Sociocultural adjustment among sojourning Malaysian students in Britain: a replication and path analytic extension

Viren Swami · Adriane Arteche · Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic · Adrian Furnham

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Abstract The present study examined the sociocultural adjustment of 249 sojourning Malaysian undergraduates in Britain. One-hundred and ten Malay and 139 Chinese students enrolled in various courses answered a self-report questionnaire that examined various aspects of sociocultural adjustment and socio-demographics. Overall, Malay students reported significantly poorer sociocultural adjustment than Chinese students, as well as more negative outcomes on a range of predictors. Path analysis for the total sample showed that higher family income led to greater sociocultural adjustment, but partially because it led to more contact with host and conationalists, better language proficiency, lower perceived cultural differences and less perceived discrimination. Moreover, participants with higher English proficiency were better adapted, but partially because they perceived less cultural differences as well as having more contact with host nationals. Additionally, individuals reporting better sociocultural adjustment also reported better health statuses. The same model was equally useful at predicting sociocultural adjustment for both Malay and Chinese participants. These results are discussed in terms of the role played by income in buffering against the negative aspects of sociocultural adjustment.

Keywords Sociocultural adjustment · Immigration · Malaysian students · Family income

Introduction

In the past several decades, empirical research and theorising has overturned the once prevalent view that migration and sojourning almost always compromises psychological well-being among migrants. Even so, sojourning remains a difficult process involving many different factors that are highly stressful [4, 35]. Within this perspective, researchers have highlighted the salience of life changes, their appraisal as threatening or challenging, and less often, the choice of coping strategies that sojourners use to deal with associated psychological and sociocultural distress (e.g. [22], [36, 47]. This perspective has led to efforts to empirically examine the factors associated with the acculturation process that compromise psychological well-being [40, 41]. Within this literature, researchers have typically distinguished between psychological adjustment (that is, the mental health and overall well-being of a migrant) and sociocultural adjustment (the behavioural and cognitive factors that are associated with effective performance during cross-cultural transition) (see [28], [37]. Although a small number of studies have examined the factors associated with psychological adjustment (e.g. [41] and associated coping strategies (e.g. [37], the majority of
research to date has focused on sociocultural adjustment (e.g. [18, 48]).

Among the factors that have been found to be valid predictors of sociocultural adjustment, the perceived cultural distance between the migrant’s home culture and host culture is one of the most important. As expected, greater perceived cultural distance is associated with poorer sociocultural adjustment [31, 37, 38], possibly because of the greater degree of cultural learning that must take place [10]. This is especially true where cultures differ in their core values or systems (e.g. between individualist and collectivist nations) and where sojourners also perceive a high degree of discrimination, marginalisation or alienation [3]. Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind 1997, [17, 24, 27, 29, 33, 46].

More fundamentally, sociocultural adjustment typically increases in the early stages of sojourning until it finally reaches a plateau where the new culture is sufficiently familiar [11, 38, 41]. One factor that appears to improve sociocultural adjustment over time is social-support and interactions with individuals from the host nation (e.g. [14, 15, 32], which may provide sojourners with opportunities to develop an understanding of the new culture [3], [20]) and even mitigate the effects of discrimination [9, 26]. Just as important is the level of social-support for conationals in the host nation [5, 12, 34], although this is often limited [1].

On the other hand, migrants’ socio-demographic variables may also influence sociocultural adjustment. For instance, sex, education level, host language proficiency and ethnicity have also been shown to be significantly associated with sociocultural adjustment [3, 33, 48]. Some studies have also examined individual difference predictors of sociocultural adjustment, focusing on factors such as acculturation attitudes, locus of control, self-esteem and cultural values (e.g. [19, 21, 24, 25, 39]), although here is the evidence is more equivocal.

The influence of the above factors on sociocultural adjustment may be particularly acute for short-term migrants who experienced marked ‘culture shock’ [8], as a result of the sudden loss of familiar cultural symbols and support. For example, the acculturation process can be difficult for students travelling to other countries for further education, and in such cases, culture shock may have a detrimental effect on academic performance [44]. In a recent study, for instance, Swami [33] reported ethnic differences in sociocultural adjustment among Malaysian students sojourning in Britain. Specifically, he found that Malay students had poorer sociocultural adjustment compared with Chinese students, which was explained as a function of the greater perceived discrimination, poorer English language proficiency and less contact with host national among Malays [33].

