

THE MODERATING EFFECT OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SELF-EFFICACY AND PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION AMONG MYANMAR STUDENTS IN THAILAND UNIVERSITIES

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Received: 25th November 2020

Revised: 20th December 2021

Accepted: 9th January 2022

Abstract: The current study explored the acculturative stress of Myanmar international students studying in Thailand universities and its relation to socio-cultural adaptation moderated by personal and social factors, namely, perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support, respectively. This quantitative research utilized a descriptive type of inquiry using a self-report survey questionnaire of 120 Myanmar international students composed of 61 females and 59 males from five universities in Thailand. Findings revealed a direct negative correlation between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. The students' perceived social support can moderate this relationship. Those with low levels of perceived social support tend to have lower socio-cultural adaptation than those with high levels of perceived social support. Furthermore, perceived social self-efficacy was also found to have a moderating effect on the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. Students with low levels of perceived social self-efficacy and acculturative stress are related to lower socio-cultural adaptations. Hence, students who possess a high level of acculturative stress and with low levels of perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy have the lowest levels of socio-cultural adaptation

Keywords: Acculturative Stress; Social Support; Social Self-Efficacy; Sociocultural Adaptation

Introduction

Globalization has brought wider access to educational services worldwide and creates a highly competitive market for quality international higher education

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programs (Mahmmod Hajara, 2014; Wildavsky, 2010). As opportunities for studying abroad among international students continue to expand, Thailand has become a preferred destination for those who wish to avail of a high-quality international standard education at a minimal price. Data from the Office of the Higher Education Commission of the Ministry of Education of Thailand shows that in 2011, around 20,309 international students were studying in different universities in Thailand, and Myanmar students ranked second in terms of the international student population in Thailand, next to China (Jaroensubphayanont, 2014). (Jaroensubphayanont, 2014). International students are drawn to pursue their higher education in Thailand due to its high-quality academic programs and wide range of academic offerings, mostly instructed in English.

However, despite all of these salient qualities of Thailand, international students still experience acculturative stress while studying in the country because of different socio-cultural backgrounds (Vergara, Smith, & Kelee, 2010). The term acculturative stress refers to the unique stressors experienced through immigration (Berry 2006). The international students' experiences of acculturative stress can differ based on how they are able to cope with the stressors related to acculturation and can result in a variety of physical, psychological, and social changes. According to William and Berry (1991), when individuals possess the capacity to deal with the demands of acculturation and are able to make psychological and behavioral changes that are adaptive to the host culture, acculturative stress may not occur. Regarding the socio-cultural adaptation among international students, previous studies found that poor socio-cultural adaptation, with less cultural knowledge, results in an increase in the acculturative stress experienced (Zhang & Goodson, 2011; Xia, 2009; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004). Regarding the important factors influencing individuals' cross-cultural adaptation, perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy prominent factors. To illustrate, Yusoff's study found that perceiving social support and different self-efficacy domains are positively related to international students' socio-cultural adaptation (Yusoff, 2012).

Throughout the history of acculturation studies among international students, remarkably, while there is extensive literature on Asian international students who study in Europe and USA, there has been little research on the experiences of international students who study in Asian universities such as in Hong Kong, (Yin, 2010), Singapore (Nasirudden et al., 2014), and Malaysia (Asmawati, 2011). The findings of these previous studies gave a glimpse of the fact that even Asian international students experience acculturative stress in Asian universities. However, it is inappropriate to draw inferences from

such findings for the population of Myanmar international students who study in Thailand because Myanmar students cannot be considered representative of that population. Furthermore, most of the acculturation studies conducted in Asian university settings focused on identifying the predictors of acculturative stress and its relation to coping strategies, acculturation strategies, and buffering effects. However, there is no study that explored acculturative stress related to psychological or socio-cultural adaptation. According to Berry's (2006) acculturation theory and framework, the effect of acculturative stress can be best determined by the psychological and socio-cultural adaptation of the individuals. For this reason, the current study aims to explore the acculturative stress of Myanmar international students and its relation to socio-cultural adaptation moderated by a personal factor, namely perceived self-efficacy, and a social factor, namely perceived social support.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to analyze the relationship between acculturative stress of Myanmar international students and their socio-cultural adaptation moderated by their perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy. The results from this study are aimed at providing a more conclusive overview of the acculturation experiences of Myanmar international students in Thai universities and its possible implications for curriculum development and academic activities rendered by the universities.

