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Roles of Music-Making in the Process of Cross-Cultural Adaptation: A Case of International Students in Wrocław

Abstract

With the intensifying flow of academically motivated people between countries, the significance of research on cross-cultural adaptation increases. Although the problems and difficulties caused by cultural differences have been researched extensively, this research focused on a common practice among different cultures: participative music-making in an intercultural context. Therefore, the current study explores how participative music-making shapes international students' cross-cultural experiences in Wrocław. For this purpose, the relevance between international students' cross-cultural adaptation and music-making as a social activity in Poland is examined. The required data were gathered through in-depth interviews with six students from various countries who made music as a collective activity during their transnational accommodation. The collected data is analysed by the inductive coding approach to explore the commonalities in the international students' experiences. Findings concluded that collective music-making shapes music-maker students' cross-cultural experiences by not merely helping them gain a specific social network but also contributing to their financial income and mood states, and finally, privileged behaviour by the host country members towards these students.

Keywords: music-making, sociocultural adaptation, psychological adjustment, culture learning theory, cross-cultural transition, social network

Introduction

According to the United Nations' reports regarding global migration (United Nations 2017: 38), 3.4% of the world's total population were immigrants in 2017. By 2019, international migrants reached almost 272 million worldwide (United Nations 2019: 33). Despite the negative impact of COVID-19 on migration flow, the number of people outside their country of birth was estimated to reach 281 million in 2020 (United Nations 2020: 60). European Union hosted the most significant number of international migrants, around 87 million. Meanwhile, the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS) predicted that in

the first half of 2020, 2.1 million international people were only in Poland, and most of these people were residing temporarily. Focusing on the mobility to Poland with academic motivations, the mentioned increase becomes even more evident. Due to various reasons (Kosmaczewska 2015: 1–15), more and more international students prefer to study in Poland every year. For instance, the number of international students studying at Polish institutes in the 2000/01 academic calendar was 6563 (GUS 2020: 231). This number rose to 10,092 in 2005/06, the first academic year following Poland's accession to the European Union. Looking at the most recent data, the number of international students studying in Poland reached 78,259 in 2019/20, which was around 58% more than a year before. Consequently, this intensifying human flow between countries enriches the multicultural population within countries. However, it also raises questions about when this mobility is perceived as a process. For this paper, the cross-cultural adaptation process of these students.

Indeed, a wide range of research has been done so far in cross-cultural adaptation. For example, studies that take the perspective of international students, such as anxiety and uncertainty (Rui, Wang 2015: 400–411), language confidence (Yang, Noels, Saumure 2006: 487–506), intercultural communicative competence (Lewthwaite 1996: 167–185), acquisition of culturally appropriate behaviour and skills (Bochner, Lin, McLeod 1980: 265–272; Furnham, Bochner, Lonner 1986: 300), investigated the differences between cultures and consequences in migrants. However, instead of focusing on differences, this article aimed to analyse music-making as a social activity that may be universal among people with different cultural backgrounds.

For this purpose, the article presents a case study conducted in Wrocław. The first section of the paper discusses the conceptual framework by introducing theories from cross-cultural adaptation and music-making. It also addresses the research problem and questions. The second section, *Methodological notes*, presents the methods used in this study. Lastly, the third section draws the results of empirical analysis and conclusions of the case study.

Cross-cultural Adaptation

Since the concepts such as adaptation, acculturation, adjustment, and accommodation have been used interchangeably (Wendy, Ward 1990: 449–464), the major difficulty with cross-cultural adaptation is the lack of certainty about what constitutes *adaptation*. In this regard, it is crucial for this study, first, to dissolve this ambiguity. One of the reasons these concepts have been used interchangeably is that they all point to dynamic processes. These concepts address the between-cultures continuum and its roles or consequences on individuals who experiences cross-cultural transition.

In this study, cross-cultural adaptation is an active process that individuals learn from their firsthand contacts to accommodate themselves to the host culture and function in the new society. This accommodation involves acculturation. Looking at acculturation studies, we may refer to the first general outline of acculturation as defined by Redfield *et al.*, “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups.” (Redfield, Linton, Herskovits 1936: 149–152: 149). As outlined by them, acculturation may result in three different ways,

acceptance, adaptation and reaction. However, this approach was strictly criticised for being influenced by Western ideologies and prejudices later on (Cheung 1996: 321–356).