The study by Swami [33], however, suffered from a number of important limitations. First, the ethnic differences that were reported may have been an artefact of family or household income, which is an important factor in sociocultural adjustment [5]. Although various authors have cautioned against a simple focus on ethnic differences in family income in Malaysia (e.g. [6]), it nevertheless remains the case that inter-ethnic differentials exist, with Chinese families on average reporting higher incomes that Malay families (e.g. [13]). In such a scenario, higher incomes may afford Chinese sojourners greater resources with which to establish better language proficiency, more contact with host nationals and counter the effects of perceived discrimination. This makes it important to include measures of participants’ income or, as may be more important with student sojourners, family income.

A different extension to the work conducted by Swami [33] could be the inclusion of self-assessed health as a distinct variable. It has been suggested that differences in acculturation play an important role in health behaviours, with lower sociocultural adjustment resulting in poorer health status (e.g. [16], [23]). These results are explained in terms of acculturation acting as a useful marker of shifts in health-related knowledge and practices, which influence health status and health service use. Indeed, these studies have concluded that the acculturation process (including, but not limited to migrants’ socioeconomic status) can directly affect health outcomes, which makes measurement of the health status of sojourners extremely important.

Finally, recent studies have tended to ignore the possible inter-relations between different predictors of sociocultural adjustment. In order to overcome this statistical limitation, which may obscure mediational and moderational effects, path rather than regression analysis could be used [2]. Unlike regression analyses, path analyses allows for the construction of latent variables and testing confirmatory, rather than exploratory, models. In the present study, therefore, we used path analyses to examine the impact of various predictors on sociocultural adjustment and health status in a new sample of Malaysian Chinese and Malay students in Britain.

Based on the above review and previous findings among Malaysian students [33], we predicted that higher income would result in greater sociocultural adjustment, but that this effect would be mediated (at least partly accounted for) by contact with host and conationals, better language proficiency, smaller cultural differences and less perceived discrimination. Additionally, we predicted that individuals with better sociocultural adjustment would report better health statuses. Finally, given the inclusion of a measure of family income, we predicted that the same path analytic model could be used to predict sociocultural adjustment.
among Malays and Chinese, although the latter group would still report better sociocultural adjustment.

Method

Participants

The participants of this study comprised 249 Malaysian nationals who were enrolled in various undergraduate courses at universities in Britain at the time of the study. Of the total sample, 110 were ethnic Malays (61 women, 49 men) with a mean age of 21.56 years (SD = 1.21). All participants in this group were Muslims, and their mean length of stay in Britain was 21.01 months (SD = 5.09, range = 9–27 months). A second group of participants comprised 64 women and 75 men of Chinese descent (age M = 20.92, SD = 0.99). The majority of participants in this group were Buddhists (64.70%, Christian = 26.60%, other = 8.60%), and the sample had been living in Britain for between 13 and 34 months (M = 21.40, SD = 6.45). All participants in both groups reported having student Visas, and so this variable was not retained for analysis.

Measures

With the exception of two items (family income and self-assessed health), the measures used in this study were identical to those used by Swami [33]. These were originally developed by Zlobina et al. [48] in their study of Spanish migrants, and were adapted to refer to life and conditions in Britain.

Contact

Two items relating to the quantity of contact asked about contact with conationals living in Britain and about contact with host nationals (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much). Two further items relating to the quality of contact asked about contact with conationals and host nationals (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much). A principal components factor analysis (Varimax rotation with Kaiser normalisation) of these four items revealed two independent factors accounting for 90.65% of the variance. The first factor referred to contact (quantity and quality of contact) with conationals, and accounted for 48.44% of the explained variance. The second factor referred to the quantity and quality of contact with host nationals, and accounted for 42.21% of the explained variance. Factor scores were created for each participant by averaging the scores of items associated with each factor, and were used in all subsequent analysis as scores of contact with conationals (z = 0.95) and host nationals (z = 0.81).

Plan of residence

Participants were asked about their plan of residence in Britain (1 = Permanent, 2 = Temporary, 3 = Uncertain). The majority of participants (91.6%) reported that their intended stay in Britain was temporary, whilst the remaining 8.4% reported that they were uncertain about their future residency.

