studying alone is most useful for accomplishing high academic objectives (Ramsey, Barker, & Jones, 1999 cited in Cameron & Meade, 2001). Ward (2001) also discusses how individualist versus collectivist cultures influence a student's behaviour in a classroom setting such as students from individualist cultures "are likely to want to 'stand out' in class, ask questions and engage in debate" (p.18). Bartol, Martin, Tein and Matthews (1999) include New Zealand and Australia in the 'high-individualism countries' category and state behaviours of individuals from these countries include "concerning themselves with their own interests as opposed to the interests of a larger group" (p. 804). This is a disparity with students from collectivist backgrounds (including Asian countries) who are more likely to want to 'fit in' and therefore not engage in classroom debate or ask questions. The evident differences in these behaviours influence perceptions of cross-cultural classmates and if negative, subsequently limit opportunities for interaction. Ward goes on to highlight the power distance factor that also exists in collectivist cultures. This emphasises the inappropriateness of questioning the teacher and the importance of respect and maintaining formality. In summary Ward states "it is not difficult to see that these differences in cultural values can lead to misperceptions across cultural groups" (2001, p. 18).

Low occurrence of relationships between international and local students does not suggest complacency within the international student group. Indeed international students are open to and desire greater contact with domestic students (Klineberg & Hull 1979, cited in Ward, 2001). Domestic students "hold relatively favourable perceptions of international students but are disinterested in initiating contact with international peers" (Ward, 2001, p.2-3). These

findings are pertinent to establishing the level of influence attitudes and behaviours such as complacency, contribute towards cross-cultural interaction.

This study explores the nature of interaction between international and domestic students within a business education classroom environment and a social context. It attempts to determine the current level of this interaction and gain an understanding of how attitudes held by these two student groups impact on the interactions between them.

Method

The primary research for this study was quantitative in nature and aimed to collect descriptive data from the two identified stakeholder groups, domestic students and international students. As discussed earlier, in order to better understand the interaction and attitudes held by domestic and international students it was necessary to survey both student groups. Accordingly, the questionnaire was designed to explore cross-ethnic and co-ethnic interactions, friendships and classroom experiences.

Participants

The sample for this study comprised students enrolled in a business school during the second semester, 2003. The business school was selected for this study owing both to the high number of international students with English as a second language, as identified by reviewing the institution's enrolment data. A total of 88 students completed the questionnaire; this consisted of 49 international students and 39 domestic students. In this study international students are classified as full-fee paying students and domestic students are defined as New Zealand citizens or Permanent Residents

Table 1 details the demographics of this sample. Fifteen domestic respondents were male; 24 were female. Ages for this group ranged from 17 to 40 years ($M = 23.78$, $SD = 7.57$) with half ($N = 20$) of these students being aged between 18-21 years. The most common living arrangement for domestic students was living at home with their parents ($N = 21$). Ten respondents flat with other co-nationals and seven students live alone. No local students reported living with international students. Twenty-five domestic participants reported their ethnicity was New Zealander; nine stated Australian and the remaining students indicated their nationality was British, Canadian, Iraqi or Zambian.

Twenty-seven international student respondents were female and 21 were male. Ages for this group of respondents ranged from 19 years to 38 years with bi-modal ages of 21 and 24 years.

Twenty-four international students stated they live with other foreign students, thirteen live in a Homestay arrangement and only five live with domestic students. Three students live at home with their parents and two students live on their own. Eighty-one percent (N=39) of international student respondents stated their nationality was Chinese, with three indicating Taiwanese background and two students stated they were Japanese. One student was from each of South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Table 1. Sample Respondents Demographics

Demographic	International Students		Domestic Students		Total Respondents	Percent of Sample
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	21	43%	15	39%	36	41%
Female	27	55%	24	61%	51	58%
Live at home with parents	3	6%	21	54%	24	24%
Live with co-nationals	24	50%	10	25.5%	34	39%
Live Alone	2	4%	7	18%	9	10%
Home-stay	13	27%	1	2.5%	14	16%
Live with cross-nationals	5	10%	0	0	5	10%
Age Range	19-38 years		17-40 years		85	97%

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. The first part examined co-ethnic and cross-ethnic interactions. Part B asked the respondents questions about friendships. Part C had questions relating to respondent's classroom experiences and the final part gathered demographic data. The questionnaires differed only in part C when international students were asked about their classroom experiences with 'New Zealand students' and domestic students were asked about their experiences in the classroom with 'international students.'

