

The Socio-cultural Adjustment of International Students in the UK: A comparison of Asian and European students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore how international students feel about studying and living in the UK and what kind of strategies they often use to cope with difficulties in the process of socio-cultural adjustment in the study-abroad context. This research employed questionnaires to examine the perceptions and experiences of 60 international students who attended 3-month ESL (English as a Second Language) courses provided by the Language Centre at a university in the UK. The participants were divided into two groups, according to their nationalities, in order to compare the results of European and Asian students. This study confirmed that a number of international students were not confident with their English language skills. More Asian than European students were less confident asking questions and expressing their opinions, and tended to have more difficulties. It was also found that European students had higher cultural awareness, and could better share their interests and interact with local British people. This study also revealed that most students employed social supports by British as well as people living in their own countries. More European than Asian students observed behaviors and gestures of British people, and they also could more easily adjust in new settings and accept cultural differences.

イギリスで英語を学習する60名の留学生を対象に、留学中の体験や意識に関するアンケート調査を実施した。彼らは大学のランゲージセンターが提供する ESL のクラスに3ヶ月在籍し、国籍によって、アジア圏とヨーロッパ圏出身の2グループに分けられ、両者の調査結果を比較した。本研究の目的は、留学生が海外で生活し、学習する際に感じることを分析し、文化適応の過程で体験した困難に対処するために、どんなストラテジーをどれ程の頻度で利用したかを明らかにすることである。結果として、多くの留学生は自分の英語力に自信がなく、特にヨーロッパ圏の学生に比べ、アジア圏の学生は質問したり、意見を述べることにについて自信を持ってないことが多いと判明した。また、ヨーロッパ圏の学生のほうが、より文化的意識が高く、イギリス人と共通の関心事を見つけるなど、現地の人

と関わる頻度が高いことが明らかになった。留学生は自国に住む知人のみならず、イギリス人より社会的なサポートを受けることが多いが、特にヨーロッパ圏の学生は、アジア圏の学生に比べて、イギリス人の態度やジェスチャーを頻繁に観察し、異なる文化を受容したり、より容易に文化適応が可能な者が多いことも明らかとなった。

Key Words: socio-cultural adjustment, international students, study abroad, intercultural understanding, cultural awareness

1. Introduction

There has been a great increase in the number of international students at universities, especially in English-speaking countries. Similarly, it is also becoming more important that these universities recognize the problems or difficulties which overseas students may encounter in the process of their adjustment to a new environment.

This research focuses on international students who aimed to improve their English by participating in ESL classes offered by the Oxford University Language Centre in the UK, which was established to facilitate the completion of their academic courses as well as to provide students with opportunities to learn foreign languages. The main purposes of this study are to examine how international students feel about studying and living in the UK and what kind of strategies they often use to cope with difficulties in adjusting to new settings. The target students were divided into two groups, according to their nationalities, in order to compare European and Asian students' viewpoints, because some studies have pointed out that Asian students tend to have more difficulties than other international students in adjusting to campus life. Consequently, offering more social support is recommended (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). On the basis of this study's aims, the research was conducted with the following research questions:

- 1) What difficulties do international students tend to have when they live and study in the UK?
- 2) What kinds of strategies do international students employ in order to improve their lives and study in the UK?
- 3) Are there any differences between European and Asian students in their study abroad experiences in the UK?

2. Literature review

2.1 Rationale for the research focusing on international students

It has become common to study abroad not only for a short-term stay with a few-month program to learn the foreign language and enhance intercultural understanding, but also for a long-term stay to obtain a qualification or complete an academic degree (Andrade, 2006). According to Schneider (2000), several English-speaking countries, with the cooperative efforts of government and educational institutions, have promoted various projects to attract overseas students and have increased their registrations in the field of higher education. In fact, international students have contributed to intercultural understanding and have helped local students improve their knowledge of foreign cultures, customs and languages. Peterson et al. (1999) also mentioned that learning with international students could raise the awareness of local students to identify cultural differences and promote the idea of world peace.

However, it has been reported that study abroad students tend to have adjustment problems or concerns in their academic or daily lives. They have often experienced greater difficulty than local students, because their family and friends are usually not living nearby and these students have less social support than usual (Church, 1982; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002). It is highly likely that international students feel more lonely and homesick than local students, and they have difficulties using the foreign language under the new educational system and fitting themselves into a new life in the foreign country (Church, 1982; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002).

2.2 Empirical research on socio-cultural adjustment issues

Several studies emphasized the significant relationships between social interaction and the adjustment of study abroad students, and suggested the necessity of providing them with social support, especially in the environment of a different culture and language (Furnham, 1988; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Yang et al., 1994; Zimmerman, 1995). According to the research by Ramburuth (2001), seventy-six percent of overseas students who were non-native English speakers at an Australian university, required intensive English language support. Ramsay et al. (1999) also point out that international students tend to suffer from more stress and anxiety since they need to make more effort to overcome their challenges than

do local students. Furthermore, tutors and tutorials are beneficial for reducing these problems and concerns. It was also found that international students participated in peer support programs with local students demonstrated significantly higher academic achievement than did the nonparticipants (Abe et al., 1998; Westwood & Barker, 1990). A number of studies also discovered that interacting with local students was highly effective for adjusting the perception of international students in studying and living in the foreign country (Andrade, 2006; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995) .

2.3 Definition of key terms

This section deals with definitions of important terms in this article, such as “international students”, “adjustment” and “culture shock”, in order to clarify the concepts of these expressions in the setting of foreign language learning for further discussion.

In this article, “international students” is regarded as non-native English speakers who stay in foreign countries on a temporary basis and enroll in institutions of higher education (Andrade, 2006). The term “adjustment” describes the condition in which study abroad students fit their academic or daily lives into new settings, in terms of studying in a new learning style, using the foreign language and living in a different culture, etc. (Ramsay et al., 1999). Then, Ruben et al. (1977) connect “culture shock” with the idea of adjustment, and explain that culture shock focuses on the manner in which persons experience and cope with the cyclic psychological, physiological, and vocational fluctuations associated with adjustment in the first months in a new environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of the survey were 60 international students (male: 37 / female: 23) who attended either “Academic Writing” or “Advanced Communication Skills” classes provided by the Oxford University Language Centre. Each course had 8 weeks of lessons starting around the end of October, 2013 and ending at the beginning of January, 2014. Most of the courses were exclusive to university students who had already obtained IELTS scores of at least 6.5 to meet the English proficiency requirement of the university. In addition, more than half of the respondents were post-graduate or post-doctoral students. The students were

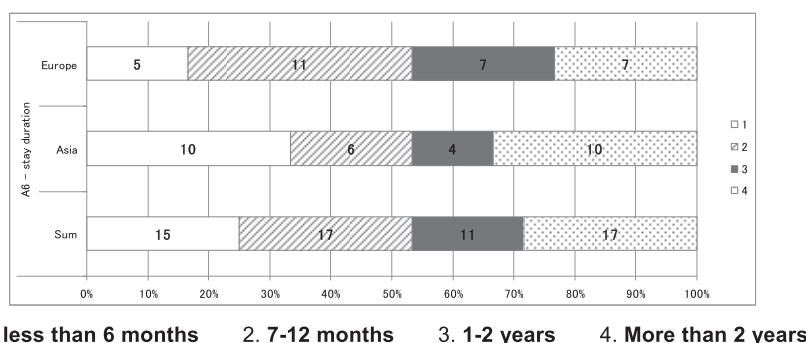
divided into the following two groups, according to their nationalities:

