

A comparative analysis of the student experience of international business studies
programmes at the undergraduate level in three countries:
Taiwan, Germany and the United Kingdom

Submitted by Hou-Heng Chang to the University of Exeter
as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
In May 2011

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the experiences of international students studying in English-medium business programmes in three countries: the United Kingdom, Germany and Taiwan. The purpose of this comparative study is to investigate how the students' identity is constituted in the multicultural business classroom and on the multi-cultural campus, the role in this of cultural components of the curriculum in international business programmes, the ways in which the wider student experience operates in such multi-cultural settings and the implications of each of these facets for teachers and institutional managers.

Inter-/cross-cultural competence is held to be a vital skill that business graduates should be equipped with in order to be capable of working in an increasingly diverse global village, and it is believed that such competence can be developed through frequent communication and negotiation with people from other cultures. Sojourners in this study attempted to negotiate new identities in the multicultural learning environment in the alien context in ways that were strongly influenced by individuals' biographical and life experiences. There were several influential factors in these sojourners' processes of learning and transition, including: interpersonal and

intrapersonal factors; motivations for studying abroad; the nature of the learning environment they encountered; and the settings in which these interactions took place. Holliday's (1994) "small cultures" theory and Wegner's (1998) "communities of practice" are concepts used to help explain sojourners' experiences in terms of where and with whom they interacted, and how this influenced their perception of the learning experience in the international contexts.

The three institutes were selected through the purposive sampling method, with pre-set criteria such as the percentage of courses taught in participants' second or foreign language(s) and the percentage of international students in the student population of the university. The sample of twenty-two student participants was obtained by using opportunistic sampling and snowball sampling methods. The qualitative data set comprised 18 individual interviews, 3 group interviews and 40 diary entries. Data analysis took the form of typological analysis (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) by dividing the overall data set into categories or groups based on predetermined typologies.

One of the main findings of this study is that international students experienced high levels of isolation and marginalisation, which affected their academic confidence and

social involvement. The universities concerned were aggressively recruiting international students and making efforts to internationalise curricula, yet the academic and social support on offer was perceived as narrow and very marginalised.

Keywords: international students, intercultural/cross-cultural competence, small cultures, communities of practice