Harmonization of Multicultural Awareness and Intercultural Relations among Multiracial Society in Malaysia

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Abstract

Interracial issues are critical to sustain a harmonious interethnic relationship among diversified ethnic population especially in the South East Asian region. Interethnic conflicts, difficulties, anxiety and uncertainties occurred due to people's lack of awareness or insensitivity to the cultural clues of different cultural frame of references (values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and customs), and expectations. Symbolic multicultural environments have significant influences to the people's ways of life. Notably, intercultural awareness was found to be insufficiently measured. Hence, the present study was initiated to establish a feasible measure to assess the cognitive influence of multicultural awareness, guided by the Social Learning Theory. A psychometric contains was assessed and a principle components analysis procedure was undertaken to obtain the reliability of the construct. A key finding from the present study indicated that the scale is valid and reliable in assessing cultural awareness among the multiethnic society in Malaysia. The result signal sufficiency of cultural knowledge assists people to eliminate a psychological discomfort and interracial conflicts.

Keywords: Multicultural, Awareness, Relation, Interaction, Measures

Introduction

Developmental issues such as economic volatility, social and cultural nuisance and other internal political intervention is crucial to the regional stability. The recent collision between Cambodia and Thailand are due to fight over the ancient temple and the surrounding territory could jeopardize a harmonious intercultural relationship in this region. Asian region is a unique example of multicultural diversification society that requires highly intercultural awareness and understanding to sustain a harmonious intercultural relationship. Particularly, Malaysia accounted for 28 million populations (July estimation) according to the Preliminary Count Report on the Malaysian

population and housing Census 2010. Bumiputra comprises 65.1% of the population, followed by Chinese (26.0%) and Indian (7.7%). Non-Malay indigenous groups make up half of east Malaysia about 50% population of Sarawak (apart from Malay 23%, Chinese 26.7%, Indian 0.2% and others 0.2%), and about 66% population of Sabah (apart from Malay 15.3%, Chinese 13.2%, Indian 0.5% and others 5.0%). The federal government of Malaysia officially recognized 28 ethnic groups in Sarawak with its main groups of Iban, Bidayuhs and Melanaus. In Sabah, Kadazan/Dusuns, Bajans and Muruts are the main indigenous groups.

Malaysian government is addressing interracial and ethnic relations issue with great care, and carried out cultural-based public policies to avoid any possibilities of tragic violence. A tragic conflict between Malays and Chinese in May-July 1969 has shown a lesson that inadequate intercultural awareness can jeopardize a harmonious multicultural integration. Cultural knowledge, awareness, sensitivity and respect on social norms are crucial to set up effective participation of intercultural interactions and relations, and adaptation into new a cultural environment (Bjerregaard *et al.*, 2009; Hall, 1956, Gudykunst and Hammer, 1984; Kim, 2005). Sufficient awareness and compromising on cultural differences reduced negative consequences such as disappointment, uncertainty, confusion and psychological discomforts. Therefore, this present study assesses the extents people from different cultural background aware the cultural differences from one to another. The main aim crafted in the present study is to uncover the reliability of the adapted Multicultural Awareness Scales in explaining an individual's intercultural understanding. Thus, the present study initiated to confirm the multicultural awareness scale among the multicultural society of Malaysia.

Literature Review

Culture is mental programming that shaped individual frame of references of mind set which contents set of norms, value, belief, attitude, perceptions and customs (Hofstede, 1991, Torbiorn, 1982). It is a collective cognitive learning knowledge and skills, which make an individual unique and creates a group's identity, and being boundaries to differentiate from one to another. Cultural elements are being passed down by generations (Kroeber and Klukhorn, 1952; Krout, 1932) through imitation and modelling learning process (Bandura, 1977) and through society influences. Contrast frame of reference, cultural expectation and ethnocentrism sentiment may cause cultural misunderstanding, resistance, rejection, separation, conflict, anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural relationships and interactions. In addition, ethnicity or sub-culture is a branch of a cultural group that creates specific races or ethnic identification. Ethnic diversification creates heterogeneity in cultural society especially within Asian region, which possibly create gigantic cultural confusion and understanding difficulties especially between non-Asian.