Part A of the survey required respondents to complete a 13-item measure of social efficacy relating to their interaction with people in both co-ethnic and cross-ethnic groups (adapted from Fan & Mak, as cited in Barker, Troth & Mak, 2002). A seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 7 = Strongly Agree, was used to determine students' self-effectiveness in both academic and social situations. Respondents specified their level of agreement or disagreement for their interactions relative to interactions with people from the

same ethnic group and different ethnic groups. Questions included “*It is difficult for me to make new friends,*” and “*I do not handle myself well in social gatherings.*”

Part B presented respondents with questions relating to ‘friendships’ within their own and different ethnic groups. A five-item indicator of social interactions was used and questions were connected to the number of close friends in the respondent’s same cultural group or other cultural groups, as well as the amount of time the respondent had spent with friends from those groups in the past week. Responses to the open-ended questions for this section were collated to establish differences in the types of activities both groups of students undertook with friends in their own cultural group versus cross-cultural friends.

Classroom experiences between the two student groups were gathered in Part C of the survey by asking questions that aimed at forming an understanding of the level of relations between the two student groups, as well as the attitudes they held about each other. Questions were mostly open-ended and addressed perceived classroom cross-cultural benefits, disadvantages of mixed classrooms, feelings about group work and group characteristics. Questions included “*Do you sit with local/international students?*” and “*What benefits do you see having local/international students in your class?*” Responses from the open-ended questions were rated as positive, negative or neutral/ unsure to establish overall attitudes of ‘other’ group characteristics. Part C responses were also analysed by two independent raters, to determine consistency of ratings. Responses such as “*friendly*”, “*easy going*”, “*warm heart*” and “*hard working*” were considered to be positive. Answers including “*they don’t speak to us first*”, “*don’t want to know other group people*” and “*arrogant*” were considered negative. Neutral responses included “*I don’t know*”, “*quiet*”, “*serious*” and “*talkative*”. Each idea the student wrote was considered one characteristic.

Results

Social Interactions

On all measures of social interaction with people from different ethnic groups when compared with interactions with people from their own ethnic group, the sample rated themselves significantly lower ($p < .01$). Students reported that with people from other ethnic backgrounds they were less likely to initiate friendship. They also felt they were less confident, had less common ground, and that it was more difficult to express dissenting ideas and to get information. All respondents were similar in their perception of their commonality of conversation topics with people from different ethnic groups.

Both international and domestic respondents' reported no difference between getting information from, or obtaining a date with members of their culture or another culture. International students stated that they found it harder to make friends cross-culturally, but that they would persist with attempts after initial lack of interest from locals. Domestic students differed by rating themselves as less likely to initiate interaction and more prone to giving up attempts at friendship within their own ethnic group than international students. Domestic students considered themselves more able to handle social situations with their own ethnic group than did international students ($p < .01$).