Expectations

Participants rated their actual experience living in Britain compared with their expectations before leaving Malaysia on a 3-point scale (1 = Better than expected, 2 = The same as expected, 3 = Worse than expected).

Perceived cultural distance

Perceived differences between the host and home cultures in different areas of everyday life (e.g. family life, gender relationships, work habits) were assessed with 36 items rated on a 3-point scale (1 = Less, 2 = Equal, 3 = More). Following previous work [33, 48], responses indicating the perception of difference between the two cultures was codified as 1, and the absence of difference was codified as 0. A total mean score was then calculated for each participant, with scores ranging from 0 to 1, to estimate the magnitude (but not direction) of perceived cultural differences (z = 0.65).

Sociocultural adjustment

Sociocultural adjustment concerning the degree of difficulty in dealing with practical, social and interpersonal communication problems during the previous year was assessed on 18 items rated on a 5-point scale (1 = Not at all, 5 = Very much). The 18 items were averaged to provide an overall score for sociocultural adjustment (z = 0.94).

Perceived discrimination

Perceived discrimination was assessed with six items concerning the frequency of being treated negatively due to participants’ nationality. These items were rated on a 4-point scale (1 = Never, 4 = Almost always) and averaged scores showed good reliability (z = 0.79).

Language proficiency

Three items asked about participants’ grasp of English, Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) and Chinese (or dialects) on a 4-point scale (1 = Do not understand, 4 = Very fluent).
Only the item referring to English proficiency was retained for analysis.

**Demographics**

Following Swami [33], participants reported their age in years, sex, ethnicity, religion, educational levels, length of residence in Britain in months and their immigration status. In addition to this, they also reported their current health status on a 5-point scale (1 = Good, 5 = Poor) and their family monthly income in Malaysian Ringgit (rated on a 5-point scale: 1 = Less than RM1,500, 2 = RM1,501-4,000, 3 = RM4,001-8,000, 4 = RM8,001–12,000, 5 = More than RM12,000).1

**Procedure**

All participants completed each of the scales in the order described above. Participants were approached to take part in the study on an opportunistic basis, at various venues frequented by Malaysians in Britain (e.g. sporting events for Malaysian clubs and societies, Malaysian restaurants, Malaysian student accommodation). Only participants of Malay and Chinese ethnicity were invited to take part in the study, and only two participants declined the invitation. All participants in the different locations completed the questionnaire individually and under similar conditions, namely in a quiet location and under supervision by the experimenter. Both English and Malay versions of the questionnaire were prepared by Swami [33], and participants were able to choose which version of the questionnaire to complete (English = 103, Malay = 146).2

**Results**

Descriptive statistics and ethnicity effects

Table 1 presents Ms and SDs for sociocultural adjustment and all predictors, as well as between-group effects (t-tests and Cohen’s d). As can be seen, ethnicity had a significant effect on all assessed variables, apart from self-assessed health. Malay participants reported poorer sociocultural adjustment and were more likely than Chinese participants to perceive their experience in Britain as being worse than expected. Additionally, Malays reported lower family income, less contact with both co-nationals and host nationals, and lower English proficiency than their Chinese counterparts. Finally, in comparison with Malays, Chinese participants had a higher length of residence in Britain and were less likely to perceive cultural differences and discrimination.

**Sociocultural adjustment predictors**

First, a series of bivariate correlations were performed to explore the associations between sociocultural adjustment and its predictors. As shown in Table 2, greater sociocultural adjustment was significantly correlated with higher income, more contact with conationals and host nationals, better evaluation of participants’ experience in Britain, higher English proficiency, better health and more permanent plans of residence in Britain. Additionally, higher sociocultural adjustment was associated with lower perceived cultural distance and with lower perceived discrimination. Next, a multivariate stepwise regression was computed to identify the predictors that better explained sociocultural adjustment (see Table 3). Perceived discrimination explained the greatest amount of variance (55%), followed by English proficiency (14%), contact with host nationals (4%), family income (2%), contact with conationals (1%) and perceived cultural distance (0.6%). It is notable that, together, these variables accounted for 80% of the variance in sociocultural adjustment, which is higher than that what has been reported in previous work (e.g. [33, 48]).