Cultural aspects have proven to give significant interventions in any interpersonal relationship, human resource management practices and human behavioural studies (examples, Abang Ekhsan, 2009; Aycan *et al.*, 2000; Bruton and Lau, 2008; Leung *et al.*, 2005; Magnusson *et al.*, 2008; Stahl, 2000). Among others, effective communicative competency and intercultural understanding was found the essences toward effective human relationship and interaction in determining the proper way of doing things (Clausen, 2010; Leung, 2007; Matsumoto and Yoo, 2006). Besides, a

study by Neelankavil *et al.* (2000) has identified that, culture has played significant roles in managerial effectiveness. In addition, environment and sociological examination indicated that intercultural relationship building is depend on an individual's ability to fit-in with socio-cultural setting, especially in their international travelling (Bhanugopan and Fish, 2006; Bowman and Meacheam, 2000; Forster, 1997; Harzing, 1995; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2008, 2009; Yeaton and Hall, 2008). Insensitivity to the cultural influences ruins the interpersonal relationship, the effectiveness of marketing strategies (see, Acar *et al.*, 2011) and affect a critical emotional reaction (Awang-Rozaimie, 2011). The multicultural society of Malaysia with diversity in sub-culture or ethnic composition challenges the effectiveness of intercultural relationship. Hence, a multicultural awareness rationalizes in the present study is perceived as recognition and understanding on cultural skills, knowledge and the way of life of different ethnic group. Hence, the multicultural awareness implicitly conceptualised as cognitive elements of intercultural knowledge, believed promotes a harmony inter-ethnic relationship.

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory underlines an explanation on a symbolic environment which plays significant roles in influencing people's ways of life and intercultural interaction. Intercultural relations effectiveness depends to the awareness and integration of the social system to create harmonious social relationships. In social integration, a mutual connection is created through right cultural imitation and modelling processes. However, misleading imitation of the learning process may create inappropriate behaviour such as unpleasant, unnecessary, unwelcome, threaten, forces, annoying and show one's intercultural incompetency (Selmer, 2004). In addition, lack of cultural awareness and interest to other cultures typically lead to anxiety and uncertainty in intercultural encounters (Gudykunst and Nishida, 2001). An extrovert person and those who are possesses adequate intercultural awareness shows comfort in other's way of life; wider cultural perspectives and knowledgeable about the different culture frame of references. Intercultural awareness competency requires certain qualities of openness and flexibility to the culture differences. Studies (examples, Ingulsrud *et al.*, 2006; Krainovich-Miller *et al.*, 2008; Rew *et al.*, 2003) found that, self-awareness is a foundation toward intercultural competency. Self-awareness refers realization of knowledge about personal cultural status which may differ with others (Rew *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, cultural awareness emphasizes on cultural knowledge, skills and personality of others which stimulates intercultural competency (Matveev and Milter, 2004). For example, the knowledge about *mianzi* (face-saving) and *guanxi* (relationship) is the key concepts in Chinese culture, which is important to prove mutual business connection in China (see, Buckley *et al.*, 2006; Chen, 2006; Chen and Starosta, 1996; Friedman *et al.*, 2009). In addition, cultural teaching such as a Chinese's Feng Shui (Wan *et al.*, 2012) is able to guide for proper instrumentation and spiritual management toward positive attitude and behaviour.