Looking at contemporary studies, apart from the homesickness and its consequences on psychological well-being, some of these problems require considering the cultural gap between home and host culture. The cultural gap defines the degree of the differences between the home and host culture. A more significant gap anticipates greater problems. As the study showed (Gudykunst, Hammer 1988: 569–601), cultural similarities between the host and home culture lead to less uncertainty and anxiety for the migrants and, thus, better functioning. Moreover, another study (Furnham, Bochner 1982: 161–198) concluded that greater cultural distance between the home and host culture causes more significant difficulties that migrants experience in their social interactions. Differences in language (Masgoret, Ward 2006: 58–77), religious and traditional practices (Berry, Phinney, Sam, Vedder 2006: 303–332), geographical conditions (Pennebaker, Rimé, Blankenship 1996: 372–380), daily practices (Argyle, Bryant, Trower 1974: 435–443), and dealing with the bureaucracy (Ward, Kennedy 1999: 659–677) may be shown as examples of the cultural gap.

However, some studies concluded that international people who established direct relationships with local people experience notably lesser problems than those who do not establish such relations. For instance, according to the study (Seltiz, Cook 1962: 7–23), migrants who started having at least one close friend from the host culture encountered fewer difficulties than the migrants with no host culture friends. Similarly, another study found that (Poyrazli *et al.* 2004: 73–82), international students who spend more time contacting the local people are significantly more well-adapted to the host culture than those who often interact with other international students. Based on these findings, the current research assumes that participative music-making could be an effective tool for making contacts with the host society, thus acquiring the necessary culture-specific knowledge and greater social network.

Unlike classical theories, contemporary studies emphasise that migrants are not passive victims of stresses and difficulties resulting from cross-cultural adaptation. On the contrary, they are social actors who proactively respond, find their way around and shape their surroundings due to their actions. Regarding the contemporary conceptualisation of cross-cultural adaptation, while the stress and coping theory deals with the psychological adjustment of international people and points to affective processes as a psychological impact of life experiences, the culture learning theory corresponds to the behavioural realm, and it tackles learning culturally relevant social skills. Behavioural responses of international people refer to the sociocultural adaptive outcomes, and the current research investigates the relevance of participative music-making in international people's cross-cultural adaptation through the lenses of sociocultural adaptation and psychological adjustment.

According to Ward *et al.* (Ward, Kennedy 1999: 659–677; Ward, Bochner, Furnham 2005: 384), sociocultural adaptation resides in the behavioural realm; it refers to migrants' ability to fit in or execute effective interactions in the host society. In this sense, the sociocultural perspective is a comprehensive and crucial aspect of human existence. It takes place in every part of daily life. How individuals understand, interpret, negotiate, and eventually communicate with others is partly based on this theory. Fusing such understanding with the concept of adaptation is beneficial to providing valuable information about the reality of music-maker international students and their position in this reality. Thus, this research's concern was not to measure the adaptive outcomes of these students but to show how participative music-making translates the surrounding reality of them. For such an aim, concepts of sociocultural adaptation and

psychological adjustment were employed, as music-making international students were in the cross-cultural transition process.

Intercultural Communication Through Participative Music-making

Music has an essential role in shaping individuals' cognitive, social, and cultural recognitions, hence, affecting how people operate their lives. As one of the cultural and frequently leisure-based activities, listening to music and participation in music is fundamental for many (Juslin *et al.* 2011: 174–207). Participative music-making can be explained as a way of communication through musical practice that consists of reciprocal links established on musical flow and sometimes answer to both self and others (Michaelson 2013: 284; Brinck 2018: 430–446). Music-makers participate in such activities to interact with others musically, develop their skills, gain popularity, and feel joy. Above that, the interaction via participative music-making may create a deeper connection since the music itself is deeply connected with fundamental emotions. As Turino put it, participatory music-making is widespread globally, as it serves the human need for deep connection with others (Turino 2009: 103–116; Roy, Dowd 2010: 1–49).

As many researchers stressed, the studies regarding minority groups' or migrants' individual well-being and music are under-researched (Henderson *et al.* 2016: 459–478; Daykin *et al.* 2017: 39–46). Nevertheless, few crucial studies focused on the same topic. They reported that music functions positively in social, physical, as well as psychological for migrant groups via not just establishing collective identity and agency but also strengthening social support, providing cultural maintenance and feeling of happiness and friendship (Baker, Jones 2007: 249–260; Clift 2012: 114–124; Davidson, Emberly 2012: 127–149; Karlsen 2013: 161–177; Lenette, Sunderland 2016: 32–49; MacDonald, Pothoulaki, Flowers 2012: 239–256). Being that, one should not disregard that for many people in marginalised communities, such as refugees or recent-arrivals migrants, music-making may be their best social option and, thus, a significant opportunity to connect with the new society (Cain, Lakhani, Istvandy 2016: 105–124; Lenette *et al.* 2016: 125–139; Lewis 2015: 42–58).