Table 2. International and Domestic Students Cross-Cultural Interactions

Item	Ethnic group	International mean	Domestic mean
A1. Meeting people	Same	4.82*	4.05
	Different	4.95	3.59
A2. Persistence making friends	Same	3.96*	3.28
	Different	3.60	3.00
A3. Difficulty making friends	Same	5.44	5.31
	Different	4.53	4.87
A4. Socially not confident	Same	4.56	5.59**
	Different	4.09	5.21**
A5. Conversation difficulties	Same	5.36	5.84
	Different	4.11	4.67
A6. Language skills confidence	Same	5.00	5.36
	Different	4.02	4.41
A7. Quiet in social situations	Same	4.62	4.53
	Different	4.00	3.92
A8. Common conversation topics	Same	4.88	4.69
	Different	4.30	4.42
A9. Common interests	Same	4.76	4.77
	Different	4.02	4.23
A10. Common activities	Same	4.64	4.79
	Different	4.05	4.46
A11. Difficulty express opinions	Same	4.90	4.87
	Different	4.20	4.55
A12. At ease to request information	Same	5.10	5.18
	Different	4.73	4.87
A13. Dating difficulties	Same	4.81	4.59
	Different	4.53	4.10

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Social activities that were reported by international students as undertaken with domestic students include karate, having dinner, shopping, chatting, going to the cinema and church, and playing table tennis. Within their own cultural group international students reported all the above social activities as well as playing basketball, going for a drink and swimming. Examples of domestic students' social activities with friends from their own ethnic group include social drinking, sport, golf, parties, watching rugby, going to the gym and to the cinema. Activities undertaken with friends from other cultures were having dinner, watching a movie, going to church and playing basketball.

Friendships

Both local and international students reported more close friends with co-nationals than with students from a different ethnic group ($p < .05$). Both groups of respondents also stated they spent more time socialising and studying with members of their own cultural groups than people of other ethnic backgrounds. Almost half of all respondents ($N=40$) indicated that they have 'a few' cross-cultural friendships, with 27.3% of the sample ($N=24$) stating they have no friends from other ethnic groups. In contrast when asked for the number of co-ethnic friendships, 60% of respondents ($N=53$), reported that they have 'some' or 'many' co-ethnic friends.

There were no significant differences in the time domestic and international students spent socialising within or outside of their own ethnic group. However, domestic students reported having a greater number of friends within their own ethnic group than international students did ($p < .05$), but the number of friends from outside their own cultural group was comparable. Both groups stated similar amounts of study time spent with people from their own ethnic background, while international students reported spending significantly more time studying with friends from other ethnic groups than the domestic students did ($p < .01$).

Classroom Experiences

Attitudes held towards students from another cultural group were determined through the characteristics used to describe each other; each item written within a response was collated as an individual characteristic. International students responded with 121 characteristics; 87 of which were positive towards domestic students, 20 were negative and 14 were neutral. Domestic students responded to this question with 94 characteristics; 39 positive and 39 negative with 16 neutral.

Discussion

It was found that interaction primarily occurred within co-ethnic student groups and when students did interact with people from different ethnic backgrounds it tended to be for academic rather than social activities. This is consistent with past research undertaken in Britain, Japan, France, United States of America and Canada (Ward, 2001) indicating an international trend for overseas born students to interact with co-nationals.

This study found that overall attitudes between the two student groups were positive, however interaction frequencies were low for cross-cultural relations. Ward (2001, p. 4) states the “presence of international students is insufficient in itself to promote intercultural interactions.” It appears both international and domestic students “perceive it is the responsibility of educational institutions to increase and enhance intercultural interactions” (Ward, 2001, p. 4). Effectively this requires tertiary institutions to adopt interventionist strategies to develop cross-cultural interaction. Ward supports the introduction of interventionist strategies “to promote more and better intercultural activities” (2001, p. 3). These strategies include peer-pairing of local and foreign students, although care should be taken to ensure these arrangements involve equal status contact, with local students not assuming an ‘expert’ role and subsequently disempowering international students. The New Zealand Ministry of Education’s Guidelines Supporting the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (2003) introduces the concept of ‘peer-pairing’ as ‘suggested good practice’. These guidelines state that “support such as a mentoring system with New Zealand students” (p. 56), is recommended. Westwood and Barker (1990) reported peer-matching programmes where international students are matched with a local support person resulted in higher achievement for foreign students (as cited in Haines, 1998.).