Literature Review

Acculturative Stress

Acculturative stress is defined as negative consequences that result from contact between two distinctive cultural groups, often leading to the reduction of physiological, psychological, and social well-being, which in turn leads to a struggle in adapting to a new culture (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Berry et al., 1987). Among international students, the symptoms of acculturative stress can be seen in the form of absenteeism in school and reduced productivity in academic activities (Kuo & Roysircar, 2006). This group of symptoms is closely related to adjustment disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The second group of symptoms concerns the specific negative reactions of immigrants toward the new cultural environment that includes disgust and indignation over cultural differences, a sense of rejection by the host society, and a rejection of the host culture Van Oudenhoven and Ward (2006). The third group of symptoms comprises homesickness, i.e. a sense of profound loss and intense longing for home.

Sociocultural Adaptation

Socio-cultural adaptation refers to the acquisition of social skills of one culture that include interpersonal and intergroup relations (Berry & Sam, 1997). In Wilson's (2013) definition, socio-cultural adaptation refers to how well an individual is able to function in their daily lives in school or at work, and in the community in general. In his study, he examined skills of interpersonal communication, language proficiency, personal interests, community involvement, and ecological adaptation to measure the socio-cultural adaptation of individuals (Wilson, 2013). The trajectory of socio-cultural adaptation is depicted as a learning curve (Searle & Ward, 1990) in which socio-cultural adjustment increases over time by acquiring culturally appropriate skills through contact with host nationals, cultural experience, and training (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). According to Searle & Ward (1990), the cultural distance between the host and home culture affects the extent of the social difficulty and socio-cultural adjustment difficulty experienced by an individual. Greater cultural distance requires greater effort to learn the more varied cultural norms and skills to navigate the new culture.

The Relationship Between Acculturative Stress and Sociocultural Adaptation

Berry's acculturation framework clearly stated that acculturative stress reactions may lead to symptoms of anxiety and depression, which in turn, influence the individual's psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Berry, 1997; Renner, Laireiter, & Maier, 2012). As an affirmation of Berry's concept, a recent study by Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) indicated that the analysis of socio-cultural adaptation difficulties related to adaptive skills affected by one's language ability, length of stay in the country and acculturation strategies can be the most important dimensions in examining acculturative stress.

Perceived Social Support

In psychological terms, perceived social support refers to social resources that individuals perceive to be available or that are offered to them, which involves the provision of psychological and material resources. These resources may serve as a buffer against stress by preventing a situation from being appraised as stressful in the first place or by providing a solution to a stressful problem, minimizing its perceived importance, or facilitating healthy behavioral responses (Crocket, Iturbide, Torres, 2007; Cronkite & Moos, 1995; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Among college and university students, international students are the special population who have left their friends and families behind. These students oftentimes feel a deep sense of loss and loneliness (Zhao et al., 2008; McClure 2007). Sandhu & Asrabadi (1994) stated that when social support for international students starts to diminish as their duration of stay in

the host country increases, the negative feelings such as sadness, disappointment, resentment, guilt, and painful feelings of isolation might be augmented.

The Relationship Between Social Support and Acculturative Stress and Sociocultural Adaptation

Previous studies suggested that social support mitigates the adverse stress caused by migration from one country to another (Zhang & Goodson, 2011; Crockett et al., 2007; Thomas & Choi, 2006). The acculturative stress model identifies social support as a variable that may serve as a “buffer” in reducing the degree to which acculturative stress is experienced (Lay, & Struthers, 2003; Williams & Berry, 1991). A study conducted by Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992) showed that social support has a direct positive correlation with stress reduction and acts as a buffering effect when international students experience psychological distress. Extending this, Zhang and Goodson (2011) found that social interaction with host nationals provided moderating and mediating effects related to decreased levels of depression and the difficulties associated with cultural adaptation. Similarly, in Lee and his fellows’ (2004) study of acculturative stress among Korean graduate students in the United States, results clearly showed that higher levels of social support in addition to higher levels of identification with the host culture were associated with lower levels of acculturative stress (Lee, Koeske & Sales, 2004).

Social Self Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined by Bandura (1977) as a person’s beliefs in their capabilities to successfully perform a specific task (Yusoff, 2012; Bandura, 1977), and this model explains the cognitive processes in producing a change in psychological treatment settings. Sherer and fellows (1982) first introduced social self-efficacy as a separate domain during the Self-Efficacy Scale development (Smith & Betz, 2000; Sherer & Adams, 1983). According to Sherer, social self-efficacy refers to an individual’s perceived ability to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships (Smith & Betz, 2000; Sherer & Adams, 1983) that includes behavioral aspects such as negotiating interpersonal conflict, meeting new people, displaying assertiveness in social situations, cultivating romantic relationships, developing friendships, and interacting in group settings. Ramos-Sánchez and Nichols (2007) found that international students’ social self-efficacy impacts their sense of belongingness in their host country but not their academic performance. Regarding the study of social self-efficacy and its relation to acculturative stress among international students, Lin and Betz (2009) examined factors related to social self-efficacy among Chinese and Taiwanese student populations. They concluded that increasing Chinese and Taiwanese

international students' social self-efficacy in English interactions might reduce their acculturative stress.