Music and its meaning do not only unfurl in a social context but also part of the context itself (Seeger 2004: 188), and this study aims to analyse how music-making in the adaptation process shapes the reality of international students. Following Griswold, *meaning* should be regarded as the shared significance that ensues when music indicates something beyond itself, representing some aspect of social life (Griswold 1987: 1–35). Undoubtedly, music-making international students' unique experiences significantly shape various aspects of their realities. The essential questions are in what way and how?

As this study is designed to discover the relevance between the participative music-making and the cross-cultural adaptation process of international students, its main question is **how participative music-making translates the surrounding reality of music-maker international students during their cross-cultural adaptation process in Wrocław?** [emphasis in bold – E.A]. To find possible answers, both the sociocultural and psychological compounds of cross-cultural transition were examined under two subsidiary questions.

The first aims to understand the sociocultural compounds of cross-cultural adaptation. Subsequently, the social network of international students was examined. The social network of these students is significant in the acquisition of culture-specific knowledge about the host culture, as it

follows the assumption that international students who establish direct relationships with local people experience notably lesser problems than those who do not establish such relations (Selltiz, Cook 1962: 7–23; Poyrazli *et al.* 2004: 73–82). Thus, it asks **how participative music-making influences the social network of international students?** [emphasis in bold – E.A].

The second question aims to explore how music-making contributes to these students' stress and coping strategies. This question corresponds to the psychological adjustment process and it asks, **how international students use participative music-making as a tool to cope with stress?** [emphasis in bold – E.A]

Methodological Note

The current study holds the social actors' perspectives and asks how they are experienced situations by interpreting objective settings, translating those settings into the psychologically active components that influence affections and behaviours (March 1994: 293; Weick 1988: 305–317; Yang, Read, Miller 2009: 1018–1037).

It means that psychological states activate subjective interpretations of the settings' objective features and generate emotions and, thus, behaviours. Given these circumstances, it is necessary to examine the meanings people give to social situations to understand the reasons underlying their actions and affections. Thus, how the social actors define some specific experiences is critical for this study, and this stage corresponds to an in-depth study of the meaning that international students give to their unique experiences. Hence, qualitative methods have been employed. As Silverman stressed (Silverman 2006: 488), contrary to quantitative methods, which are concerned with the meanings of participants' experiences—their stories.

As this research aims to depict the participant accounts of making music in the adaptation process to understand how it is negotiated by social actors directly affected by the process and their experiences, the interpretive paradigm is adopted. In its simplest definition, the ontological position of interpretivism is relativism (Guba, Lincoln 1994: 163–194: 110). Since the social actors construct their reality, there are as many realities as social actors, and this study tries to understand the reality of participants by taking their view on certain social phenomena through their experiences. Thus, in-depth interviews have been conducted to have music-maker international students' perspectives.

For the aim of this case study, some of the criteria were crucial to choose the study sample, such as being an international student in Wrocław, residing in Poland for up to 20 months, music-making in public areas. As a result of this purposeful sampling, six students from different educational levels constituted the study group; two undergraduates, three graduates and one doctoral student. Their age range differentiates from 22 to 28.

Apart from these essential criteria mentioned above, the cultural gap was also considered during the sampling, as the cultural gap significantly affects the adaptation process. Hence, among the study population (n=6, equal sex distribution), three participants were born in European countries, and three came to Europe for the first time in their life.

Interviews

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In-depth interviews with music-maker international students have been conducted. Half of the interviews were held in places where the participants decided to be. The other half of the interviews were done over the Internet due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All the interviews were conducted in the English language. The collected data were analysed with the inductive coding approach by ATLAS.ti software. As a result of the analysis, 52 codes and three main categories have been identified from the informants' narratives. These categories were (a) Negatives of the adaptation process, (b) Positives of the adaptation process, and (c) Advantages of music-making. However, due to the limited space of the article, the emerged codes cannot be elaborated on in-depth.