Cooperative learning such as classroom group work may also be important, as this study found local students do not initiate interaction and that the highest frequency of interaction occurs in lecture settings. Also relevant is professional development for staff involved with international students such as sessions to discuss cultural awareness, basic pronunciation of foreign names and cultural learning styles. Indeed the opportunity exists for tertiary institutions to communicate benefits of a culturally diverse student body through intervention strategies such as sessions to address stereotypes with the intention of removing barriers between cultures. Institutions may offer separate facilities and support to international students that effectively avert rather than promote cross-cultural interaction. It is acknowledged that international students pay higher fees than their domestic peers but this is not necessarily an appropriate argument for creating or maintaining distinct support

programmes, when benefits derived from interaction between cross-cultural groups include better conversation skills and self-esteem.

Interestingly, international students persevere with attempting to establish cross-ethnic friendships although domestic students appear disinterested and/or are less likely to make contact with their foreign peers. The attitude of disinterest or apathy from local students may contribute to early impressions and subsequently result in “initial disappointment that may negatively affect subsequent perceptions and attitudes” (Ward 2001, p. 14). This apparent disinterest is also reflected in this study’s findings that no local students reported living with international students and only five international students stated they live with domestic students. The most common living arrangement reported by international students was living with other international students. The existence of local student complacency towards interacting with international students is sustained by a study (Hurtado, Dey & Trevino, 1994, cited in Ward, 2001) relating to majority versus minority culture relations, which found minority cultures interact more across cultures. Essentially, the minority culture has to work harder to forge relationships with local people, which may explain the inertia of domestic students initiating friendships or interaction with international students.

This study found that both domestic and international students reported having more friends and spending more time socialising within their own ethnic group. It was positive that both international and domestic students stated “friendly” as a characteristic of the other group. Butcher (2002) supports this finding in his Auckland research that established 86.4% of international students found New Zealanders moderately friendly to very friendly. The attitudes and perceptions of both student groups regarding each other were generally positive, suggesting the lack of interaction is not attitudinally based. Ward (2001) supports this by referring to research assessing stereotypes, which “converge to indicate that although cross-national stereotypes are mixed, they are more positive, on balance, than negative” (p. 14). Evidence implies lack of interaction may be a result of friendships being formed more easily with culturally similar individuals (Ward, 2001). This indicates students from a ‘western’ or ‘European’ background will have to work harder at becoming friends with culturally dissimilar groups such as Asian students, and if the extra effort is not deemed essential, friendships are not initiated.

The different learning styles of collectivist and individualist cultural groups clearly influence attitudes formed about the other student group. Local students provided comments such as “*quiet*”, and “*study a lot*”. This suggests domestic students are unaware or choose not to make allowances for a collectivist cultural learning style that necessitates international

students be quiet and respectful in a classroom setting. In contrast, international students commented that domestic students are “*out-going*”, “*friendly*”, “*fast thinking*”, “*like to express their opinions in class*” and “*they do not hesitate to ask or say their opinion during a lecture.*” Existing research suggests locals believe international students impair their academic progress and are disinterested in intercultural relations (Mills, 1997; Smart, Volet & Ang, 2000). As Beaver and Tuck (1998) discovered local students want to gain their qualification as quickly and efficiently as possible. These motives seem plausible and offer an explanation of why favourable attitudes such as those established by this study and prior research, do not lead to increased interactions between local and international students. This presents an opportunity for tertiary institutions to communicate the benefits of a culturally diverse student body while addressing the concerns held by domestic students through intervention strategies such as sessions focusing on stereotypes with the intention of removing barriers between cultures.