An intercultural awareness measurement was found mixed with other communicative and sensitivity studies (Chen and Starosta, 2000). In addition, intercultural awareness constructs also was found to be treated as a subscale to other well-being studies which created mix results and impact for a specific study. For example, awareness dimensions in Krainovich-Miller *et al.*'s (2008) study comprises elements of general experience, general awareness and attitude, nursing classes/clinical, research issues and clinical practices. Besides, the Cultural Awareness Scale (CAS) by Rew *et al.* (2003) accounted the dimensions of awareness which covers general education

experience, cognitive awareness, research issues and behavioural/ comfort with interactions. On the other hand, the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) developed by Henry (1991, 1995) refined by Brown (2004) and supported by Hardin, Lower, Smallwood, Chakravarthi and Jordan (2010), found the instruments are reliable to measure an awareness on cultural diversity and overall belief of a person's toward multicultural attitude and behaviour in healthcare examination. Study by Goode (2006) using the Promoting Cultural Diversity and Cultural Competency: Self-Assessment Checklist for Personnel Providing Behavioural Health Services and Supports to Children, Youth and Their Families also has shown a significant cultural awareness among healthcare service provider. Additionally, Chen and Starosta (2003) have developed 20-items of Intercultural Awareness Instrument, but it only emphasizes cultural awareness toward American culture. Delineated from the studies as mentioned above, it yields the need for relevant instruments to measure multicultural awareness among the public. Thus, the present study aspired to recognize the psychometric composition of adapted cultural diversity awareness measures in order to have more feasible scale to assess cultural awareness among multiethnic society akin to Malaysia.

Methodology

The Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) was chosen as it has a capacity to measure intercultural awareness effect. The overall internal consistency of CDAI accounted Cronbach α of 0.90. However, coefficient efficient value for diversity awareness dimensions of CDAI for separate comparison was not available in the original or later studies (see, Henry, 1991; Brown, 2004; Hardin *et al.*, 2010; Larke, 1990; Moore *et al.*, 2003). However, CDAI was initially designed to assess an attitude, beliefs and behaviour toward young children of culturally diverse backgrounds (Henry, 1991). Besides, CDAI also has been used to measure teachers' attitudes towards multiculturalism and diversity (Larke, 1990; Moore *et al.*, 2003) in which treated CDAI with five subscales includes General Cultural Awareness, The Culturally Diverse Family, Cross Cultural Communication, Assessment and the Multicultural Environment. In particular, the present study is initiated to enhance the magnitude of intercultural awareness to which was measured by the Multicultural Awareness Scale (MAS) (refers, Awang-Rozaimie *et al.*, 2012). Ironically, the social desirability (Li *et al.*, 2013) influences have identified as contributed causal to the little factors' reliability of MAS and the need for further scale's enhancement.

Thus, 28 items have listed for the psychometric screening by the experts to ensure the feasibility of an adapted CDAI in the present study. The experts (a professor in sociology, a PhD holder in intercultural study, two Malaysian natives with a master degree in TESL and MBA respectively, and an English-speaking expatriate) used their expertise, knowledge and understanding to help certify clarity and understandable aspect of an adapted CDAI. Sample items to measure intercultural awareness from CDAI are, "I believe my culture to be different from the others surround me" (self-cultural awareness); and "It is important to identify immediately the ethnic groups of a person we meet or communicate with" (cultural awareness). 11 items have been slashed which literally were not suitable to measure intercultural awareness as conceptualised in the present study. Remaining 17 items were rephrased and named as adapted CDAI (ACDAI).

Later, preliminary testing was conducted among three groups of Malaysian samples and a group of international students to validate and establish reliability of the ACDAI. The Malaysian samples are comprised full-time undergraduates', part-time post-graduate students' (both are from public universities) and generic public samples. Undergraduate students' were chosen because they have relatively homogeneous maturity and are not yet exposed to some critical decisions in their life about work, career, marital life and relationship with the community. The students are notably tended to mingle around within small, regular group members and with those whom they are comfortable with. Second, part-time post-graduate (master degree) students were chosen because they have heterogeneous expectation and experiences towards intercultural relationship. On the other hands, public and international students' samples were incorporated to assess the possibility of different magnitude towards multicultural awareness with their intercultural perspectives and experiences with multicultural society. Students' samples were selected to be in lined with prior studies (sees, Henry, 1991; Larke, 1990; Milner *et al.*, 2003) who had examined an attitude and behaviour towards cultural diversity in the academic environment. A quota sampling was used to identify targeted respondents in a cross-sectional design. In order to establish an optimal feasibility of the scale, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a principle axis factoring procedures (Igbaria *et al.*, 1994) were undertaken. The EFA procedure is used to understand and identify the feasibility of the underlying psychometric structure of the scale and estimate scores of the latent construct of multicultural awareness. Thus, questionnaires were distributed equally (number and gender) to the four groups of identified samples in order to gather an equal effect preliminary analysis of an ACDAI.