Ethical Considerations

The most critical ethical obligation is to describe the participants' experiences in the most reliable way possible. Before data collection, the participants of this research study were informed about the study to be carried out. To ensure that the interview took place in a casual atmosphere, the researcher conversed with the informants before the interview. The consent has been taken from informants to use the data they provided. Regarding privacy, all the participants' names in this article are anonymised to protect their confidentiality. The data is stored in the repository of the University of Wrocław.

Results

The results showed music-making in public areas substantially affects the cross-cultural adaptation of international students in Wrocław, which is evincible under two main categories; *social network* and *psychological*. Moreover, these areas seem interconnected, as they affect and are affected by each other.

Regarding the social environment of these students, this study showed that music-making in public areas is an effective tool for meeting new people, especially locals, and establishing social bonds with them. Moreover, it also brought them not just popularity but also financial income, which they benefited from in their cross-cultural adaptation. Finally, based on the informants' narratives, local people were showing them privilege thanks to the music they made. Thus, it is possible to assert that music-making contributed positively to the sociocultural adaptation processes of international students in Wrocław.

Meanwhile, based on the data collected, making music was associated with positive emotions, which informants expressed as joy, fun, or feeling alive. Thus, it was seen that music-making is a powerful tool to cope with the stress caused by the cultural transition. Furthermore, the psychological well-being derived from music was also valid for their listeners, as students stated that they always see smiling people around them. Therefore, it is essential to note that seeing such welcoming faces around them contributes positively to their cultural adaptation by arousing the migrants' sense of acceptance into the host society.

Discussion

The motivation that brought music-maker international students to Wrocław had of major importance. Compared to European students, non-Europeans' motivation for Wrocław was mainly financial, as these students explicitly stressed that the choice of Wrocław was affordable. On the other hand, the motivations of the European students were mainly to learn the local language and have new experiences.

The social network of all informants was expanding mainly under the same domain, as they all participated in the UniOrchestra project organised by the university. With participants from different cultural backgrounds, this project allowed improvisational music-making among migrants from thirteen countries. They performed music mostly from their own cultures in various settings, such as international festivals, conferences and local charity organisations. These music-maker students were meeting in publicly accessible places for rehearsals and doing participative music-making, which was open to anyone who passed by and desired to join them.

Informants stressed that friendships around them are often formed among people of the same nationality or classroom. In contrast, friendship with the same interest was more attractive to them. The expansion of the social networks they were freshly in was like a chain reaction. Vima (23, Azerbaijan) explained how the musical scene surrounds her social network as follows:

At first, I met with the organiser of UniOrchestra. Thanks to him I socialised in a musical atmosphere. The first people connected me with other people, and those connected me with another. It is like a tree, like a root, and then branches. Making music really works on building a social network. You don't have to organise. It starts with a person. (Vima)

In addition, these students stated music-making functioning as a conversation starter. To them, when one makes music in public, having a face to face interaction with other people is inevitable. People were approaching them, asking questions, sharing some experiences or giving information-often their phone numbers. Music was "a socially accepted excuse" to start a conversation. Etem (27, Turkey), who is in a doctoral college, shared his experiences regarding how interaction through music-making is likely with people, especially with locals:

People want to know about you, after the performances especially. They come to you and ask questions, some of them ask your contacts, etc. In this way, it is possible to meet local people. (...) it is always possible that you can ask for their assistance when you need something. (Etem)

Evidently, music-making in public spaces such as streets attracts people's attention and gives them a reason to interact with music-maker migrants and even exchange contacts. These interactions are more likely to occur after public performances, and more audiences bring more social networks. Moreover, this social network is also providing financial income to international students. It is good to remind that the motivation for coming to Wrocław for non-European students was mainly due to financial constraints. Hence, this income is significant in students' cross-cultural adaptation. Concerning this, Sila (22, Ecuador) said:

People are going to start to speak with you and will ask your help, for example, for the lessons to learn the instrument. (Sila)

Undoubtedly, international students' social network was the primary element in shaping their reality during their transition. Also, knowing the locals were functioning to learn culture-specific knowledge. Since music-making in public places attracts locals' attention and serves as a *conversation starter*, having a friendship with locals was easier. Ledan (25, Italy) and Vima (23, Azerbaijan) implied that music-making indirectly helped them learn some culture-specific knowledge. According to them, by its nature, music-making brings people together and offers opportunities to meet with locals. Thus, friendship with local people provides them with culture-specific knowledge:

