

COMPARISON OF THEORETICAL MODELS OF ACCULTURATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract: This study investigates the phenomenon of acculturation, especially cultural shock among international students, focusing on its underlying mechanisms and potential mitigation strategies. Despite the increasing number of students studying overseas, many encounter significant psychological and socio-cultural challenges due to cultural differences, leading to issues such as depression and anxiety. This paper reviews the existing literature on acculturation, tracing its crucial definition and stages. The U-curve and W-curve models are examined to understand the temporal dynamics of cultural adaptation, with particular attention to the four-stage model. Additionally, by comparing Self-Determination Theory and its sub-theories, including Cognitive Evaluation Theory, Organismic Integration Theory, Basic Psychological Needs Theory, Causality Orientation Theory, and Goal Content Theory, it highlights that fulfilling basic psychological needs and fostering intrinsic motivation can enhance international students' resilience against cultural shock. This research sheds light on understanding and addressing the challenges faced by international students in cross-cultural environments, ultimately contributing to their improved mental health and academic success.

Keywords: Models of acculturation; Educational psychology; International students; Theoretical comparison

1 INTRODUCTION

The influx of international students into international educational systems presents a unique set of challenges associated with cross-cultural adaptation in the context of globalization. Among these challenges, cultural shock stands out as a critical issue that significantly impacts students' academic performance and psychological well-being [1]. This phenomenon not only poses significant challenges for international students but also has profound implications for their socio-cultural adaptation to the updating of educational technology [2-3].

The objective of this study is to delve into the experiences of international students, particularly focusing on the process and impact of cultural shock. By examining the theoretical frameworks that encapsulate cultural shock, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cultural shock unfolds and its effects on students' adaptation. The study also seeks to explore the role of self-determination theory in mitigating the impact of cultural shock, considering the motivational processes and psychological needs that influence students' responses to new cultural environments.

This research is grounded in the theoretical analysis method, which allows for an in-depth examination of existing literature and the development of a robust theoretical model. By synthesizing insights from various theoretical perspectives, including cognitive evaluation theory, organic integration theory, basic psychological needs theory, causality orientation theory, and goal content theory, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on cultural shock and offer practical recommendations for enhancing cross-cultural adaptability among international students. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and support services in designing interventions that can help international students navigate the challenges of cultural shock more effectively.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a theoretical analysis approach to investigate the phenomenon of cultural shock among international students. This methodology was chosen for its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of the research topic [4]. The process began with the identification of the research problem, where the focus was to clarify the issues at hand, define the relevant theories and concepts, and establish the purpose and significance of the study [5].

A thorough literature review was conducted to examine existing literature related to the research question. This involved an exploration of both theoretical frameworks and empirical findings to identify gaps and deficiencies in current research. This step was crucial in determining the innovative aspects and potential breakthroughs for the study.

The theoretical foundation was then analyzed based on the research question. This involved a deep analysis and understanding of existing theories or concepts, including their connotations, extensions, and logical relationships. Both inductive and deductive methods were employed to categorize theories or concepts into themes, models, or patterns, which were then explained and elaborated upon.

Subsequently, a theoretical model was constructed on the basis of the analyzed theoretical foundation. This model could take the form of mathematical, conceptual, or empirical models, transforming theories or concepts into operable and measurable variables or indicators.

Theoretical deduction was then carried out based on the established model, leading to conclusions and recommendations. The study concluded with the derivation of findings based on the results of the theoretical deduction. These conclusions aimed to explain the connotations and extensions of existing theories or concepts, as well as their significance and value in practical applications.

Finally, the findings were presented in the form of this research paper. Attention was paid to the structure and format of the paper, including sections such as the title, abstract, introduction, main body, and conclusion. Additionally, the clarity and readability of the language, as well as the citation and formatting of figures and references, were carefully considered.

The draft was then subjected to multiple revisions to refine and perfect the research. This involved ensuring the accuracy and fluency of the language, as well as the logical and systematic nature of the arguments. The innovation and practical utility of the paper were also emphasized to provide a valuable reference for future research.

3 DEFINITION AND KEY PROCESSES OF CULTURAL SHOCK

Kalervo Oberg first formally defined cultural shock as anxiety caused by the loss of all familiar signs and symbols of social interaction [6]. Cultural shock is sometimes referred to as a "cultural cold" or "cultural shock", with the former implying its universality and the latter expressing its severity. Levine and Adelman described cultural shock as a feeling of bewilderment and disorientation. In other words, cultural shock is regarded as a negative psychological reaction and mental disorder. It is evident that cultural shock poses significant challenges for international students and can negatively impact their psychological and socio-cultural adaptation. Based on existing literature, cultural shock is a process of negative emotions experienced by international students when they leave their home country and arrive in the host country, due to changes in environment, culture, language, and customs.