Furthermore, Mallinckrodt and Wei (2005) reported positive relationships between social self-efficacy and perceived social support in U.S. undergraduate student samples. Similarly, Meng, Huang, Hou, and Fan (2015) explored the relationship between social self-efficacy and perceived social support in their study of international first-year students in a Chinese university setting. Their findings showed that social self-efficacy was positively correlated with perceived social support, which was significantly associated with self-reported, academic, and socio-cultural adjustment.

Conceptual Framework

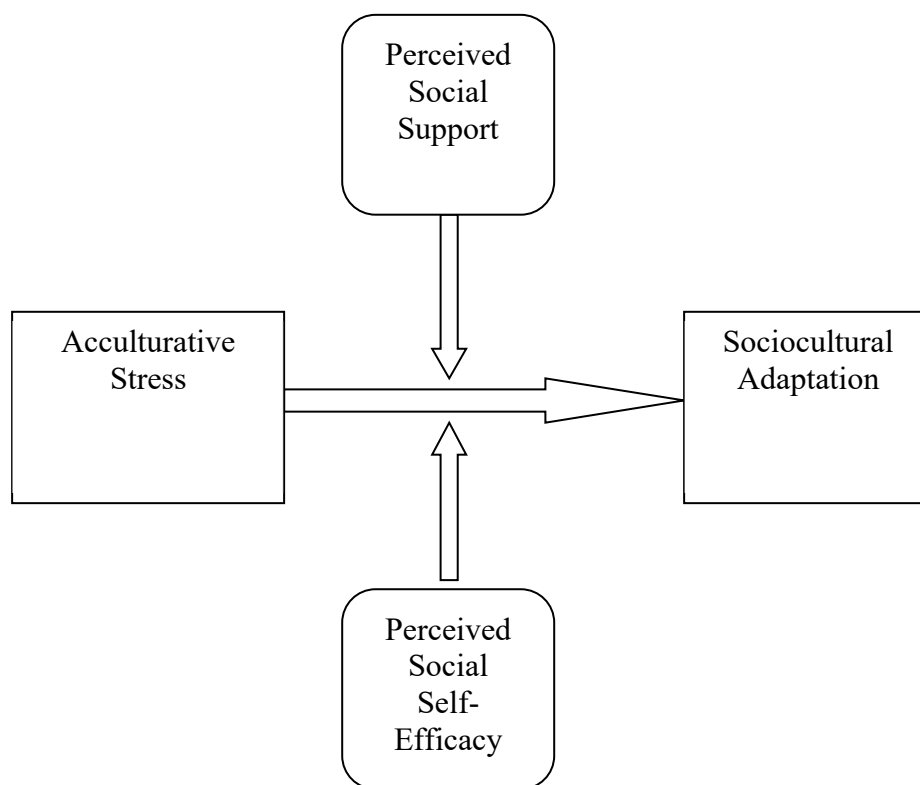


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

In Berry's model of an acculturative process, it is conceptualized that there is a relationship between the psychological acculturation stage (behavioral shift, acculturative stress, psychopathology) and the adaptation stage (psychological adaptation and socio-cultural adaptation) (Renner, Laireiter, Maier, 2012).

The current study tried to test the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation moderated by individual-level factors and social-level factors such as perceived self-efficacy and perceived social support.

Research Methods

Research Design

A quantitative research method was used to determine the relationship between acculturative stress and the socio-cultural adaptation of Myanmar international students. The current investigation employed a descriptive research type of inquiry utilizing a written self-report survey questionnaire to obtain information, subsequently subjected to statistical analysis and interpretation. In this study, moderated regression analysis using Hays Process Macro (Model 2) was employed to analyze the moderating effects of the two moderator variables (i.e., perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy) on the relationship between the predictor variables (acculturative stress) and the dependent variable (socio-cultural adaptation). Interaction terms were included in the regression analysis. A significant beta value for each interaction term was considered due to the interaction between the corresponding predictor and moderator variables.

Participants

This study utilized the statistical program G*Power 3 to determine the desired sample size. Setting the significance level at 0.05, power at 0.80, and effect size at 0.15 (medium) for all three predictor variables (Cohen, 1988), the lowest number of the desired sample size is 120 participants. Myanmar undergraduate and graduate students from selected five universities in Bangkok, Thailand, served as the study's respondents.