Findings

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed; 356 were returned and usable for data analysis where yielded 89% of response rate. Responses were identified through the purposive techniques, which the questionnaire has been equally distributed by gender except international students' sample. An average age of the respondents were 31.49 years old with 47.2% of majority (n = 168) ranging less than 25 years old. In total, female respondents accounted for 51.7% participation. Most of the respondents were single (54.5%, n = 194), and the rest indicated they were married (44.9%), divorced and widowed at 3% respectively. Majority (50.6%, n = 180) of the respondents were Muslim, followed by Christian (34.3%), Buddhist (7%), Hindus (1.4%) and others (6.7%). Most of the participants are Malay (43.3%, n = 154) and the others were from various ethnic backgrounds such as Arab, Bidayuh, Bisaya, Brunei, Bugis, Caucasian, Chinese, Iban, Indian, Kadazan/ Dusun, Kayan, Kedayan, Kelabit, Kenyah, Lun Bawang, Melanau, Orang Ulu and Selako. Notably, international students were from Canada, China, Finland, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. A summary of collected responses detail is shown as in the Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Data Collected

	Questionnaire Distributed (samples group)				
	Malaysian			International Students'	TOTAL
	Full-time undergraduates'	Part-time undergraduates,	General Public		
Sent	100	100	100	100	400
Returned	100	100	100	56	356
Usable	100	100	100	56	356
Response rate	100%	100%	100%	56	86%
Gender	M* F**	M* F**	M* F**	M* F**	
dispersion	50 50	50 50	50 50	23 33	

*Note: M – Male, F-Female; Summary about number of questionnaire distributed, returned, usable, response rate and by gender dispersion.

The estimated internal consistency of the data was shown by a reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha value. According to Nunnally (1967), only α value of .60 or above showed sufficiency of the measures items to form a scale. Additionally, acceptable items should meet factoring loading with Eigen values greater than 1.0, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin more than .7 and the diagonals of the anti-image correlation matrix possessing values above .50 or greater on one factor and .35 or lower on the other factor (Igbaria *et al.*, 1994). The results of reliability and factor analysis were shown in Table 2. In addition, with a nominal data, a nonparametric test was performed to identify the goodness-of-fit of the scale.

Table 2: The Summary of Reliability and Factor Analysis of the ACDAI

	Component				Communalities (h^2)	A
	SeA	CuA	InA	SiA		
Self-Awareness (SeA)						.751
12 Accept the use of ethnic jokes or phrases	.732				.579	
11 Asked about preferred culture identity	.729				.540	
10 Do not ignore the use of non-standard language	.663				.513	
9 Our responsibility to solve communication problems	.648				.426	
8 Likes conducting activities with different culture group	.631				.402	
1 My culture is different from others	.534				.402	
Cultural-Awareness (CuA)						.725
16 Culture similarity / shared with others'		.731			.544	
17 One's culture knowledge affect others' expectation and reactions		.707			.507	
15 Able to make necessary cultural adaptation		.699			.505	
14 Responsible to share culture differences		.676			.469	
13 Individual responsibility to learn others' customs and tradition		.620			.410	

Table 2 : The Summary of Reliability and Factor Analysis of the ACDAI (Cont)

