

Chapter 15

Self-Esteem and Associated Factors of International Tertiary Students in New Zealand and the Implications on Acculturation and Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem plays a major role in the well-being and adaptation of an international student to a host country, including acculturation at school, workplace, and other settings. The main objective of the chapter is to investigate the self-esteem and associated factors of international students in non-funded private training establishments (PTEs), one of the fast growing higher education sectors in New Zealand. This exploratory study presents the initial findings of self-esteem of international students in one of the PTEs. Implications of the findings on self-esteem will be discussed in light of how it is related to the acculturation of an international tertiary student in a host country.

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INTRODUCTION

Given a significant growth of international students in New Zealand between 2010 and 2015 especially in non-funded private training establishments (PTEs) (Ministry of Education, 2011, 2015, 2016), the well-being and adaptation of international students are crucial for the stakeholders in international education (Telbis, et al., 2014).

The current study reviewed the literature relevant to self-esteem and associating factors before explaining how the present study was conducted. Using a questionnaire which assesses self-esteem, associated factors, and demographic variables, the outcomes of this research are three-folded. In addition to reporting the well-being of international students of the present study using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), this study explores the contextual factors that are associated with self-esteem so that the next phase of research can be established to examine these factors in details.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem refers to the extent to which an individual approves, appreciates, and values oneself (Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Robinson, et al., 2013). As a sum of evaluations of noticeable qualities that an individual perceives of himself or herself (Robinson, et al., 2013), self-esteem gains its place in understanding how an individual, such as an international student, sense of self-worthiness and self-acceptance during an adaptation process in a host country (Yeh, 2002; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Martín-Albo, et al., 2007; Shafaei, Nejati, & Razak, 2018).

A review of literature indicates that work (Trzesniewski, et al., 2006; Kuster & Orth, 2013; Kuster, et al., 2013; von Soest, et al., 2015), relationships (Johnson & Galambos, 2014; Erol & Orth, 2016, Mund, et al., 2015) and health (Trzesniewski, et al., 2006; Orth, et al., 2012; Orth & Luciano, 2015) are among the important life domains that self-esteem has consequences with.

Positive view of oneself is generally believed to benefit an individual in many ways, including psychological health (Heatheron & Wyland, 2003; Shafaei, Nejati, & Razak, 2018). Whereas, those with a low self-esteem are associated with depression, aggression, antisocial behaviour and delinquency (Donnellan, et al., 2005; Wei, et al., 2008). Low self-esteem during adolescence is also believed to be a predictor of sickness, criminal behaviour and poverty during adulthood (Trzesniewski, et al., 2006).

Age and Gender

Differences in self-esteem as to gender and age can be observed in cultures all over the world (Tsai, et al., 2001; Cai, et al., 2007; Arslan, et al., 2015). According to various studies (Kling, et al., 1999; Trzesniewski, et al., 2002; Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005; Huang, 2010; Trzesniewski, et al., 2013; Orth & Robins, 2014; Arslan, et al., 2015; Orth, Erol, & Luciano, 2018), self-esteem is reported as high during childhood (ages 9-12), drop in adolescence (ages 13-17) have gradual rise in adulthood (ages 18-60), and decline sharply during old age (ages 61-above) across gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and nationality (Trzesniewski, et al., 2002).

Due to the large interval of age within the adulthood group, a research created a college-age group (18–22) and a post-college age group (23–29) which showed the increase of self-esteem level from the college period to the end of post-college period and remained stable in the 30s (Trzesniewski, et al., 2002).

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