Research Instruments

Measures for the current study consisted of a self-report questionnaire made up of five parts. Parts I to V contain items intended to measure the respondents' demographic characteristics, acculturative stress, socio-cultural adaptation, perceived social support, and perceived social self-efficacy. Throughout this study, four instruments were utilized: An Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS), Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support, A Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS), and A Perceived Social Self-Efficacy Scale, along with a demographic questionnaire. Each part of the survey questionnaire is explained in more detail in the following sections.

Part I. Demographic Information

Participants were asked to answer a set of researcher-constructed questions designed to identify their age, gender, degree level, length of stay in Thailand, English language fluency, and Thailand language fluency. In terms of language fluency, the participants were asked to indicate the level of comfort they feel when using the English language from the following categories: (1) Not comfortable, (2) Somewhat comfortable, (3) Comfortable, (4) Very comfortable, or (5) Extremely comfortable.

Part II. Perceived Social Self-Efficacy

The Scale of Perceived Social Self-efficacy (PSSE; Smith & Betz, 2000) is a 25-item scale to assess individuals' social degree of perceived social self-efficacy. The scale used a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (no confidence at all) to 5 (complete confidence). The higher the score, the higher the international students' social self-efficacy is. Sample items include "Start a conversation with someone you don't know very well" and "Work on a school, work, community, or other projects with people you don't know very well." The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the PSSE was .94 from a sample of 354 college students in a large Midwestern university (90 males and 264 females) (Smith & Betz, 2000).

Part III. Acculturative Stress

The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students (ASSIS) was used to measure the stress experienced by international students in terms of their personal, social, and environmental challenges upon arrival in a new country. The Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students was developed by Sandhu & Asrabadi in 1994. It consists of 36 items on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = "Strongly Disagree," 2 = "Disagree," 3 = "Not Sure," 4 = "Agree," to 5 = "Strongly Agree." The total scores ranged from 36 to 180, with higher scores representing higher levels of acculturative stress. The 36-item scale has high internal consistency, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, ranging from .92 to .94. Reliability also was established through the Guttman split-test, showing the reliability to be .97 (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Wei et al., 2007).

Part IV. Perceived Social Support

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item scale, rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) very strongly disagree to (7) very strongly agree. It measures social support from three sources: family, friends, and a special person, measured on three subscales: FA (family), F.R. (friends), and SO (significant other), each with four items. The total social support is the sum of the scores from 12 items. The

higher the sum of the 12 items, the higher the level of social support. Zimet and his colleagues reported a Cronbach alpha level of .88 for the scale. They also checked the test-retest reliability of the scale and reported this as .85 (Zimet et al., 1988).

Part V. Socio-Cultural Adaptation

Socio-cultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) with 29 items developed by Ward and Kennedy (1999) was used in the study to measure the participants' adjustment to the host culture. Participants were asked to respond to all questions using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (no difficulty) to 5 (extreme difficulty). Scores obtained from the scale will indicate the respondents' perceptions when facing difficulties in understanding the values and cultures of their host country. Average scores of the 29 items were used to measure the overall socio-cultural adaptation level. Higher values obtained on the scale indicated greater difficulty in socio-cultural adaptation. The overall reliability of the 29-item scale was found to be excellent ($\alpha = .97$); the 7-item cognitive-adaptation difficulty ($\alpha = .94$) and the 22-item behavioral adaptation difficulty ($\alpha = .96$) were adequately reliable.

Data Collection and Procedure

The first step was obtaining formal permission from the President of the Myanmar Students Association of respective universities to collect data from their graduate and undergraduate students. After receiving the recommendations, this was followed by conducting an actual survey from one university to another. Among Myanmar Students Association members of a particular university, only those who willingly agreed to participate were given the questionnaires to fill. It took around one and a half weeks to complete the distribution and collection of questionnaires. After that, all completed questionnaires were individually checked for possible errors of commission or omission, and only valid questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Reliability of the scales utilized (acculturative stress, socio-cultural adaptation difficulties, perceived social support, perceived social self-efficacy), means and standard deviations of four variables (acculturative stress, socio-cultural adaptation difficulties, perceived social support, perceived social self-efficacy). Frequency means and standard deviations were used to analyze the demographic data collected from participants. Moderation regression analysis using Hays Process Macro (Model 2) was employed to analyze the moderating effects of the two moderator variables (i.e., perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy) on the relationship between the predictor

variables (acculturative stress) and the dependent variable (socio-cultural adaptation)

Results

Myanmar students coming from five different universities in Thailand were composed of 50.8% (n=61) females and 49.2% males (n=59); 50% (n=60) were studying for master's degrees, and the other 50% were in their undergraduate studies. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 42 years old, and the average age was 21 years.