Group 1: 30 students aged in their 20s to 40s, whose nationalities were mainly **European**
[Belgium (1), Czech (1), Finland (1), Georgia (1), Germany (4), Greece (1),
Holland (1), Italy (8), Israel (1), Poland (1), Portugal (1), Russia (1), Spain (8)]

Group 2: 30 students aged in their 20s to 50s, whose nationalities were **Asian**
[China (13), Indonesia (1), Japan (5), Korea (4), Malaysia (4), Taiwan (1),
Thailand (1), and Vietnam (1)]

16 out of 30 students from each group had stayed for less than one year in the UK. A few more Asian than European students had stayed in the UK for more than two years when the research was conducted (see Graph 1).

Graph 1 Duration of participants' stay in the UK



3.2 Procedure and design of the survey

The questionnaire was distributed by English teachers who were in charge of “Academic Writing” or “Advanced Communication Skills” classes in the last 15 minutes of their final lessons. All the respondents had studied English as a second language for at least two months in a similar language learning environment in the UK at the time of the survey. The draft of the questionnaire was checked by the director and the assistant director of the Language Centre before this research was put into practice and both of them are native English speakers. The questionnaire consisted of four sections with 52 questions in total. There were ten demographic questions in Section A regarding the respondents’ background (age, nationality, purpose, duration of staying in the UK, etc.). Section B contained 16 closed questions about studying and living in the UK, and 24 closed questions in Section C asked about strategies for coping with life in the UK. Section D had two open

questions which asked respondents to describe their difficulties with studying and living in the UK and their strategies for dealing with these problems.

All the closed questions in Section B were followed by a five-point rating scale, with a choice of either “strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, neutral (Q1-12)” or “very easy, relatively easy, relatively difficult, very difficult, no opinion (Q13-16)”. Most questions in this section were extracted from the “Cross-Cultural Social Efficacy Scale” created by Fan & Mak (1998). Section C also had only closed questions with a four-point scale of “often, sometimes, seldom, never”, and these were extracted from the “Cultural Learning Strategies Inventory” introduced by Paige et al. (2002). Some expressions in the model questions were modified in order to make the meaning of questions clearer for the research participants.

4. Findings and Discussion

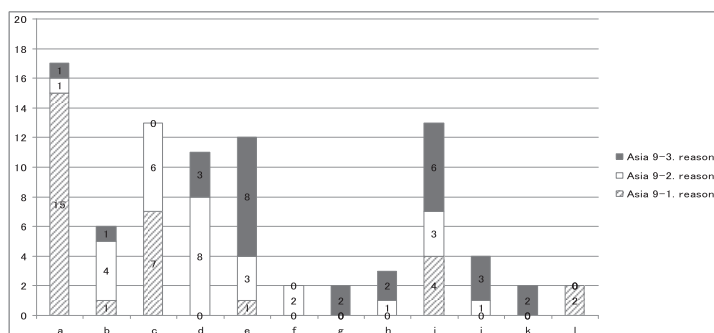
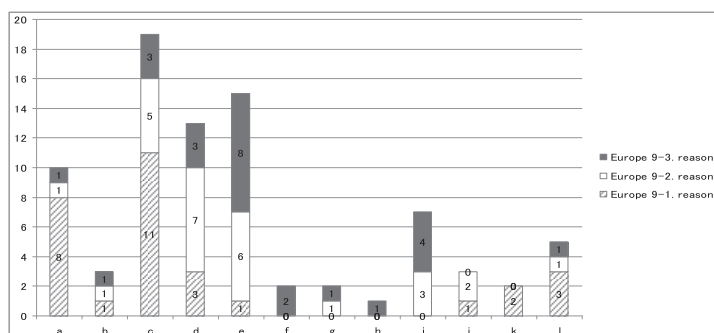
4.1 Findings and analysis of the questionnaire survey

4.1.1 Main purposes for studying in the UK

This section reports the results from the questionnaire conducted for study abroad students at the Language Centre of Oxford University, and compares the responses from two different groups (Group 1: European, Group 2: Asian, see 3.1).

The answers to question A9 shown in Graph 2 indicate that important reasons for European students to study in the UK were to improve their current careers (11), to obtain a degree or qualification (8), and to get a better (different) job (3). To improve their English was also regarded as one of the important reasons. Similarly, the most important reason for Asian students was to get a degree or qualification (15), and the second was to improve their careers (7). However, they chose “to broaden their outlook” as the third most popular reason (4).

The main reasons why the respondents decided to study in the UK in particular were asked in question A10. Nearly ten students were interested in British culture, and another ten chose the UK to learn English. Around twenty students said that the academic fields or the education at the Oxford University have a good reputation. Ten students came to the UK in order to accompany someone, such as their supervisors or partners. Only a few students chose the UK because their home countries were nearby.

Graph 2 Primary reasons for studying in the UK

- a. To obtain a degree or other qualification
 b. To study at a foreign (English-speaking) university in the future
 c. To improve my current career
 d. To get a better (different) job in the future
 e. To improve my English
 f. To understand British culture
 g. To make friends with foreigners
 h. To travel
 i. To broaden my outlook
 j. To live or spend some time abroad
 k. To accompany a family member
 l. Other

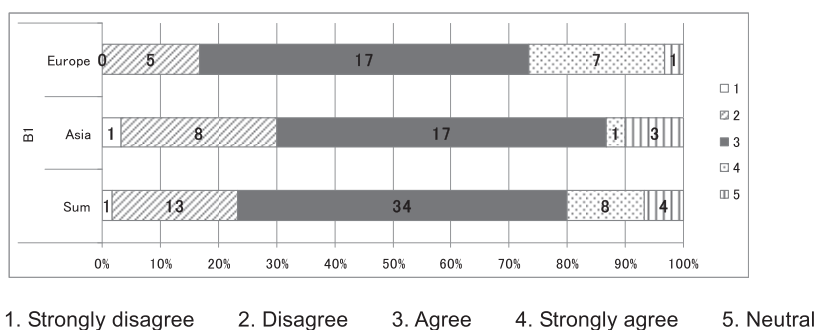
4.1.2 Perceptions of studying and living in the UK

The questions in Section B examined how international students felt while they studied and lived in the UK, and each question employed a five-point rating scale with the choices of either “strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD), neutral (N)”, or “very easy (VE), relatively easy (RE), relatively difficult (RD), very difficult (VD), no opinion (NO)”. The numbers in the middle of each bar chart indicate how many students chose each alternative answer.

