

Language in International Students' Cross-Cultural Adaptation: Case Study of Ukrainian Students in Taiwan and Lithuania

Authors : Min-Hsun Liao

Abstract : Since the outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022, universities around the world have extended their helping hands to welcome Ukrainian students whose academic careers have been unexpectedly interrupted. Tunghai University (THU) in Taiwan and Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) in Lithuania are among the many other universities offering short- and long-term scholarships to host Ukrainian students in the midst of the war crisis. This mixed-methods study examines the cross-cultural adjustment processes of Ukrainian students in Taiwan. The research team at MRU will also conduct a parallel study with their Ukrainian students. Both institutions are committed to gaining insights into the adjustment processes of these students through cross-institutional collaboration. Studies show that while international students come from different cultural backgrounds, the difficulties they face while studying abroad are comparable and vary in intensity. These difficulties range from learning the language of the host country, adopting cultural customs, and adapting culinary preferences to the sociocultural shock of being separated from family and friends. These problems have been the subject of numerous studies. Study findings indicate that these challenges, if not properly addressed, can lead to significant stress, despair, and failure in academics or other endeavors for international students, not to mention those who have had to leave home involuntarily and settle into a completely new environment. Among these challenges, the language of the host country is foremost. The issue of international students' adjustment, particularly language acquisition, is critical to the psychological, academic, and sociocultural well-being of individuals. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected: 1) the International Student Cross-cultural Adaptation Survey (ISCAS) will be distributed to all Ukrainian students in both institutions; 2) one-on-one interviews will be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of their adaptations; and 3) t-tests or ANOVA will be calculated to determine significant differences between the languages used and the adaptation patterns of Ukrainian students. The significance of this study is consistent with three SDGs, namely quality education, peace/justice, and strong institutions and partnerships for the goals. The THU and MRU research teams believe that through partnership, both institutions can benefit exponentially from sharing the data, avoiding fixed interpretation, and sharing contextual insights, which will help improve the overall quality of education for international students and promote peace/justice through strong institutions. The impact of host country language proficiency on academic and sociocultural adjustments remains inconclusive. Therefore, the outcome of the study will shed new light on the relationship between language and various adjustments. In addition, the feedback from Ukrainian students will help other host countries better serve international students who must flee their home countries for an undisturbed education.

Keywords : international students, ukrainian students, cross-cultural adaptation, host country language, acculturation theory

Conference Title : ICBLA 2024 : International Conference on Bilingualism and Language Acquisition

Conference Location : Boston, United States

Conference Dates : April 22-23, 2024