Reliability Analysis of Scales Utilized

Reliability analysis of the scales was conducted on the four scales utilized in the questionnaire to measure acculturative stress, socio-cultural adaptation, perceived social support, and perceived social self-efficacy. The computed overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the five scales were high and ranged from .94 to .97. Therefore, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of those scales imply that (1) the reliability results for the Acculturative Stress Scale for International Students, Sociocultural Adaptation Scale, Perceived Social Support Scale, and Perceived Social Self-Efficacy Scale were considered acceptable (Cronbach's alpha were .66 to .74) (Kilic, 2016).

The following Table (5) presents the means and standard deviations for the five computed factors.

Mean and Standard Deviations for the Computed Factors

The following Table (5) presents the means and standard deviations for the five computed factors.

Table 5. *Means and Standard Deviations for the Computed Factors of Acculturative Stress, Sociocultural Adaptation, Perceived Social Self-Efficacy, and Perceived Social Support.*

	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Acculturative Stress (AS)	2.6706	.92510	120
Sociocultural Adaptation (SCA)	4.7647	.90259	120
Perceived Social Self Efficacy (PSSE)	3.2107	.78830	120
Perceived Social Support (PSS)	5.0729	1.34008	120

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test hypothesis 1 and to determine the relationship among four variables: acculturative stress, socio-cultural adaptation, perceived social self-efficacy, and perceived social support. Table 6 shows that the independent variable (acculturative pressure)

and a criterion variable (socio-cultural adaptation difficulties) negatively correlate. Still, the two moderating variables (perceived social self-efficacy and perceived social support) have negative relationships with independent variables but positive relationships with the dependent variables.

Table 6. *Inter-Correlations Among All Study Variables*

		1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
1	AS	-				2.67	.925
2	SCA	-.65**	-			4.76	.902
3	PSSE	-.45**	.75**	-		3.21	.788
4	PSS	-.49**	.70**	.68**	-	5.07	1.34

* $p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.05$

Note: *There are some abbreviations in this table. Acculturative Stress (ASS), Sociocultural Adaptation Difficulties (SCAD), Perceived Social Self-Efficacy (PSE), and Perceived Social Support (PSS).*

The results indicated that the acculturative stress of Myanmar students (Masters & Bachelor) studying in Thailand had a negative relationship with their sociocultural adaptation ($r = -.65, p < 0.05$), negative relationship with perceived social self-efficacy ($r = -.45, p < 0.05$), and perceived social support ($r = -.49, p < 0.05$). Sociocultural adaptation had a positive relationship with perceived social self-efficacy ($r = .75, p < 0.05$), perceived social support ($r = .70, p < 0.05$). Perceived social self-efficacy had a positive relationship with perceived social support ($r = .68, p < 0.05$). According to the correlation result, hypothesis-1 was supported by the present study results, that socio-cultural adaptation of Myanmar students studying in Thailand Universities negatively correlates with their acculturative stress.

Moderated Regression Analysis

Moderation analysis via Process Macro (Hay, A.F, 2017) was employed to test the hypotheses of the moderating effects of perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy on the structural relationship between the independent variable (acculturative stress) and the outcome variable (socio-cultural adaptation). The analysis involved: (1) regressing the independent variables of acculturative stress on the dependent variable of socio-cultural adaptation (2) regressing the moderator variables of perceived social self-efficacy and perceived social support on the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation, which was explained below.

Table 7. *Relationship between Acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation.*

Variables	B	S.E.	β
Acculturative Stress	-.638	.068	-.654**

* $p < 0.01$ ** $p < 0.05$

The results of the multiple regression (Table 7) show that acculturative stress ($\beta = -.654$, $p < 0.05$) is a significant predictor of sociocultural adaptation. The variable explained 42.8% ($R^2 = .428$, $p < 0.05$) of the variance in sociocultural adaptation which was highly significant at $F(1,118) = 8.178$, $p < 0.05$.

Perceived Social Self-efficacy

Acculturative stress

Table 8. *Moderating Effect of Perceived Social Self-efficacy on the Relationship between Acculturative Stress and Sociocultural Adaptation*

Variables	B	S.E.	β	R^2	R^2 change
Acculturative stress	-.393	.047	.320*	.428*	-.393
Perceived social self-efficacy	.507	.059	.443		
Acculturative stress X Perceived social self-efficacy	.359	.050	.334	.782	.355

* $p < 0.01$

The results of the multiple regression (Table 8) show that acculturative stress is a significant predictor of socio-cultural adaptation ($\beta = -.32$, $p < 0.05$). Acculturative stress and perceived social self-efficacy explain 42.8% ($R^2 = .428$, $p < 0.05$) of variance in sociocultural adaptation which was highly significant at $F(1,118) = 88.178$, $p < 0.05$. The addition of the interaction term (acculturative stress X perceived social self-efficacy) to the model improved the explained variance significantly ($R^2 = .782$, $p < 0.05$) by 35%. The interaction term is also a statistically significant predictor (Beta = 3.116, $t = 25.283$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that perceived social self-efficacy is a significant moderator of the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. Hence, there is no evidence to accept the null hypothesis 2. As a result, the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation is moderated by perceived social self-efficacy.