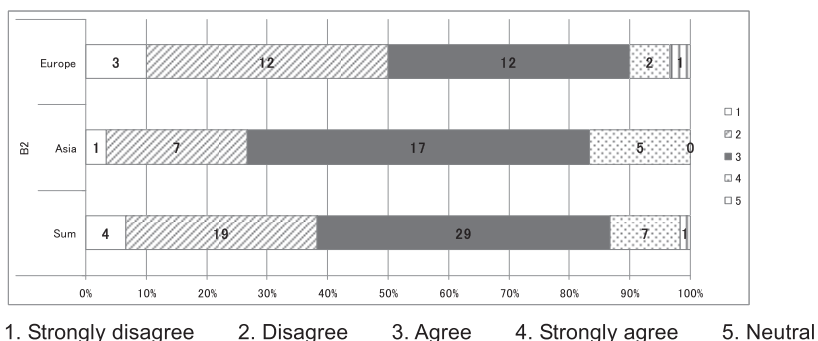
The results for question B1 [“I can handle myself well in social gatherings.”] show that 17 out of 30 students in both European and Asian groups agreed that they can handle themselves in social gatherings in the UK. However, there were seven European students but only one Asian student who strongly agreed, while eight Asian students, three more than European students, chose “disagree” (see Graph 3). Nearly 75% of the Asian students chose either “strongly agree” or

“agree” to answer question B2 [“I am usually quiet and passive in social situations.”], while less than half of the European students chose these options. Thus, half of the European students did not think that they were usually quiet and passive in social situations in the UK, but only a quarter of the Asian students felt the same (see Graph 4).

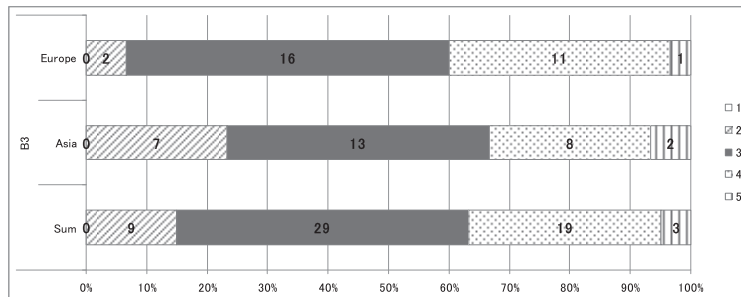
Graph 3 I can handle myself well in social gatherings. [B1]



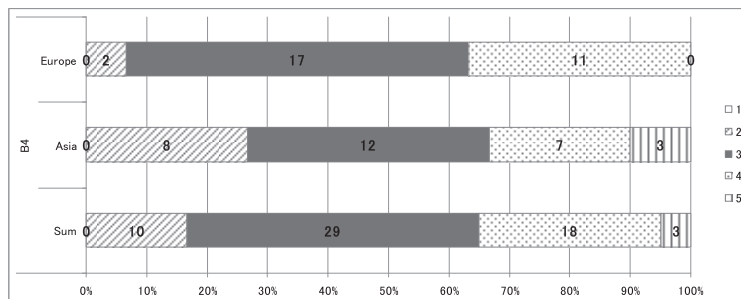
Graph 4 I am usually quiet and passive in social situations. [B2]



It was found that 90% of the European students felt confident asking their teachers a question before or after class (SA: 37%, A: 53%), and 70% of the Asian students felt the same (SA: 27%, A: 43%). However, nearly a quarter of the Asian students disagreed with the feeling (see Graph 5). Similarly, over 90% of the European students felt confident talking to their teachers (SA: 37%, A: 57%), and less than 65% of the Asian students felt the same (SA: 23%, A: 40%). In addition, over a quarter of the Asian students chose “disagree” for this question (see Graph 6).

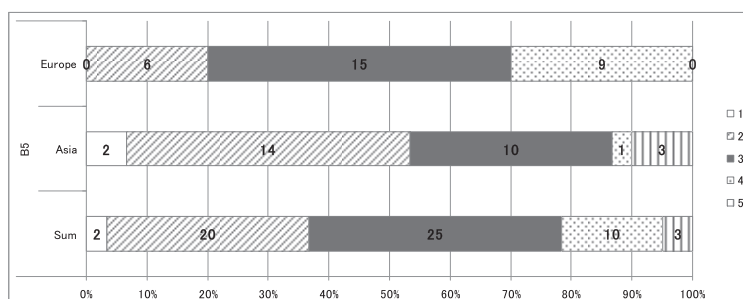
Graph 5 I feel confident asking a teacher a question before/after class. [B3]

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

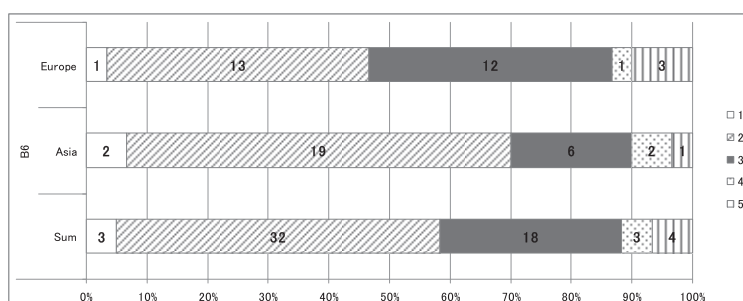
Graph 6 I feel confident talking to my teachers. [B4]

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

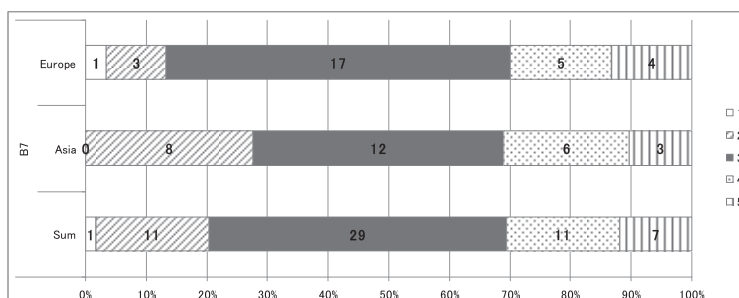
According to the responses to question B5, it is obvious that the majority of the European students feel confident asking questions in class (SA: 30%, A: 50%), while more than half of the Asian students chose either “strongly disagree” or “disagree” (SD: 7%, D: 47%), and only around 30% of the Asian students agreed with this feeling (see Graph 7). The results for question B6 also show that 70% of the Asian students did not feel that they were confident of their English language skills (SD: 7%, D: 63%), but less than half of the European students felt the same (SD: 3%, D: 43%). The number of European students who chose “agree” to this question was twice as high as that of the Asian students (see Graph 8). In regard to question B7, more European students agreed that they feel comfortable requesting information in general, and more Asian students disagreed. It seemed difficult for students to understand the meaning of this question since over 10% students in both groups chose “neutral” (see Graph 9).