Prior research recognises that self-efficacy and effective interaction skills are important in advancing intercultural adjustment (e.g. Barker & Troth, 2002). As Schwarzer and Scholz (2002) discuss, a strong sense of personal efficacy is related to better health, higher achievement, and more social integration. This implies that if international students are to attain the greatest benefits from the educational system, they need to establish interpersonal relationships and communicate effectively. Without interaction, international and local student relationships are unable to develop. Although tertiary institutions largely acknowledge the importance of interpersonal skills for international student success, little is done at the institutional level to improve these, resulting in students principally left to acquire conversationalist and expressive skills through their own day-to-day contacts (Barker & Troth, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to determine the current level of interaction between international and domestic students and attempt to gain an understanding of how attitudes held by these two student groups’ impacts on interactions between them. Apparent indifference on behalf of domestic students towards initiating interaction with their international peers is a significant point and is somewhat explained through existing research that suggests locals believe international students impair their academic progress, for they want to gain their qualification as rapidly and efficiently as they can. However this does not appear to impair international students pursuing cross-cultural friendships. Additional examination of factors limiting student interaction is warranted as this study supports existing literature that suggests to the attitudes and perceptions of both student groups regarding each other are generally positive, suggesting the lack of interaction is not attitudinally based. It is

proposed that future research should investigate the effect of tertiary institutions implementing interventionist strategies to encourage interaction between different student groups. Moreover future research should include greater cultural diversity such as international students from English speaking backgrounds.

References

Asia 2000 Foundation. (2003). *The export education industry: Challenges for New Zealand* (Occasional Paper).

Barker, M.C., & Troth, A. C. (2002). 'Transition to a new academic context: Intercultural skills training for international postgraduate students'. *Envisioning practice – implementing change*, 1, 90-96. Brisbane, QLD: Griffith University Press.

Bartol, K., Martin, D., Tein, M., & Matthews, G. (1999). *Management: a Pacific Rim focus*. (2nd ed.). Roseville, NSW: McGraw-Hill.

Beaver, B., & Tuck, B. (1998). *The adjustment of overseas students at a tertiary institution in New Zealand*. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 33, 167-179.

Berno, T., & Ward, C. (n.d.). 'Cross-cultural and Educational Adaptation of Asian Students in New Zealand.' Available: *Asia 2000 Foundation of New Zealand website* <http://www.asia2000.org.nz/about/programmes/research/index.shtml> [2003, 20 October].

Butcher, A. (2002). *A report on the demographic, social and economic impact of international students on North shore city*. Auckland: School of Social and Cultural Studies, Massey University.

Cameron, B., & Meade, P. H. (2002). *Supporting the transition to university of international students: issues and challenges*. Paper presented at the 6th Pacific Rim Conference on First Year Experience in Higher Education. Christchurch, New Zealand, 8-10 July, 2002.

Education New Zealand. (2004, 23 March). *Education exports crack \$2 billion*. Available: http://www.educationnz.org.nz/comm_media/media_files/media21.html [2004, 31 March].

Haines, A. (1998). *A critical review of the literature of the learning needs of international students*. Beyond the fringe learning development conference.

Mills, C. (1997). Interaction in classes at a New Zealand university: Some international students' experiences. *New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning*, 25, 54-71.

Ministry of Education. (2001). Foreword Maharey, S. (2001). *Export education in New Zealand – A strategic approach to developing the sector*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. (Export education Policy Project) (2001). *Foreign fee paying students in New Zealand: Trends a statistical Overview*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education (2003). *Guidelines to support the Code of Practice for the pastoral care of international students*. Wellington: National operations division, New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Schwellnus, T. (2001). Inter-cultural understanding in education – *Experiences in multi-cultural tertiary teaching in South Africa*. Paper Presented at the Pacific Circle Consortium Conference, Christchurch New Zealand.

Schwarzer, R., & Scholz, U. (2002). 'Cross-cultural assessment of coping resources: The general perceived self-efficacy scale' website <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~health/lingua5.htm> [2004, 6 March]

Smart, D., Volet, S., & Ang, G. (2000). *Fostering social cohesion in universities: Bridging the cultural divide*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Ward, C. (2001). *The impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions – A literature review*. Prepared for the Export Education Policy Project, Strategic Information and Resourcing Division, New Zealand Ministry of Education Export Education. Wellington: Ministry of Education.