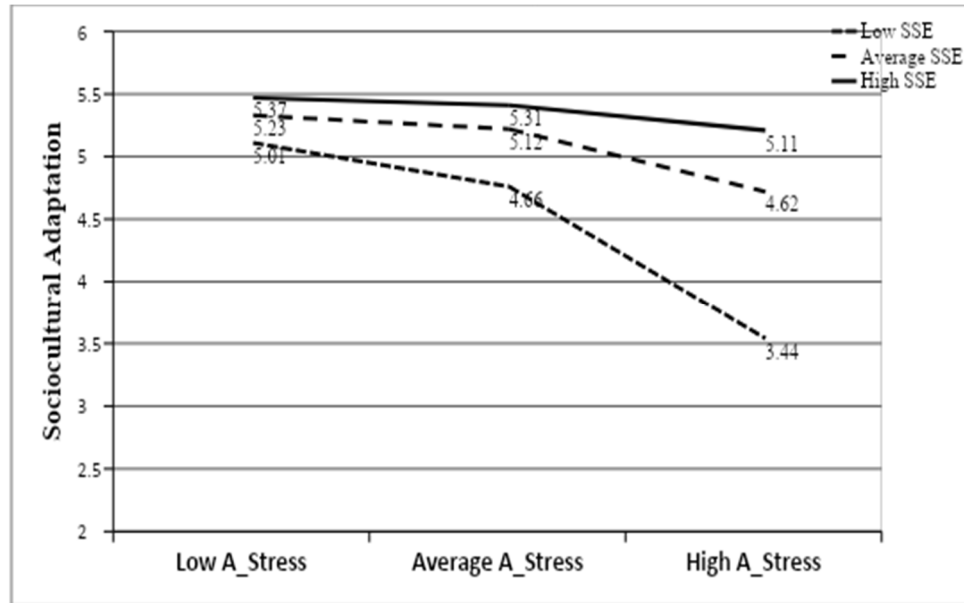


Figure 2. Plot of significant acculturative stress X perceived social self-efficacy interaction for the socio-cultural adaptation

Note: = Low perceived social self-efficacy; - - - = Average perceived social self-efficacy; — = High perceived social self-efficacy

Students who possess a high level of acculturative stress with low levels of perceived social self-efficacy have the lowest levels of socio-cultural adaptation. Their socio-cultural adaptation score is lower than the students with average or low levels of acculturative stress with average or high levels of perceived social self-efficacy. For the students who have an average level of acculturative stress, their socio-cultural adaptation level depends on their level of perceived social self-efficacy. Their socio-cultural adaptation level is high when they have high perceived social self-efficacy. In contrast, their socio-cultural adaptation level is low when low perceived social self-efficacy. The students who possess low acculturative stress with high levels of perceived social self-efficacy have the highest levels of socio-cultural adaptation. Their socio-cultural adaptation score is higher than the students with average or high levels of acculturative stress with average or low levels of perceived social self-efficacy.

Perceived Social Support

Acculturative Stress

Table 9. Moderation Effect of Perceived Social Support on the Relationship between Acculturative Stress and Sociocultural Adaptation

Variables	B	S.E.	β	R ²	R ² change
Acculturative Stress	-.375	.057	-.385*	.428*	
Perceived Social Support	.249	.042	.370		
Acculturative Stress X Perceived Social Support	.249	.042	.370	.249	.042

* $p < 0.01$

The results of the multiple regression (Table 8) shows that acculturative stress is a significant predictor of socio-cultural adaptation ($\beta = -.38, p < 0.05$). Acculturative stress and perceived social support explain 42.8% ($R^2 = .428, p < 0.05$) of variance in sociocultural adaptation which was highly significant at $F(1,118) = 88.178, p < 0.05$. The addition of the interaction term (acculturative stress X perceived social self-efficacy) to the model improved the explained variance significantly ($R^2 = .703, p < 0.05$) by 27%. The interaction term is also a statistically significant predictor (Beta = .370, $t = 22.704, p < 0.05$). Therefore, it can be concluded that perceived social support is a significant moderator of the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. Hence, there is no evidence to accept the null hypothesis 3. As a result, the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation is moderated by perceived social support.