Graph 7 I feel confident asking questions in class. [B5]

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

Graph 8 I am confident of my English language skills. [B6]

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

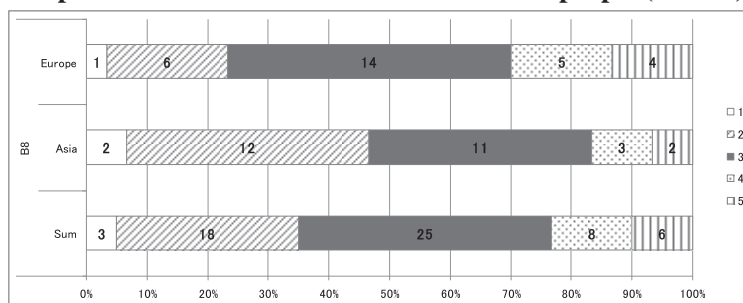
Graph 9 I feel comfortable requesting information in general. [B7]

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

As expected, question B8 found that more European than Asian students thought that they have common interests with British people. More than 70% from the European group chose either “strongly agree” or “agree” (SA: 17%, A: 47%), while less than half of the Asian students chose the same options (SA:10%, A:37%) (see Graph 10). Interestingly, the answers to question B9 are very different between the two groups. Nearly 85% of the European students either **strongly agreed** or **agreed** with the feeling that they have common topics for conversation with British people. On the other hand, 60% of the Asian students

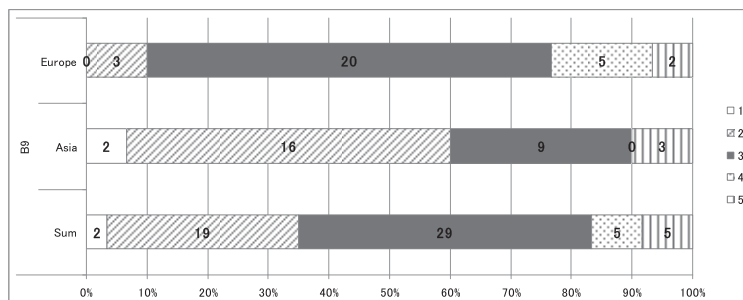
either **strongly disagreed** or **disagreed** with this feeling. None of them chose “strongly agree” to answer the question (see Graph 11). Similar to the results from question B9, the answers to question B10 were also very different between the two groups. About 75% of the European students enjoyed activities that most British people do (SA: 13%, A: 60%). Only a third of the Asian students **agreed** with the idea and none of them chose “strongly agree” to answer the question. There were 10% of the European students and 20% of the Asian students who chose “neutral” to answer this question (see Graph 12).

Graph 10 I have common interests with local people (British). [B8]



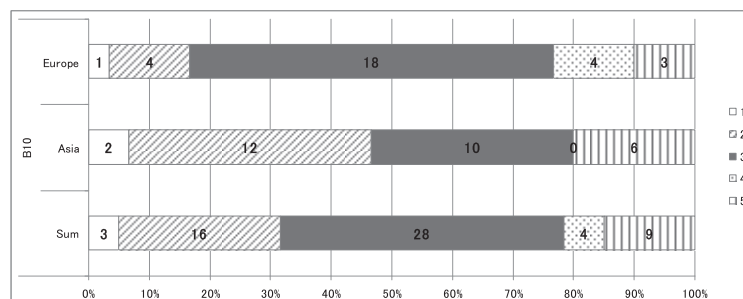
1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

Graph 11 I have common topics for conversation with local people. [B9]



1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

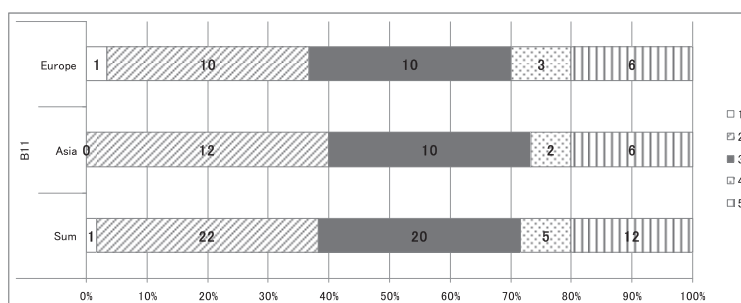
Graph 12 I enjoy activities that most local people enjoy. [B10]



1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

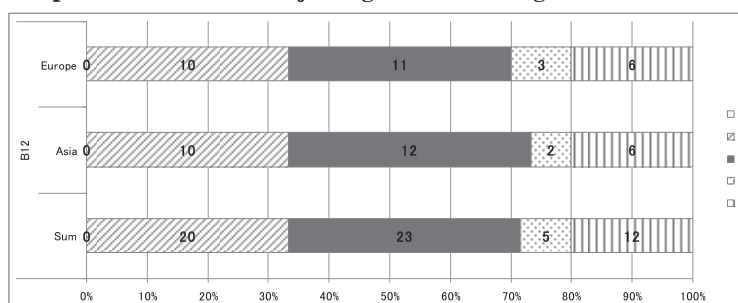
On the other hand, answers to question B11 from both groups were very similar. Around 40% of the students in each group either **strongly agreed** or **agreed** that they start a conversation if they see someone they would like to get to know. A similar number of students in each group also chose either “strongly disagree” or “disagree”, and six students in each group chose “neutral” (see Graph 13). Same as the answers to B11, both groups had very similar answers to question B12. Almost 50% of the students in each group either **strongly agreed** or **agreed** that they feel confident joining in activities organized for students, and over a third of the students in each group **disagreed** with the idea (see Graph14). It seems that these answers are more related to the students’ personalities rather than their nationalities.

Graph 13 If I see someone I would like to get to know, I start a conversation instead of waiting for the other person to do so. [B11]



1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

Graph 14 I feel confident joining in activities organized for students. [B12]

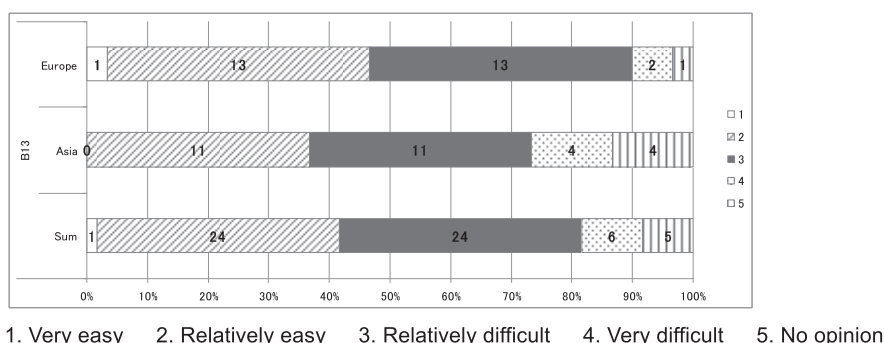


1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Agree 4. Strongly agree 5. Neutral