Music-making gives me such an opportunity to get to know locals, their culture, and perspective on music in general. (Vima)

However, when they were asked for more specific information about what they learned, the participants failed to point to clear-cut cases but gave a more general answers:

I don't know if I can point out specific things, but the person we became closer was because of music, and he is Polish. Also, all the other people are Polish in the meeting he invited me. So, spending time with local people, somehow, you start to gather more. Because one thing that you can read about some specific cultural, or what you can hear from other people... but other thing is actually experiencing these things [from the firsthand]. And most of the time, many of these cultural features or things are not even explicit. It is something that you just learn when you actually spend time with... knowing local people for sure helps, in general, to feel more integrated into the culture. (Ledan)

Concerning these findings, this study agrees with Selltiz *et al.*, which concluded that having a friend from a host culture provides an easier adaptation process by introducing culture-specific knowledge. Additively, music-making was functioning attractively to make friends.

When the focus is drawn to the psychological effects of music-making, the first visible effect is related to the development of self-confidence. According to this, performing in public places provided music-maker international students with popularity to some extent. This popularity also brought self-confidence. For example, Vima (23, Azerbaijan) noted that performing in front of crowds contributed significantly to her extroversion. Familiarly, Ozi (24, Italy) stressed that the popularity of music-making increased his self-confidence. The self-confidence, which makes him engage with others, seems essential for his adaptation process as it is easy to assume that there is a positive relation between engaging with others and positive adaptive outcomes:

I think the popularity facilitated me in knowing people because some of them knew me already and sometimes when I wanted to start a conversation; these situations increased also my self-confidence. (Ozi)

According to informants, another positive effect of music-making in public places was that people were often smiled at them during their performances. Indeed, this situation should be meaningful for the people in the adaptation process—always seeing the smiling people around them should have been reinforced the international students' feeling of acceptance by others:

First of all, we get a bunch of sincere smiles from people around us which create reliance, faith. (Vima)

Lastly, whether solo or collectively, music-making was therapeutic for the participants, even though they used different terms to describe the feeling derived from music-making, such as *joy*, *fun*, or *feeling alive*.

Based on all this information, this study argues that enthusiastic and self-confident people will have a distinctively higher chance of their surrounding realities being positive, thus, having a smoother and easier adaptation process. Sila (22, Ecuador) summarised nicely:

[My – E.A.] musician friends are... all the time happy, you know? They are always positive, calm, and I feel that they are giving me good energy. I don't know... my non-musician friends usually have problems, and they are kind of depressed. The side of musician friends.. they are always positive! (Sila)

Conclusion

Even though the research covered a small number of informants, the results revealed that music-making in public areas extensively affects the cross-cultural adaptation processes of international students in Wrocław by shaping their surrounding reality. The crucial questions were in what ways and how. To find answers, it tackled two partially interrelated aspects of cross-cultural adaptation: sociocultural adaptation and psychological adjustment.

Music-making in public areas expanded international students' social networks greatly in a relatively short time, thanks to its conversation starter role. Another reason these students were able to expand their social networks quickly was that they were making their music in various public places. Moreover, this collective activity gave them not just popularity in their circle but also financial income, which they could use help for their cross-cultural transition process.

Moreover, considering the frequency of the term *us* in the narratives of informants who get acquainted for a relatively short time, this study agrees with Turino's conclusion that participative music-making serves the human need for deep connection with others (Turino 2009: 103–116). In addition to this, the current study showed that this connection occurs not only among music-makers but also with locals due to music's social bonding role.

More interestingly, unexpected finding, privilege has shown by the locals is a phenomenon that may enable international students to adapt faster and easier to the host culture. Exciting investigations can be done in the future regarding this topic, as it is an under-explored phenomenon in the literature.

Regarding psychological adjustment, it is seen that music-making can be a powerful stress-coping strategy in terms of its effects on international students' mood states. Even though the informants used different terms to express, the evocation of positive emotions resulting from music-making was found. Moreover, it is strongly believed that receiving positive reactions from local people thanks to music they made in public positively contributed to international students' psychological adjustment process by awakening their sense of acceptance by the host culture members.

Lastly, music-making conspicuously created a collective identity among musicians that are often expressed during the interviews, also has positive psychological effects during the cross-cultural transition process. However, a study focusing on the communicative aspects of music-making in an intercultural context might provide detailed information about how migrants form and express their identity through music-making.

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