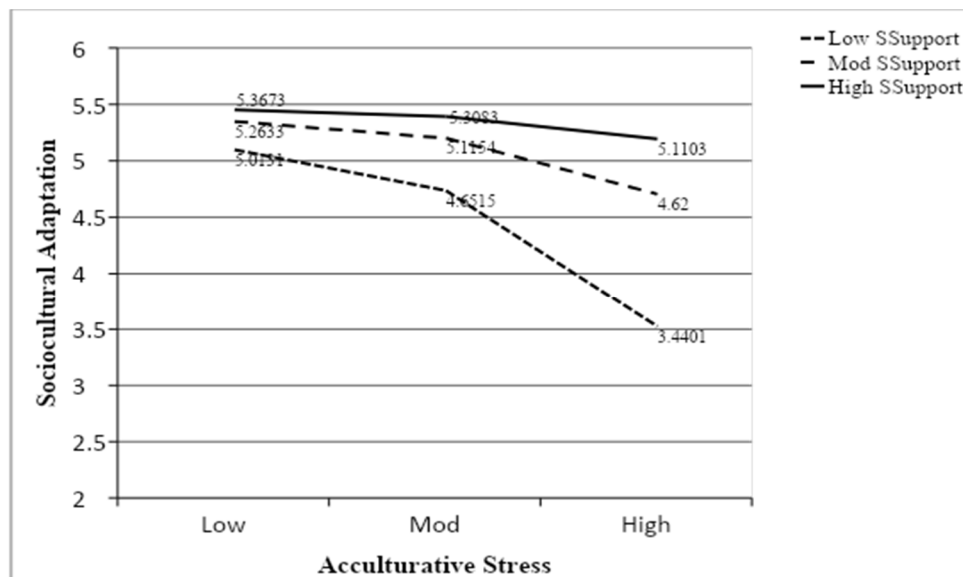


Figure 3. Plot of significant acculturative stress X perceived social support

interaction for the socio-cultural adaptation.

Note: ----- = Low perceived social support; - - - - = Average perceived social support; — = High perceived social support.

Students who possess a high level of acculturative stress with low levels of perceived social support have the lowest levels of socio-cultural adaptation. Their socio-cultural adaptation score is lower than the students with average or low levels of acculturative stress with average or high levels of perceived social support. For the students who have moderate levels of acculturative stress, their socio-cultural adaptation level depends on their level of perceived social support. Their socio-cultural adaptation level is high when they have high perceived social support. In contrast, their socio-cultural adaptation level is low when they have low perceived social support. The students who possess low levels of acculturative stress with high levels of perceived social support have the highest levels of socio-cultural adaptation. Their socio-cultural adaptation score is higher than the students with average or high levels of acculturative stress with average or low levels of perceived social support.

Discussion

Regarding hypothesis-1, the current study results showed that the acculturative stress of Myanmar students in Thailand universities negatively correlates with their socio-cultural adaptation. This finding implies that as the acculturative stress of Myanmar students increases, their level of socio-cultural adaptation decreases, and as their level of acculturative stress decreases, their socio-cultural adaptation increases. The current study results are consistent with a previous study by Mahmood Hajara, who studied the correlation between acculturative stress levels of international students and all five subscales of socio-cultural adaptation. His study results showed a significant negative relationship between international students' overall acculturative stress and all five subscales of socio-cultural adaptation (Mohmood Hajara, 2014).

Regarding hypothesis-2, this study's results showed a moderating effect of perceived social support on the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation of students. The result indicated that at low levels of perceived social support, the negative relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation is stronger than at high levels of perceived social support. Reflecting on the result of this study, students who have low levels of perceived social support, their acculturative stress is related to lower socio-cultural adaptation than those who have high levels of perceived social support. This finding concurs with the results of previous studies, such as Winkleman, who stated that social support network ameliorates a variety of

stressors and directly applies to the resolution of acculturative stress and cross-cultural adaptations (Winkelman, 1994).

Regarding hypothesis-3, the results from this study showed that perceived social self-efficacy has a moderating effect on the relationship between acculturative stress and the socio-cultural adaptation of students. The result indicated that at low levels of perceived social self-efficacy, the negative relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation is stronger than at high levels of perceived social self-efficacy. Reflecting the result of this study, for students who have low levels of perceived social self-efficacy, their acculturative stress is related to lower socio-cultural adaptations than those who have high levels of perceived social self-efficacy. As an antecedent of the current study, Church (1982) suggested an essential personal resource that has been consistently found to predict socio-cultural adaptation is self-efficacy. In another study, Ramos –Sanchez, and Nicholas (2007) found that international students' social self-efficacy impacts their sense of belonging in their host country and socio-cultural adaptation. Similarly, Rujipark (2016) researched psychological well-being with 500 international students in four Thailand Universities randomly selected from the top 20 universities. His research findings stated that the buffering effect of self-efficacy was a powerful resource for individuals experiencing significant levels of life stress and stress associated with cultural adjustment.