	SeA	CuA	InA	SiA	(h^2)	A
Interaction-Awareness (InA)						.453
5 Comfortable with dissimilar language			.662		.578	
4 Racial statement should be ignored			.595		.399	
6 Important to immediately identify ethnics group			.575		.378	
7 Surprise with others' ethnic participation			.568		.429	
Similarity-Awareness (SiA)						.436
2 Prefer to work with other with dissimilar culture				.768	.621	
3 Comfortable in dissimilar culture settings				.746	.578	
Eigenvalue	2.769	2.432	1.545	1.410		
Percentage Variance (47.98%)	16.290	14.308	9.089	8.291		
Overall Scale						**.607**

Initial overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient value was generated at .607 (SD = 5.56, VAR = 30.927). This coefficient value is considered as acceptable reliable (Cronbach, 1951) of measurement. In addition, the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy accounted for .741, which shows sufficiency of samples (p > .70). KMO scores indicated that the degree of common variance among 17 items was at "middling" percentage of variance and factors extracted accounted for are a fair amount of variance. In addition, all 17 variables in Measure of Sampling Adequacy (MSA) were in acceptable scores with more than cut-off point of .50 show sufficiency loading of factor analysis. All 17 items retained which nicely loaded greater than or equal to .50 subjected to varimax rotated principal components factor analysis and without unacceptable cross loading. There are four factors (with Eigen value of 1.00 or higher) of the cultural awareness have been extracted (Igbaria *et al.*, 1994). There are four factors solutions are explained 47.98% of variance was derived and labelled as Self-Awareness, Cultural-Awareness, Interaction-Awareness and Similarity-Awareness. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for each four factors generated at .751 for Self-Awareness, .725 for Cultural-Awareness, .453 for Interaction-Awareness and .436 for Similarity-Awareness.

Measure's feasibility establishment was applied on the ACDAI which the procedures was followed a study conducted by Caprara *et al.*, (1993) in the development of the new questionnaire, to assess the five factor model of personality. Besides, the use of measures inventory in development of new scales was cautiously adhered to scale creation as advised by Goldberg *et al.*, (2006). Dominantly, the result found as above indicated an ACDAI was believed to be more feasible to be used in assessing multicultural awareness study.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Need for Multicultural Awareness

The purpose of this study is to establish reliability of an adapted scale to assess multicultural awareness among multicultural society in Malaysia. Four groups of samples incorporated in the present study have shown acceptable overall reliability coefficient of ACDAI at alpha value of .607. This reliability value specified that all 17-items of ACDAI are moderately reliable in assessing cultural awareness among diversified ethnic backgrounds. Specifically, a person who scored high in ACDAI indicated a cognitively aware of cultural differences between his/her own cultural elements and with others. Intercultural awareness is the essence in creating a mutual relationship with others from different ethnic backgrounds as demonstrated in related earlier studies. Thus, the present study confirmed that, ACDAI is a reliable instrument in assessing multicultural awareness among the multicultural society in Malaysia.

Foremost, the findings of the present study enrich our understanding on the concept of multicultural awareness towards the effectiveness of interpersonal relationships. A neglected specific understanding and aware cultural influences in people's behaviour may harm the harmonious intercultural relations and interaction. The finding of the present study is in line with intercultural awareness as postulated by Chen and Starosta (1996). The result of the present study suggests four factors of multicultural awareness. First, fallacies such self-judgement, racism and ethnocentrism sentiments could be prevented if a person has sufficient *self-awareness* dimension culturally. Self-awareness refers to the cultural knowledge and thoughtful about the needs and expectations from own cultural point of view. Second, individuals who have *cultural-awareness* dimensions have realized that their own cultures were different with the others'. Knowledge about the other cultural compositions is essential to create mutual benefits of intercultural relationship. Third, *interaction-awareness* dimension indicates an awareness or concern on cultural differences in social connection. Cultural biases, using slurs or sluts' (insult) statements in conversation must be avoided to gain respect and trust when dealing and interacting with culturally different people. Fourth, *similarity-awareness* needs a person to be sensitive and be aware of the cultural differences when interacting with others of different cultural backgrounds. Nonetheless, insufficient internal consistency of alpha value identified for two factors (interaction-awareness and similarity-awareness) signals some proportion for further investigation. Hence, the present study recommended the ACDAI should be treated as uni-dimensional scale. The main reason to keep the items as the components of multicultural awareness believe important reflected the cognitive knowledge of a person culturally.