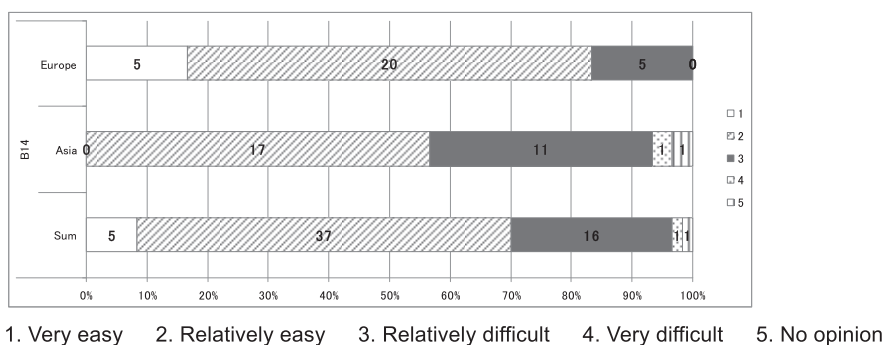
Question 13 asked how difficult or easy it is to make friends in the UK. There were 13 students in the European group that felt it is **relatively difficult**, and the same number of students felt that it is **relatively easy**. Similarly, 11 students in the Asian group felt that it is **relatively difficult** and the same number of Asian

students also felt that it is **relatively easy** to make friends in the UK. However, more Asian students chose “very difficult” or “no opinion” to this question (around 10% each) (see Graph 15). Nearly 85% of the European students believe that they can hold a conversation easily with people from different cultures (VE: 17%, RE: 67%), while nearly 40% of the Asian students chose “relatively difficult”, and none of them chose “very easy” (see Graph 16).

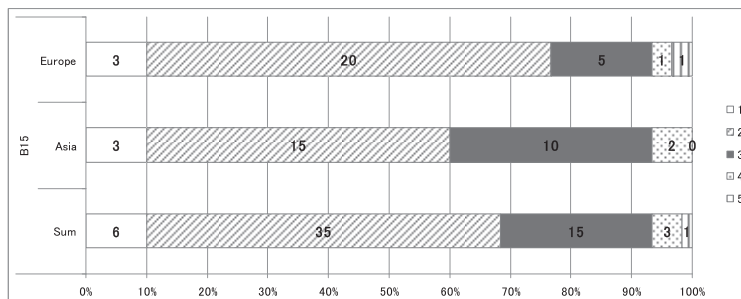
Graph 15 Making new friends in this country [B13]



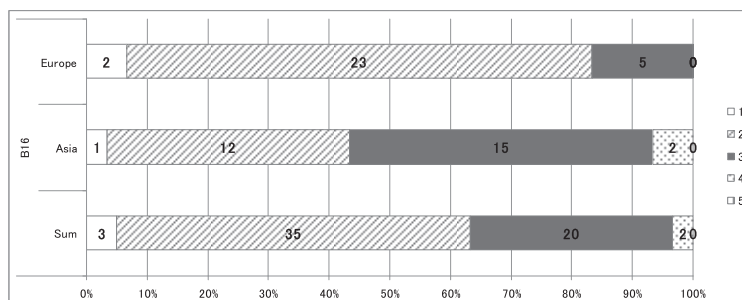
Graph 16 Holding a conversation with people from different cultures [B14]



According to the answers to question B15, most students in each group felt it is **relatively easy** to participate in class discussions. However, a third of the Asian students chose “relatively difficult”, which is twice as many as that of the European students (see Graph 17). Question B14 asked how difficult or easy it is to express a different opinion. The majority of the European students (25 out of 30) chose either “very easy” or “relatively easy” to this question. However, more than half of the Asian students (17 out of 30) felt it difficult to express a different opinion (VD: 7%, RD: 50%) (see Graph 18).

Graph 17 Participating in class discussions [B15]

1. Very easy 2. Relatively easy 3. Relatively difficult 4. Very difficult 5. No opinion

Graph 18 Expressing a different opinion [B16]

1. Very easy 2. Relatively easy 3. Relatively difficult 4. Very difficult 5. No opinion

4.1.3 Strategies for coping with the life in the UK

Questions in Section C explore what type of strategies international students used to adapt to living and studying in the UK, and each question is categorized under one of the following seven themes which were introduced in the Culture Learning Strategies Inventory (2002):

- a) Adjusting to a new culture and coping with culture shock [Q9, Q22]
- b) Dealing with difficult times in the new culture [Q1, Q2, Q5, Q6]
- c) Making judgments about another culture [Q10, Q13, Q16]
- d) Communicating with people from another culture [Q3, Q7, Q18, Q24]
- e) Dealing with different communication styles [Q17, Q20, Q23]
- f) Understanding nonverbal communication in another culture [Q8, Q11, Q12, Q14, Q15, Q19]
- g) Interacting with people in the host culture [Q4, Q21]

Table 1. a) Adjusting to a new culture and coping with culture shock

Scale: _____ O _____ So _____ Se _____ N _____

• I discuss my cross-cultural experiences with my family and friends in my country. [C9]

Europe	17	10	2	1
Asia	9	14	4	3

- **I assume that culture shock is a normal part of a cultural learning experience and do not worry about it too much. [C22]**

Europe	13	12	5	0
Asia	20	6	3	0

According to the results for question C9, more than half of the European students **often** discussed their cross-cultural experiences with their families and friends in their home countries. While nearly a third of the Asian students **often** did the same. Almost a quarter of the Asian students chose either “seldom” or “never” to answer the question. The responses to question C22 revealed that 20 out of the 30 Asian students **often** assumed that culture shock is a normal part of the cultural learning experience and they did not worry about it too much. While less than half of the European students chose “often”, and around the same number of the students also chose “sometimes”. Nobody from either group chose “never” to answer the question.

Table 2. b) *Dealing with difficult times in the new culture*

Scale: _____ O _____ So _____ Se _____ N _____

- **I find someone from my own culture to talk to about my cultural experiences. [C1]**

Europe	7	11	6	6
Asia	9	15	6	0

- **I keep a journal or a diary about my experiences. [C2]**

Europe	1	2	6	21
Asia	1	3	6	20

- **I relax by doing what I normally do to make myself comfortable when I am stressed. [C5]**

Europe	18	12	0	0
Asia	12	16	2	0

- **I keep in touch with friends and family in my country by phoning, emailing, etc. [C6]**

Europe	25	4	1	0
Asia	26	4	0	0

Answers to question C1 indicate that the Asian students are more likely to look for someone who shares their own culture and talk with them about their cultural experiences abroad. Nearly a third of the Asian students chose “often” and half of them chose “sometimes” to answer the question. On the other hand, less of the European students chose these options: 20% of the students chose “seldom” and another 20% chose “never” as an answer. None of the Asian students chose “never”. Question C2 asked about the habit of keeping a diary or journal about their study abroad experience. Around 20 out of the 30 students in each group had

never kept a diary and only one student in each group had **often** written a journal about their study abroad experience. It seems to be uncommon to keep a diary even though the students moved to a different environment. Question C5 asked how often students could relax by doing what they normally did to make themselves comfortable when they were stressed. All of the European students chose either “often” or “sometimes” to answer this question (O: 60%, So: 40%), but slightly fewer of the Asian students could **often** do the same (O: 40%, So: 53%). Question C6 revealed that the majority of student in both groups **often** keep in touch with their friends and families in their own countries due to the convenient social networking technologies available around the world. Nobody chose “never” as an answer to the question.