Finally, path analysis [2] using maximum-likelihood estimation was used to examine the relationship among the variables. Based on the above significant correlations, an initial model was developed with sociocultural adjustment as the endogenous variable and all the predictors as the exogenous variables. Results of this analysis revealed an inadequate model fit. The chi-square test did not support the model3 ($\chi^2(14) = 136.193$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.74, PGFI = 0.30, RMSEA = 0.27(confidence interval [CI]: 0.23, 0.31) and subsequent modifications were made until good fit indices were achieved. First, the direct path from health to sociocultural adjustment was replaced by a correlational arrow. Next, the direct path from income to the dependent variable was replaced by partial mediation paths, therefore income was modelled as the exogenous

1 At the time the study was conducted, one Malaysian Ringgit was roughly the equivalent of 0.14 British Pounds, 0.20 Euros, or 0.30 United States Dollars.

2 Although not a variable of interest in the present study, it should be noted that the language of choice when completing the questionnaire would be expected to covary with other criterion variables. The opportunity to decide which language to use when completing the questionnaire, however, was deemed important in order to maximise participants’ understanding of the included items.

3 The parsimony goodness-of-fit indicator (PGFI) is a measure of power and is optimal around 0.50. For the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), values of 0.08 or below indicate good fit for the model. Finally, for the CFI (comparison of the hypothesised model with a model in which all correlations among variables are zero), values around 0.90 indicate very good fit.

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variable and all other predictors (except of sex) were modelled as both endogenous and exogenous variables. Finally, the direct effect of sex on sociocultural adjustment was replaced by a fully mediated effect (language as the mediator). Figure 1 shows the final model. Although the PGFI (0.24) indicated low power, the other good fit indices supported the model ($\chi^2(9) = 12.053, p = 0.21)$, CFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.03 (CI: 0.01, 0.08)]. Sobel’s mediation test was performed to examine the mediation paths and the results provided support for five of the hypothesised relationships (see Table 4).

As can be seen, higher income led to greater sociocultural adjustment, but partially, because it led to more contact with host and conationals, better language proficiency, lower perceived cultural differences and less perceived discrimination. Moreover, participants with higher English proficiency were better adapted, but partially because they perceived less cultural differences as well as having more contact with host nationals. Additionally, individuals reporting better sociocultural adjustment also reported better health status. Finally, men showed higher English language proficiency although this did not account for sex differences in sociocultural adjustment.

Multi-group analyses were then performed in order to test whether the model was invariant across Malays and Chinese participants. A baseline model was first tested for each group and revealed differences across nationalities. For the Malay sample the fit indicators were ($\chi^2(9) = 63.601, p < 0.001)$, CFI = 0.88; PGFI = 0.23, RMSEA = 0.23 (CI: 0.17, 0.28). For the Chinese sample, the indicators were ($\chi^2(9) = 35.079, p < 0.001)$; CFI = 0.94; PGFI = 0.23, RMSEA = 0.13 (CI:0.09, 0.19). Inspection of the covariance matrix showed that the paths from income to contact with conationals, perceived differences and contact with

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**Table 1** Means and standard deviations for all measures and nationality comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural adjustment</td>
<td>2.63 (0.66)</td>
<td>2.88 (0.70)</td>
<td>2.44 (0.55)</td>
<td>5.66**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>2.97 (1.31)</td>
<td>2.54 (1.21)</td>
<td>3.30(1.28)</td>
<td>−4.90**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with conationals</td>
<td>3.25 (1.31)</td>
<td>2.21 (0.72)</td>
<td>4.06 (1.09)</td>
<td>−15.62**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with host nationals</td>
<td>2.47 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.06 (0.56)</td>
<td>2.79 (0.84)</td>
<td>−7.97**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>2.16 (0.73)</td>
<td>2.51 (0.69)</td>
<td>1.89 (0.65)</td>
<td>7.50**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived cultural differences</td>
<td>0.59 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.63 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.57 (0.13)</td>
<td>3.36**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived discrimination</td>
<td>1.79 (0.45)</td>
<td>1.96 (0.53)</td>
<td>1.65 (0.32)</td>
<td>5.91**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of residence</td>
<td>22.96 (10.34)</td>
<td>21.00(5.31)</td>
<td>24.48 (12.77)</td>
<td>−2.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English proficiency</td>
<td>3.01 (0.64)</td>
<td>2.69 (0.46)</td>
<td>3.25 (0.66)</td>
<td>−7.65**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2.78 (1.16)</td>
<td>2.87 (1.09)</td>
<td>2.71 (1.21)</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