To investigate the issue of cultural shock, scholars from various fields worldwide have studied its overall process. One of the most well-known hypotheses is the U-curve hypothesis. Lysgaard observed in his research that the adjustment process of individuals experiencing cultural shock seems to follow a U-shaped curve, as seen in Figure 1 [7]. In this study, it was found that individuals who stayed in the United States for less than six months or more than 18 months adapted well, while those who stayed between six and 18 months did not adapt well. These individuals appeared to experience a "crisis," feeling less adapted, lonely, and unhappy.



Figure 1 A U-shaped Curve of Cultural Shock

Kalervo Oberg confirmed Lysgaard's U-curve theory and divided the process of cultural shock into four stages: the honeymoon stage, the shock stage, the "adjustment stage, and the adaptation and enjoyment stage, thereby summarizing the four-stage theory of cultural shock [6]. Initially, individuals experience the novelty of the new culture, facing life with an optimistic and positive attitude, similar to being on a honeymoon. As the novelty of the honeymoon stage fades, individuals gradually confront the realities of overseas life, including issues related to school, language, housing, transportation, and shopping. This marks the beginning of the shock stage, during which individuals develop hostile and aggressive attitudes towards the host country. In this stage, significant anxiety and confusion arise as cultural shock continuously impacts the mental and psychological defenses of international students, thereby affecting their academic performance, daily life, and mental health. After experiencing the shock stage, individuals gradually understand the local culture, adopt a more inclusive and accepting attitude towards cultural differences, and begin to adjust and adapt to their new environment.

Oberg's four-stage model is widely accepted. For example, combined Oberg's model to study the commonality and similarity of cross-cultural adaptation among international students, as well as how internal and external factors influence the choice of adaptation strategies. Oberg's four-stage model is a significant model in the study of cultural shock. As research on cultural shock has increased, other scholars have proposed alternative theories regarding its process. For instance, Adler proposed a five-stage theory: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Autonomy, and Independence [8]. He argued that this cultural transition process is itself a learning experience. It can also further divide the stages of cultural shock into seven phases more accurately to reflect its gradual and developmental nature. These seven stages are: excitement, anxiety, rejection, regression, recovery, acceptance, and adaptation and enjoyment. Observations reveal that both the five-stage and seven-stage theories follow a U-shaped curve. Gullahom and Gullahom proposed the W-curve theory. When sojourners return to their home country, they experience a similar cultural adaptation process as when they initially left, resulting in a W-shaped curve [9]. The W-curve is commonly seen among international students, with many experiencing difficulties readjusting upon returning home, leading to negative emotions. The overseas study experience can also blur students' subjective identities and exacerbate the negative impacts of cultural shock. If each phase of cultural adaptation in the W-curve, where individuals encounter a culture different from their most recent residence, is considered an independent process, the W-curve can be decomposed into two cultural adaptation processes, each still following a U-shaped curve.

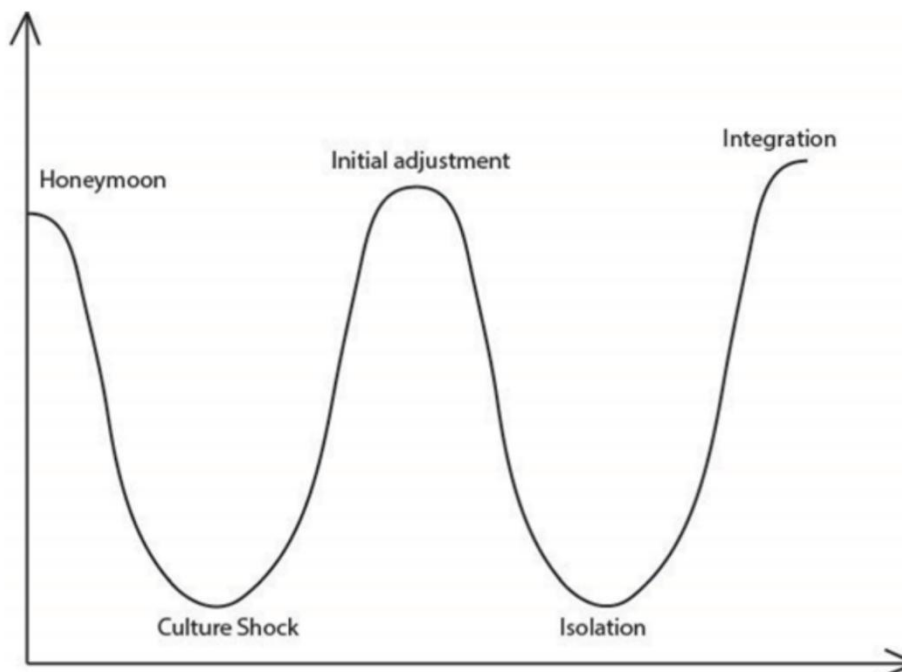


Figure 2 W-curve

In academia, some scholars' research does not align with the U-curve theory. For example, Ward conducted a questionnaire survey of 35 Japanese international students in New Zealand, examining their experiences at four-time points: 24 hours, four months, six months, and 12 months after arrival [10]. The findings contradicted the U-curve theory, as most students reported feeling lonely and depressed upon arrival in New Zealand, rather than excited. The limitation of this study lies in the time segmentation, and this research will continue to validate the curve models.