For the international business travellers, the knowledge about culture is essential to obtain beneficial business arrangement. The present study gave some additional agreement to cultural effects on the Asian business studies (examples, Acar *et al.*, 2011; Bjeeregaard *et al.*, 2009; Buckley *et al.*, 2006; Leung *et al.*, 2005; Magnusson *et al.*, 2008; Neelankavil et al, 2000; Osman-Gani and Rockstuhl, 2009; Selmer, 2004; Stahl, 2000). In particular, cultural knowledge is the key to eliminate any sign of ethnocentrism, stereotyping and social desirability as contended by scholars (examples, Aycan *et al.*, 2000; Clausen, 2010; Stahl, 2000). Note that, awareness to

the cultural clues is crucial to avoid cultural difficulties when dealing with those with different cultural frame of references.

Limitations of the Present Study

There are a few limitations of the present study which may offer opportunities for future studies to generate validity of ACDAI. First, the applicability of ACDAI against other instruments to assess cultural awareness such as Cultural Awareness Scale (CAS), original scale of The Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory CDAI and self-assessment checklist (SAC) for the same and/or other types of the population can be further investigated. The main reason to have a general measure of CDAI is because other instruments specifically were used to assess an awareness among medical practitioners (Goode, 2006; Ingulsrud et al., 2006; Krainovich-Miller et al., 2008; Rew et al., 2003), teaching-learning program (Brown, 2004; Henry, 1991, 1995), and awareness towards American cultures (Chen and Starosta, 2003).

The second limitation of the present study is the sampling frame. Chosen samples incorporated in the present study were purposively approached and randomly picked. Thus, the response-bias problem might affect the result of the present study. Eliminating response-bias and possibilities of the social-desirability problem is important to ensure the trustfulness of the survey result. Besides, a control experimental group (involves the participants within the same ethnic group) is recommended in the future study in order to examine the impact of social desirability against the measured instrument, especially in regard to the intercultural interactions (Caprara et al., 1993; Li et al., 2013). Although different groups are incorporated, the aim of the present study is to confirm the new measure to assess the magnitude of multicultural awareness. Hence, further analysis is granted to check regression between different groups' of samples towards multicultural awareness as contended.

Lastly, Utilization of different methods in data collections is granted to measure a consistency of the measure instruments (Portalla and Chen, 2010). Other methods of data collection especially a qualitative study such as interview, observation and participation may provide significant impact to the intercultural investigation and support the findings of the present study.

Final Remark

In light of the evidence, the national social integration has increase diversification of ethnic identities in a society. Being unaware and having insufficient cultural knowledge create a tendency to intercultural miscommunication, conflict and anxiety, due to the different cultural frame of references. Hence, the present study is proficient to confirm and establish a feasible instrument to assess cultural awareness of others' cultural differences. The key findings of the survey indicated that, the adapted cultural diversity awareness scale (ACDAI) is reliable in assessing cultural awareness among the multicultural society of Malaysia. It is recommended to treat ACDAI as one-dimensional scale in assessing multicultural awareness. Additionally, auxiliary enquiry is granted to assess ACDAI's validity among different group of sample. Foremost, multicultural awareness is important in establishing a harmonious

multicultural society, and eliminating social desirability, ethnocentrism, stereotyping and racism sentiments. To conclude, it is perceived that ACDAI is suitable to measure an awareness of cultural differences among the multicultural society to enhance beneficial and sustainable multicultural business environment.

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