**Table 2** Correlations between sociocultural adjustment, demographic variables and adjustment predictors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural adjustment</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.58**</td>
<td>−0.24**</td>
<td>−0.60**</td>
<td>0.66**</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>0.74**</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.64**</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.12*</td>
<td>−0.12*</td>
<td>−0.28**</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>0.67**</td>
<td>−0.09</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>−0.04</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>−0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>−0.24**</td>
<td>−0.25**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>−0.37**</td>
<td>−0.41**</td>
<td>−0.43**</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with conationals</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>−0.29**</td>
<td>−0.12*</td>
<td>−0.35**</td>
<td>−0.18**</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>−0.14*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact with host nationals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>−0.60**</td>
<td>−0.26**</td>
<td>−0.38**</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>−0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.58**</td>
<td>0.59**</td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>−0.46**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived cultural differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.44**</td>
<td>−0.15*</td>
<td>−0.46**</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived discrimination</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>−0.41**</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length of residence</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>English proficiency</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health</td>
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</table>

n = 266. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01
host nationals, as well as the paths from English proficiency to perceived differences were not significant in both groups. One possible explanation is that the variability intra-group is smaller than the variability between-groups, though the paths decreased when nationalities were considered separately. However, it is also possible that the associations were weaker because the sample size reduced by the groups division.

Table 3 Regression analysis of predictors onto sociocultural adjustment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived discrimination</th>
<th>Sociocultural adjustment</th>
<th>Predictors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived discrimination</td>
<td>β = 0.74, t = 18.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English proficiency</td>
<td>β = -0.40, t = 10.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact host nationals</td>
<td>β = -0.31, t = 9.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>β = -0.16, t = 4.84</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

All coefficients, F and R² significant at p < 0.01

Discussion

The results of this study extend previous work on sociocultural adjustment among Malaysian students in Britain [33]. First, as predicted, we found that Malay students reported poorer sociocultural adjustment than Chinese students; indeed, as can be seen in Table 1, Malays reported more negative outcomes on all assessed variables with the exception of self-assessed health. Second, path analyses showed that, for the total sample, higher family income led to greater sociocultural adjustment, a relationship that was partially explained by the fact that higher income led to more contact with host and conationals, better English proficiency, lower perceived cultural differences and less perceived discrimination. In addition, participants with higher English proficiency were better adapted, but partially because they perceived less cultural differences as well as having more contact with host nationals.

Overall, the present results suggest that family income is an important factor influencing sociocultural adjustment among Malaysian students in Britain. Furthermore, the inclusion of family income as a predictor helps to explain the ethnic difference in sociocultural adjustment: Chinese participants reported higher family income than Malay participants, and this had a direct effect on their sociocultural adjustment as well as a mediatory effect. In other words, ethnic difference between Malay and Chinese students in sociocultural adjustment appears to stem primarily from differences in family income, which affect participants’ experiences in the host nation.

The effects of income on sociocultural adjustment are perhaps not difficult to understand. Higher incomes afford individuals greater resources with which to develop more positive adjustment to a new culture, but also to counter the negative effects of the acculturation process. In the first instance, higher incomes may facilitate more contact with both host and conationals, improve English language proficiency and minimise perceived cultural differences. For example, higher incomes may afford greater use of cultural resources (e.g. community resources, social support networks; [12, 26] as well as more contact with networks left behind in the home country [30].

Importantly, these effects may also allow individuals to counteract negative aspects of the acculturation process, in particular that of perceived discrimination. For instance, higher incomes may result in better English language proficiency (e.g. through language classes), which in turn result in better contact with host nationals, and hence less perceived alienation or marginalisation by the host culture. Moreover, higher incomes may also allow individuals to counteract the negative consequences of discrimination when it is felt (e.g. through greater use of social support resources).
networks or better mental health care). Indeed, recent work has highlighted the importance of social-support network use in mitigating the detrimental effects of the acculturation process on psychological well-being (e.g. [17, 18]).