In brief, extensive research on the process of cultural shock results in various methodologies and stage theories. However, Lysgaard's U-curve theory and Oberg's four-stage model remain the primary theoretical foundations for cultural shock research and serve as the basis for many studies afterwards. These two models deserve to be remained.

4 SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND ITS SUB-THEORIES

4.1 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a macro-theory proposed by Deci and Ryan regarding the motivational processes and personality related to human self-determined behavior [11]. It posits that motivation is a dynamic and modifiable process. In its early development, SDT consisted of four sub-theories: Cognitive Evaluation Theory, Organismic Integration Theory, Basic Psychological Needs Theory, and Causality Orientation Theory. Later, Kasser and Ryan, while studying the relationship between basic psychological needs and goal content, proposed the fifth sub-theory of SDT, namely Goal Content Theory, thereby enriching the entire theoretical framework [12].

4.2 Cognitive Evaluation Theory

Cognitive Evaluation Theory links extrinsic rewards with intrinsic rewards and explores their relationship. This theory describes how social and environmental factors influence an individual's intrinsic motivation [13]. Specifically, information from the social and environmental context directly affects an individual's self-evaluation, which in turn impacts the development of intrinsic motivation. The theory suggests that overemphasizing extrinsic motivational factors can lead to the atrophy of intrinsic motivation. For instance, when a student is intrinsically motivated to learn dance out of interest and passion, providing extrinsic material rewards based on their performance in a competition may reduce their enthusiasm for practicing dance. This occurs because the reward makes the student feel that they are learning or practicing for the sake of the reward, rather than for their own interests and passions, leading to a loss of interest and decreased motivation.

The relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation corroborated this phenomenon. To be specific, informational events promote an individual's internal causal perception and sense of competence, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation levels; controlling events creates pressure, increases external causal perception, reduces feelings of autonomy, and thus weakens intrinsic motivation; de-motivating events signify ineffectiveness, and individuals experiencing de-motivation feel incompetent, which undermines intrinsic motivation [14]. Cognitive Evaluation Theory precisely links extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and explores their relationship.

4.3 Organismic Integration Theory

Organismic Integration Theory categorizes individual motivation into three types: extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, and amotivation [15]. Extrinsic motivation relies on external reward and punishment systems, while intrinsic motivation is driven by personal interests, hobbies, and the satisfaction derived from completing tasks [15]. Amotivation refers to situations where the outcome of an event is entirely unrelated to the individual [16]. It highlights the side effects of acculturation.

5 CONCLUSION

This study has provided an examination of the phenomenon of cultural shock. Building upon the foundational work of scholars, this research has explored the multifaceted nature of cultural shock, its stages, and its profound impact on students' psychological and socio-cultural adaptation.

The U-shaped curve hypothesis and Oberg's four-stage model have been instrumental in understanding the trajectory of cultural shock, illustrating the transition from initial excitement to a period of crisis and eventual adaptation. This study has further highlighted the importance of considering individual differences and the role of external factors in shaping students' experiences of cultural shock.

By integrating SDT into the analysis, this research has shed light on the motivational processes and psychological needs that influence students' responses to acculturation. The findings underscore the significance of intrinsic motivation and meet basic psychological needs that are autonomy, competence, and relatedness, in fostering resilience and facilitating positive adaptation outcomes.

The study's conclusions have several implications for practice. Firstly, it suggests that educational institutions and support services should focus on strategies that enhance students' intrinsic motivation and satisfy their basic psychological needs. This could involve providing opportunities for autonomy, fostering a sense of competence, and promoting social connections and belonging. Secondly, the findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive and tailored support services that address the unique challenges faced by international students during different stages of cultural shock.

Moreover, this research underscores the importance of further empirical studies to validate the theoretical models and to explore the applicability of these models across different cultural contexts and student populations. Future research could also investigate the long-term effects of cultural shock and the development of cross-cultural competencies, which are crucial for students' academic success and personal growth. By understanding the dynamics of cultural shock and the role of self-determination, educators and policymakers can better support international students in navigating the complexities of studying abroad, ultimately enhancing their overall experience and outcomes.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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