Table 3. c) *Making judgments about another culture*

Scale:	O	So	Se	N
• I refrain from making quick judgments about another culture. [C10]				
Europe	12	16	2	0
Asia	8	16	6	0
• I observe the behavior of people from different countries very carefully. [C13]				
Europe	17	10	3	0
Asia	6	13	11	0
• I consider my own cultural biases when trying to understand another culture. [C16]				
Europe	19	10	1	0
Asia	7	17	5	1

It was found that a little less than half of the European students **often** refrained from making quick judgments about another culture, while almost a third of the Asian students **often** did the same. The same number of students in both groups chose “sometimes”, but slightly more of the Asian students chose “seldom” to answer the question. The results for question C13 indicated that more than half of the European students **often** observed the behavior of people from different countries very carefully, while only 20% of the Asian students chose “often” to answer the question. More than a third of the Asian students chose “seldom” and only 10% of the Europeans chose the same option. The answers to question C16 showed that nearly 20 out of the 30 European students **often** considered their own cultural biases when trying to understand another culture, and the rest (10 out of 30) **sometimes** did the same. There were not many Asian students who chose “often”, but more than half of them chose “sometimes” to answer the question.

Table 4. d) *Communicating with people from another culture*

Scale:	O	So	Se	N
• I read local newspapers to better understand the current political and social issues. [C3]				
Europe	11	7	9	3
Asia	2	10	14	4
• I build relations with local people by finding opportunities to spend time with them. [C7]				
Europe	8	11	11	0
Asia	2	12	9	7
• I assume that everyone from the same culture is the same. [C18]				
Europe	1	1	8	20
Asia	3	5	10	12
• I help people in this country understand me by explaining my behaviour and attitudes in terms of my personality and culture. [C24]				
Europe	10	14	4	1
Asia	4	19	5	1

The answers to question C3 indicated that more of the European students tend to read local newspapers to understand the current political and social issues. More than a third of the European students chose “often”, while only two of the Asian students chose “often” and a third chose “sometimes” to answer the question. Due to the similarities between their native language and English, European students might have fewer difficulties with reading newspapers written in English. Question C7 examined how often students tried to build relationships with British people by finding opportunities to spend time with them. Over a quarter of the European students chose “often” and a third chose “sometimes” to answer the question. However, only two of the Asian students chose “often” and less than half of the Asian students chose “sometimes”. This seemed to indicate that European students were more proactive about building relationships with the local people while studying in the UK. The answers to question C18 showed that 20 out of the 30 European students **never** assumed that everyone from the same culture was the same, and only 40% of the Asian students also **never** felt so. Just a few of the Europeans assumed that people from the same culture were **often** or **sometimes** the same, while over a quarter of the Asian students **often** or **sometimes** assumed the same thing. According to question C24, a third of the European students **often** tried to help people in the UK to understand them by explaining their own behavior and attitudes in terms of their personality and culture, and only four of the Asian students **often** did the same. On the other hand, nearly 60% of the Asian students chose “sometimes” and less than half of the

European students chose the same option.

Table 5. e) *Dealing with different communication styles*

Scale:	O	So	Se	N
• I use a different communication style when talking with someone from a different culture. [C17]				
Europe	4	19	5	2
Asia	4	16	8	2
• I respect the way people from other cultures express their emotions. [C20]				
Europe	24	6	0	0
Asia	25	4	1	0
• I refrain from disagreeing right away so that I have a chance to listen to what others are trying to communicate. [C23]				
Europe	15	11	2	0
Asia	12	13	5	0

Question C17 examined the use of different communication styles when talking with someone from a different culture. The results showed that four students in each group **often** used a different communication style and two students in each group **never** did so. Nearly 60% of the European students and half of the Asian students chose “sometimes” to answer the question. According to the answers to question C20, it was found that nearly 80% of the students in each group **often** respected the way people from other cultures express their emotions. Several students chose “sometimes” and nobody chose “never” to answer this question. The responses to question C23 show that more of the European students **often** refrained from disagreeing right away so that they had a chance to listen to what others were trying to communicate (European: 54%, Asian: 40%).

Table 6. f) *Understanding nonverbal communication in another culture*

Scale:	O	So	Se	N
• I observe the gestures that people use in this country. [C8]				
Europe	14	8	6	2
Asia	10	8	10	2
• I try to use eye contact in a way that is appropriate in this country. [C11]				
Europe	14	11	3	2
Asia	15	8	5	2
• I ask friends in this country to explain the meaning of different gestures to me. [C12]				
Europe	11	9	4	6
Asia	3	11	8	8

- I figure out how far people stand from each other and try to keep the “right” distance from others. [C14]

Europe	9	8	8	5
Asia	2	12	9	7

- I notice the ways in which people in this country use nonverbal communication. [C15]

Europe	7	11	8	4
Asia	5	11	13	1

- I consider how my own nonverbal communication is influenced by my culture. [C19]

Europe	11	10	6	3
Asia	7	18	2	3

The answers to question C8 revealed that nearly half of the European students **often** observed the gestures of British people, while a third of the Asian students did the same. Another third of the Asian students chose “seldom” and eight students in each group chose “sometimes” to answer question. According to question C11, nearly half of the students in each group **often** used eye contact in an appropriate way in the UK, and more students in the European group chose “sometimes” to answer the question (European: 37%, Asian: 27%). The answers to question C12 indicate that a third of the European students **often** asked their friends in the UK to explain the meaning of different gestures to them, while only three of the Asian students **often** did the same. More than half of the Asian students chose either “seldom” or “never” to answer the question (Se: 27%, Ne: 27%). The responses to question C14 show that nearly a third of the European students **often** figured out how far people stood from each other and tried to keep the right distance from others, while only two of the Asian students **often** did the same. However, more or less half of the students in each group chose either “seldom” or “never” to answer the question. According to question C15, most students **often** or **sometimes** noticed the ways in which British people used nonverbal communication. However, over 40% of the Asian students and less than 30% of the European students chose “seldom” to answer the question. Furthermore, question C19 asked if students considered how their nonverbal communication was influenced by culture. More than a third of the European students **often** considered the influence on their nonverbal communication, and less than a quarter of the Asian students **often** did the same. However, 18 out of the 30 Asian students chose “sometimes”, while just a third of the European students chose the same option.

Table 7. g) *Interacting with people in the host culture*

Scale:	O	So	Se	N
• I join clubs or organizations to meet people who have common interests. [C4]				
Europe	7	10	7	6
Asia	6	10	10	4
• I refrain from making judgments about other people based on my first impressions. [C21]				
Europe	12	13	4	1
Asia	5	17	7	1

According to question C4, more than half of the European and Asian students **often** or **sometimes** joined clubs or organizations to meet people with common interests. Question C21 found that 12 out of the 30 European students **often** refrained from making judgments about other people based on their first impressions, while 17 out of the 30 Asian students **sometimes** did the same and only five of the Asian students chose “often” to answer the question.

4.1.4 Difficulties living and studying in the UK

The following two open questions in Section D asked respondents not only to describe difficulties about studying and living in the UK, but also to explain strategies to deal with the problems. Comments for each question are introduced below.