The results of the present study also suggest that self-assessed health was significantly associated with sociocultural adjustment. That is, individuals who reported better sociocultural adjustment also had better health, and vice versa. Again, however, the impact of income was important: income had a direct effect on improved health status (possibly as a function of improved health behaviours and health care access), but also through its effect on improved sociocultural adjustment. Indeed, many studies have highlighted the important role played by sociocultural adjustment in improved health outcomes among migrants, particularly (though not limited to) psychological symptoms such as depression (e.g. [40]).

The take-home message of this study corroborates previous conclusions, namely that greater resources should be directed at sojourners, particularly those from low-income groups, to help them adjust to the host culture. Importantly, however, our results do not justify the direction of resources to any one particular group from Malaysia, as has occurred under the policy of ‘positive discrimination’ for Malays. Rather, a more vigilant policy of migration assistance would see such resources being offered in relation to family income, irrespective of the sojourner’s ethnicity.

Moreover, resources in this instance need not only refer to financial support, but rather any resource that could assist in the acculturation process (e.g. English language classes, courses in the home nation to adequately equip sojourners, assistance in the host nation to help sojourners adapt, inclusion in host nation activities, diversity programmes aimed at host nationals and so on) [42].

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**Table 4 Mediation tests**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>IV to DV direct</th>
<th>IV to mediator</th>
<th>Mediator to DV indirect</th>
<th>Sobel Test Z</th>
<th>Mediation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>CCN</td>
<td>ADJ</td>
<td>−0.58**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>−0.24**</td>
<td>−0.56**</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>DIS</td>
<td>ADJ</td>
<td>−0.58**</td>
<td>−0.43**</td>
<td>0.74**</td>
<td>−0.31**</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>LAN</td>
<td>ADJ</td>
<td>−0.58**</td>
<td>0.39**</td>
<td>−0.64**</td>
<td>−0.38**</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN</td>
<td>DIF</td>
<td>CHN</td>
<td>0.38**</td>
<td>−0.41**</td>
<td>−0.26**</td>
<td>0.33**</td>
<td>Partial</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAN</td>
<td>DIF</td>
<td>CHN</td>
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<td>−0.58**</td>
<td>−0.26**</td>
<td>0.22**</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>LAN</td>
<td>DIF</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>−0.25**</td>
<td>−0.58**</td>
<td>−0.08</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.01. Key: IN = Income; CCN = Contact with conationals; ADJ = Sociocultural adjustment; DIS = Perceived discrimination; LAN = English language proficiency; DIF = Perceived differences; CHN = Contact with host nationals.
Several limitations to the present study are worth considering. First, our study focused primarily on sociocultural factors associated with the acculturation process, to the exclusion of individual difference factors. For instance, Swami [33] has suggested that personality differences may also underscore the ethnic difference in sociocultural adjustment seen here, which is in line with studies showing a positive correlation between extraversion and sociocultural adjustment (e.g. [43, 45]). However, mean rather than structural differences in personality are likely to be found between different samples [7]. Other individual difference predictors that might improve the predictive value of our path analytic model include self-esteem, cognitive ability, cultural values (e.g. endorsement of individualist or collectivist values), satisfaction with life, just world beliefs and locus of control (cf. [19, 25, 39]).

The present design could also be improved with the use of a more sophisticated methodology. It is notable, for instance, that the measures used in the present study were dependent on participants’ self-assessments, which requires caution when interpreting results. Future work would do well to use objective measures where possible; health status, for instance, could be measured using behavioural measures, such as the number of health care visits or medical records. Similarly, the measurement of family income could be improved by incorporating parental occupational status or individual employment history. Finally, future studies should also incorporate measures of academic achievement or satisfaction in studies involving student sojourners. This will offer researchers a more direct examination of the outcome of acculturation for students, and can be easily measured using academic records (e.g. examination results).

Altogether, the present results suggest that the family income is a strong predictor of sociocultural adjustment among Malaysian students in Britain, partially because it mediates the effects of contact with host and conationals, English language proficiency, perceived cultural differences and perceived discrimination. With increasing numbers of Malaysians now going overseas for their tertiary education, these results will have important implications for the acculturation process they face. For researchers and practical policy makers alike, it will be important to establish ways in which sociocultural adjustment among sojourners can be improved.

References


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33. Swami V Predictors of sociocultural adjustment among sojourning Malaysian students in Britain. Intern J Psychol (in press)