The Implications of the Study

The results from this study could fill the knowledge gap about the moderating effect of perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation among the international students of Thailand throughout their journey of studying abroad. Regarding hypothesis-1, this study provides evidence that a significant negative relationship exists between Myanmar students' levels of acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. This implies that as Myanmar students' levels of socio-cultural adaptation increase, their acculturative stress levels decrease. As levels of acculturative stress decrease, their socio-cultural adaptation to the Thai culture and community increases. Since poor socio-cultural adaptations correlate with acculturative stress that might cause academic and psychological problems to students; Thailand universities, higher education administrations, university counseling, and student support service providers could work further on specific programs or interventions to facilitate students' adaptation and acculturative stress-buffering such as inclusive monitoring of students' level of socio-cultural transformations and providing mentors on campus. To this end, host universities can maintain updated websites with

important information on the college, city, and culture to assist international students before and after they arrive.

In the context of hypothesis-2, it was confirmed that perceived social support significantly moderated the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. Perceived social support weakens the negative relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. This implies that perceived social support helps narrow the gap between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation by reducing stress and promoting socio-cultural adaptation. By revealing the moderating results of social support to acculturation stress and socio-cultural adaptation, this study has contributed valuable insights into what constitutes a practical international students' adjustment and, more importantly, how social support acts upon socio-cultural adaptation. The study results offer useful guidelines to institutions that wish to enhance student adjustment by providing social support, such as the organization's social support team for international students and counseling sessions or individual mentorship programs.

Finally, for hypothesis- 3, perceived social self-efficacy weakens the negative relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. This finding suggests that students with high social self-efficacy would find it easier to cope with new socio-cultural changes and have less acculturative stress; hence they would perform better academically and socially. It also reminds the scholarship funder, scholarship advisory service, foreign university agent, and student exchange program to test the social self-efficacy skills of students in the pre-departure phase.

Limitations of the study

Since data collection fell during summer break, only a minimum number of participants (120) were surveyed coming from five universities in Bangkok through convenience sampling. The results generated could not represent the whole population of Myanmar international students in Thailand. Moreover, this study did not incorporate specific acculturation stressors (e.g., financial concerns, demand from scholarship associations and universities for those who got scholarships for studying abroad). Furthermore, some of the instruments (e.g., SCAS, ASSIS) used were developed in the West. Despite some preliminary support for their validity in the current study, their cross-cultural construct equivalences have not been carefully examined in the current sample. This methodological limitation may overlook elements within these constructs unique to the culture being studied.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study emphasized the moderating effect of perceived social self-efficacy and perceived social support on the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation, though there are still additional factors that could affect this relationship, such as mode of acculturation, coping style, etc. (Berry, 2005; Lazarus & Launier, 1978). Future research can include these variables to expand more areas of this topic. Furthermore, this study addressed only the total score of the scales, considering there are still subscales for each of these scales (e.g., social support). Future research may explore the effects of these specific factors, whether it be different aspects of stress, adaptation, or any other variable. Finally, future researchers may explore this study by including a more diverse range of participants with more respondents.

Conclusion

Cultural adjustment in an unfamiliar culture may lead to adjustment difficulties or acculturative stress (Ye, 2005). This premise paved the way for this study to investigate the moderating effect of perceived social support and perceived social self-efficacy on the relationship between acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation among Myanmar graduate and undergraduate students in Thai universities in Bangkok. Findings revealed that acculturative stress of Myanmar graduate and undergraduate students has a direct negative relationship with their socio-cultural adaptation indicating the significant influence of perceived social self-efficacy and perceived social support on acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation. To overcome the acculturative stress and become well adapted to the new culture, international students would need to concentrate on their resources to assist their coping strategies to deal with the stressful period of socio-cultural adjustment. This would probably help international students to overcome acculturative stress and socio-cultural adaptation problem. Moreover, the findings may assist organizations, such as universities, scholarship funding institutions, student support services, and university counseling centers in developing ways to encourage and raise awareness on minimizing acculturative stress for international students in the new culture. To this end, the findings enhance our understanding of the cross-cultural adjustment of international students, which enables us to accommodate international students in Thai Universities better.

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