Question 1: Is there anything you find difficult about living in this country? How do you usually try to cope with these difficulties?

Apart from comments on weather, food, or living costs in the UK mentioned by several students, a considerable number of students pointed out the difficulty in building relationships with British people and explained as follows:

- *British people are very conservative.*
- *They are more reserved than people from my country.*
- *To avoid being disappointed, I don't expect any close relationship (friendship) from British people.*
- *[It is difficult to] start new friendships with different people from different culture.*
- *I cannot speak fluently with local people. [It is] difficult to understand their jokes.*
- *It is sometimes hard to be involved with conversation because we don't have the same cultural references.*

In regards to the ways of coping with these difficulties, the following comments were given:

- *Try to do what locals do, ask friends where to buy things.*
- *I try to first observe their way of communication and gestures, so I can adjust myself to them.*
- *Try to find a topic which I can talk with others in a social event. Listen to others, find out what they are talking about.*
- *Join society and club to find people of similar interest.*
- *Asking advice from local people.*
- *Ask friends who have already been studying quite long time in this country.*
- *Talk to the deans or tutors.*

**Question 2: Is there anything you find difficult about studying, particularly [in your current course] in the UK?
How do you usually try to overcome these difficulties?**

This question focused on the aspect of studying in the UK, and discovered that there were several students who tried hard to make efforts to improve their English but had problems understanding a variety of different accents. For example, some of them mentioned:

- *I am trying to watch the local TV [in English] and attending English classes.*
- *Just listen to BBC news, then talk and ask people about the meaning [of unknown/unclear words].*

There were also some students who asked their tutors or supervisors for advice and discussed their problems. In fact, a student mentioned:

- *Education system and the view on learning are quite different from where I come from. I talked about it with my tutor and he gave me some suggestions which were useful.*

Several students pointed out the difficulty in writing papers in English, and mentioned:

- *Finding good proof readers is not easy. I normally ask my friends but feel I am disturbing them.*
- *To overcome the difficulty, I registered in the course “Academic Writing”.*

There are also several students who suffered from a kind of “language barrier”. For instance, some wrote:

- *I communicate with my colleagues by email.*
- *I find it hard to express myself. It seems people misunderstand me in class. [It is] difficult to join discussion, [so I need to] improve my communication skill in English.*

These comments imply that there were many students who were not satisfied

with their current English abilities and struggled to improve the language skills.

4.2 Discussion of key findings

The aim of this section is to answer research questions on the basis of key findings and to develop the discussion by reviewing the empirical research explained above.

4.2.1 Perceptions of studying and living in the UK

This survey revealed that 70% of the Asian students and nearly half of the European students did not feel confident of their English language skills (see Graph 8). The result supports the study of Ramburuth (2001) which found that more than seventy percent of overseas students required intensive English language support. However, this study found that most of the European students were quite confident asking questions and talking to their teachers, while less of the Asian students felt confident doing the same things (see Graph 5, 6, 7). Especially when asking questions in class, more than half of the Asian students, but only 20% of the European students, did not feel confident (see Graph 7). Furthermore, over 75% of the European student and 40% of the Asian students felt it easy to participate in discussions in class (see Graph 17). More than 80% of the European students also felt it easy to express different opinions, while more than half of the Asian students felt it difficult to do so (see Graph 18). Therefore, this survey endorsed the studies that Asian students tend to have more difficulties and concerns when adjusting into their new academic lives in foreign countries (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). In regards to socializing in new settings, most students felt that they could handle themselves in social gatherings well (see Graph 3). However, this survey also revealed that more than 70% of the Asian students were usually quiet and passive in social situations, while less than half of the European were like that (see Graph 4).

When it comes to the interaction with local people in particular, there were big differences between answers of the European students and those of Asians. More European than Asian students had common interests and topics to share with British people (see Graph 10, 11). Nearly 85% of the European students felt that they had common topics for conversation with British people. On the other hand, 60% of the Asian students **disagreed** with this feeling and none of them **strongly agreed** with the idea (see Graph 11). Similarly, it was revealed that 75% of the European students could enjoy activities which most British people did, while

only a third of the Asian students could do the same (see Graph 12). As many studies suggested (Andrade, 2006; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995), interaction with local students is effective to adjust the perception of international students studying and living in the foreign country. Therefore, European students who could share common topics and interests and also enjoy some activities with British people have more advantages than Asian students.

However, according to the question about making new friends in the UK, half of the European and Asian students felt it to be difficult (see Graph 15). Some students also commented that British people are very conservative, and it is difficult to start new friendships with different people from different cultures (see 4.1.4).

4.2.2 Strategies for coping with the life in the UK

This article examined seven different types of strategies which international students may employ for studying and living in the UK (see 4.1.3).

a) Adjusting to a new culture and coping with culture shock

This survey found that more than half of the European students and nearly a third of the Asian students **often** discussed their cross-cultural experiences with their families and friends in their home countries. It was also revealed that 20 out of the 30 Asian students and less than half of the European students **often** assumed that culture shock was a normal part of a cultural learning experience and they did not worry about it too much. The result tells that there were a considerable number of international students who recognized “culture shock” and explained their cultural experiences to their friends or families. Some studies pointed out that international students tend to suffer from loneliness and homesick due to the lack of social support since their family and friends are far away (Church, 1982; Hechanova-Alampay et al., 2002; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). This study proves that international students actually made use of some social supports as strategies to adjust to a new culture.

b) Dealing with difficult times in the new culture

The importance of social supports in a new environment was also supported by the result that the majority of international students **often** kept in touch with their friends and families in their own countries (European 83%, Asian 87%). Especially, Asian students were more likely to find someone who shares their own culture and to talk about their cultural experiences abroad. Furthermore, almost all international students **often** tried to relax by doing what they normally did when

they were stressed. Thus, there were many students who kept similar habits and human relations to some extent in order to survive in new cultural settings. In addition, it was not common to start keeping a diary about their study abroad experience. 60% of both European and Asian students **never** kept a journal during their stay.

c) Making judgments about another culture

This study found that more than half of the European students **often** observed the behavior of people from different countries very carefully, while only 20% of the Asian students did the same. In addition, nearly 20 out of the 30 European students, but less than 10 of the Asian students, **often** considered their own cultural biases when trying to understand another culture, and more European students **often** refrained from making quick judgments about another culture. According to these results, Asian students tend to have less cultural awareness than European students do. This could be one of the reasons that Asian students usually have more difficulties than other international students when they study abroad (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Sheehan & Pearson, 1995).

d) Communicating with people from another culture

More than a third of the European students **often** read local newspapers to understand the current political and social issues of the foreign country, while there were only two of the Asian students who did the same. In addition, European students were more proactive toward building relationships with the local people than were Asian students. Besides, a third of the European students **often** tried to help local people to understand them by explaining their behavior and attitudes in terms of their personality and culture, but only four of the Asian students did the same. This study also found that the majority of the European students and less than half of the Asian students **never** assumed that everyone from the same culture was the same. These results also emphasize that European students are usually more sensitive toward understanding the cultures and people in foreign countries, and they are more aware of cultural differences between international students.

