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# Big five personality and cultural relocation factors in Vietnamese Australian students' intercultural social self-efficacy

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to test an integrative model of intercultural social self-efficacy using a sample of 124 Vietnamese migrant university students in Australia. According to the model, Asians' intercultural social self-efficacy in western societies would be predicted by three of the five Big Five personality factors (higher levels of extraversion and openness, and a lower level of neuroticism), three cultural relocation variables (a weaker ethnic identification, a higher level of fluency in the host language, and a longer period of residence in the host country), and their co-ethnic social self-efficacy. As well, the model tested if co-ethnic social self-efficacy would mediate the effects of the personality variables on intercultural social self-efficacy. Subsequent path analysis results partially supported the model tested. There were significant total effects of co-ethnic social self-efficacy, weak Vietnamese ethnic identification, English fluency, extraversion, and openness on intercultural social self-efficacy. The effect of extraversion was mediated by co-ethnic social self-efficacy. The results highlight the relevance of not only cultural relocation factors, but also the possession of relatively stable personal resources (in the form of characteristic social efficacy, extraversion, and openness), to acculturating Asians' social efficacy in interacting with host nationals. Methodological limitations of the present study and implications of the findings for both the sociocultural adjustment literature and training for migrant students are discussed. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

*Keywords:* Big five personality factors; Cross-cultural adaptation; Ethnic identity; Immigration; Social self-efficacy; Sociocultural factors

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## 1. Introduction

The demands of cultural relocation on refugees, migrants, expatriate workers, and international students are well-documented (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Stening, 1979; Taft, 1977), and can be classified into the broad categories of psychological and sociocultural adjustments (Ward & Chang, 1997). The present paper is focussed on the joint contributions of personality and cultural relocation factors in intercultural social self-efficacy, an important dimension of sociocultural adjustment, among migrant students from a socially disadvantaged ethnic community background.

Migrant students from a minority racial group may find social interactions to be particularly challenging owing to their non-English speaking background (NESB), their newcomer immigrant status, in some cases the prejudice of the people around them, and possibly their personality dispositions (Smither & Rodriguez-Giegling, 1982; Ward, 1996). However, effective interactions with peers, academic faculty members, and general staff members constitute an important determinant of tertiary students' mastery of academic work and their social integration and well-being in the educational setting (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Tinto, 1990). Recent Australian research suggests that overseas-born NESB university students are more likely to report social difficulties in both academic and everyday social encounters (Barker, Child, Gallois, Jones, & Callan, 1991; Edmond, 1996; Pe-Pua, 1994), and a lower level of social self-efficacy (Fan & Mak, 1998), than the Australia-born.

Fan and Mak (1998) have adapted Bandura's (1977) concept of self-efficacy to investigate migrant students' belief that they can successfully perform or complete target behaviors in academic or everyday situations involving social interactions. The relevant self-efficacy expectancy enables individuals to produce the desired outcome through their own actions. It is a powerful factor in behavior change because it determines the initial decision to perform a behavior, the effort spent, and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). Moreover, self-efficacy has been found to buffer the experience of stress; those with low self-efficacy are at risk for a dramatic increase in threat and loss appraisals, and are more likely to report acculturative stress (Jerusalem & Schwarzer, 1992; Zheng & Berry, 1991). Bandura (1977) has pointed out that people's belief in their own ability can have more to do with their performance in a given situation than their actual ability to perform. Perceptions of social self-efficacy in situations such as cross-cultural encounters will thus have an effect not only on individuals' social performance, but also on their decisions as to whether to become involved in particular types of social events.

According to Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997), there are four sources of self-efficacy that can be targeted for intervention to achieve positive changes. They are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological arousal. Translated into the domain of social self-efficacy in a cross-cultural context, migrants and sojourners can seek to increase this aspect of self-efficacy through mastering intercultural social interactions, watching similar models' successful social

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