e) Dealing with different communication styles

The majority of the European students and around half of the Asian students **often** or **sometimes** used a different communication style when they talked with someone from a different culture. There were also more European than Asian students who **often** listened to what others were trying to communicate and refrained from disagreeing with their opinions right away. These results also support the view that European students have higher cultural awareness than do

Asian students, but nearly 80% of the students in each group **often** respected the way people from other cultures express their emotions.

f) Understanding nonverbal communication in another culture

Nearly half of the European students and a third of the Asian students **often** observed the gestures of British people. In addition, around a third of the European students **often** asked friends in the UK to explain the meaning of different gestures or tried to figure out the appropriate distance when people stand facing each other, but only a few Asian students **often** paid attention to these things. Therefore, more European than Asian students are also aware of the various ways of nonverbal communication, but nearly half of the students in each group **often** used eye contact in an appropriate way in the UK.

g) Interacting with people in the host culture

More than half of the European and the Asian students **often** or **sometimes** joined clubs or organizations to meet people with common interests. This result also showed that international students employed strategies to interact with people and obtain social supports. As some studies recommended, it is effective to interact especially with local students to adjust to academic and daily life in the foreign country (Abe et al., 1998; Andrade, 2006; Surdam & Collins, 1984; Zimmerman, 1995). When interacting with people, there were more European students who **often** refrained from making judgments about other people based on their first impression.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the perceptions of the study abroad students living and studying in the UK and their strategies to cope with their difficulties in adjusting to the new setting. The survey with 52 questions was conducted for 60 international students who participated in the ESL classes at a university. The data was divided into two groups according to their nationalities and the results between European and Asian students were compared.

The findings of this research confirmed that there were a considerable number of international students who were not confident with their English language skills. In particular, Asian students were much less confident asking questions and expressing their opinions, with the result of that they tended to feel more difficulties than did European students. On the other hand, European students had higher cultural awareness and could better share their interests and interact with

local British people. Regarding strategies for adjusting to the UK life, most students employed social supports from local people as well as those who live in their own countries. More European than Asian students observed the behaviors and gestures of British people. It was also revealed that there were more European students who could adjust themselves to accept cultural differences and use different communication styles when they talked with someone from a different culture.

It is hoped, for a future study, to have one more group which is neither European nor Asian, and to analyze the correlations among their language performance, perceptions and strategies in order to explore more detailed factors in socio-cultural adjustment.

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Appendix

1/2

Questionnaire about studying and living in the UK**A: About yourself**

1. Your name initials: [] example: [M.S (Mary Smith)]
2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
3. Age: ☐ under 20 ☐ 20-24 ☐ 25-29 ☐ 30-34 ☐ 35-39 ☐ 40's ☐ 50's ☐ 60's or over
4. Nationality: []
5. Your country of permanent residence: []
6. The duration of your stay in the UK :
☐ less than 6 months ☐ 7-12 months ☐ 1-2 years ☐ More than 2 years
7. The duration of your current study course:
☐ less than 6 months ☐ 7-12 months ☐ 1-2 years ☐ More than 2 years
8. Name of your study course/ degree: []
9. Primary reasons for being in the UK: *Choose the three most important reasons for you.
[1st reason: , 2nd reason: , 3rd reason:]
a. To obtain a degree or other qualification [details:]
b. To study at a foreign (English-speaking) university in the future
c. To improve my current career
d. To get a better (different) job in the future
e. To improve my English
f. To understand British culture
g. To make friends with foreigners
h. To travel
i. To broaden my outlook
j. To live or spend some time abroad
k. To accompany a family member
l. Other []
10. Why did you decide to come to the UK?

B: Studying and living in the UK

1. I can handle myself well in social gatherings.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
2. I am usually quiet and passive in social situations.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
3. I feel confident asking a teacher a question before/after class.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
4. I feel confident talking to my teachers.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
5. I feel confident asking questions in class.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
6. I am confident of my English language skills.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
7. I feel comfortable requesting information in general.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
8. I have common interests with local people (British).
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
9. I have common topics for conversation with local people (British).
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
10. I enjoy activities that most local people enjoy.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
11. If I see someone I would like to get to know, I start a conversation instead of waiting for the other person to do so.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
12. I feel confident joining in activities organized for students.
☐ 1. Strongly disagree ☐ 2. Disagree ☐ 3. Agree ☐ 4. Strongly agree ☐ 5. Neutral
13. Making new friends in this country is:
☐ 1. Very easy ☐ 2. Relatively easy ☐ 3. Relatively difficult ☐ 4. Very difficult ☐ 5. No opinion
14. Holding a conversation with people from different cultures is:
☐ 1. Very easy ☐ 2. Relatively easy ☐ 3. Relatively difficult ☐ 4. Very difficult ☐ 5. No opinion
15. Participating in class discussions is:
☐ 1. Very easy ☐ 2. Relatively easy ☐ 3. Relatively difficult ☐ 4. Very difficult ☐ 5. No opinion
16. Expressing a different opinion is:
☐ 1. Very easy ☐ 2. Relatively easy ☐ 3. Relatively difficult ☐ 4. Very difficult ☐ 5. No opinion

C: Strategies for coping with your life in the UK

◆ Which of the following strategies do you use to adapt to living in the UK?

1. I find someone from my own culture to talk to about my cultural experiences.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
2. I keep a journal of a diary about my experiences.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
3. I read local newspapers to better understand the current political and social issues.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
4. I join clubs or organizations to meet people who have common interests.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
5. I relax by doing what I normally do to make myself comfortable when I am stressed.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
6. I keep in touch with friends and family in my country by phoning, emailing, etc.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
7. I build relations with local people by finding opportunities to spend time with them.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
8. I observe the gestures that people use in this country.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
9. I discuss my cross-cultural experiences with my family and friends in my country.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
10. I refrain from making quick judgments about another culture.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
11. I try to use eye contact in a way that is appropriate in this country.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
12. I ask friends in this country to explain the meaning of different gestures to me.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
13. I observe the behaviour of people from different countries very carefully.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
14. I figure out how far people stand from each other and try to keep the "right" distance from others.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
15. I notice the ways in which people in this country use nonverbal communication.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
16. I consider my own cultural biases when trying to understand another culture.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
17. I use a different communication style when talking with someone from a different culture.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
18. I assume that everyone from the same culture is the same.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
19. I consider how my own nonverbal communication is influenced by my culture.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
20. I respect the way people from other cultures express their emotions.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
21. I refrain from making judgments about other people based on my first impressions.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
22. I assume that culture shock is a normal part of a cultural learning experience and do not worry about it too much.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
23. I refrain from disagreeing right away so that I have a chance to listen to what others are trying to communicate.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often
24. I help people in this country understand me by explaining my behaviour and attitudes in terms of my personality and culture.
☐ 1. Never ☐ 2. Seldom ☐ 3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Often

D: Comments

1. Is there anything you find difficult about living in this country?
How do you usually try to cope with these difficulties?

2. Is there anything you find difficult about studying, particularly [in your current course] in the UK? How do you usually try to overcome these difficulties?