

**Valuing Cultural Diversity:**  
**The Academic Adjustment Experiences of**  
**Undergraduate Chinese International Business**  
**Students at Victoria University**

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submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Education**

**Victoria University**  
**Faculty of Human Development**  
**School of Education**

**2002**

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## **Declaration of Originality**

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis presented by me for another degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgements in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

Signature:

## Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that the pioneering work by Burke, Ballard and Clanchy has shaped and forged the basis of the study. However, I am solely responsible for the opinions expressed in the dissertation.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the following people for their support during the preparation of this dissertation:

All the informants who gave their valuable time to contribute to this investigation.

My family for their support and encouragement.

Professor Ken Wilson for his valuable advice and generous support during the course of the study.

Ms Janis Webb for her co-supervision and insights into the challenges facing international students.

Finally, I feel honored to have shared my research journey with Associate Professor James Sillitoe, who acted as principal supervisor and whose advice, recommendations and encouragement have been of inestimable value.



## **Abstract**

International students have diverse needs when undertaking education in Australian universities. It is in the interest of both international students and the host institution to ensure these students achieve success in their studies. This study builds on previous research and explores, from the students' perspective, the academic adjustment experiences of undergraduate international Business students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural backgrounds at Victoria University, Australia. A qualitative methodology, using principles of grounded theory, was used for the study. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted for data collection. The transcribed data was analysed under focus questions and themes identified in the literature review using open and fixed grids.

The dissertation documents the academic experiences of the cohort of students studied, focusing on the significant cultural factors which impinged on their adjustment; and discusses the emerging patterns, processes of the adjustment, strategies for future students to adjust well, and implications for curriculum development and delivery. The results of this study have suggested that cultural and educational backgrounds play a significant role in students' adjustment. The systematic building by academics and administrators of formal and informal mechanisms in Australian universities, which value students' cultural diversity and develop inclusive curricula, is to enrich the learning experiences of all students.

## Glossary

**Adjustment** is defined as ‘a process of fitting individual or collective patterns of activity to other such patterns carried out with some awareness of purposefulness’ (Macquarie Dictionary 1991). *Adjustment* is used to refer to students making changes in their attitudes, behaviour and social norms in order to fit into the new study environment at Victoria University.

**Adjust** is defined as ‘to change slightly, especially, in order to make suitable for a particular job or new conditions. Adjustment is the act of adjusting’ (Longman Dictionary 1988).

**Transition** The term is used to refer to the change for students to university study from their previous study, work or home duties. It is used in First Year Transition, or transition to university study.

**Chinese students** The term is not confined to geographic location, in other words, it is not limited only to students from China. It refers to international students coming from Chinese Confucian heritage cultures. Therefore, international students from Hong Kong, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, People’s Republic of China, Taiwan or Thailand are defined as ‘Chinese students’ for this study. Chinese students from migrant families who were born in Australia are not international students according to the definition above, so they will not be included in this study, although they might have similar backgrounds and adjustment experiences. The term *students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultures* is also used to refer to this group of students (Please refer to *Chinese Confucian heritage cultures*).

**Chinese Confucian heritage cultures** Biggs (1996, in Watkins and Biggs, eds) used the term to refer to students from countries such as China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia or Korea, with Confucian heritage cultures. In this dissertation, it is mainly used to refer to the cultures in countries such as China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, and the related educational values.

**Commonplaces of education** The four commonplaces of education (Schwab 1973) are in terms of *the student, the teacher, the curriculum and the milieu*.

**Course codes** Abbreviations were used for Business courses in Victoria University. The course codes used in this thesis are listed below:

***BBAA*** Course code for Bachelor of Business in Accounting.

***BBAB*** Course code for Bachelor of Business in Banking and Finance.

***BBAC*** Course code for Bachelor of Business in Catering and Hotel Management.

***BBAN*** Course code for Bachelor of Business in International Trade.

***BBAT*** Course code for Bachelor of Business in Travel and Tourism.

**Culture** is defined by Barrett (1991) as ‘the systems of agreed-upon meanings that serve as recipes, or guidelines, for behaviour in any particular society.’ Terpstra and David (1991) warn that cultural misunderstandings cause problems ‘stemming from differences in values and codes of behaviour’ between parties involved in inter-cultural communication. They believe that: ‘Culture is a learned, shared, compelling, interrelated set of symbols whose meanings provide a set of orientations for members of a society. These orientations, taken together, provide solutions to problems that all societies must solve if they are to remain viable’ (p.6).

In this study, the use of the term *culture* is based on a combination of both of the above. Culture includes belief, values, tradition, behaviour, codes of practice, social norms which members of a society share in their daily life.

**Hakka** A dialect used by local Fujian Chinese in China and overseas Chinese over the world.

**Hokkian** A dialect used by local Fujian Chinese in China and overseas Chinese over the world.

**International students** According to its use in literature, the term refers to students who live away from their home country. The terms ‘foreign students’ and ‘overseas students’ are also used in literature to refer to international students.

**Interview schedule** An interview schedule was used to structure the interviews (Appendix B). Five focus questions have been prepared, having as the themes of the students’ (i) previous educational experience, (ii) perceived differences between studying in Australia and in their home countries, (iii) experiences in adjusting academically and culturally to study in Australia, (iv) opinions on adjustment difficulties, and (v) advice to new students to facilitate success of adjustment.

**NESB** Non-English speaking backgrounds.

**Victoria University (VU)** VU is the newly determined name for the former Victoria University of Technology (VUT), in which this study was initially carried out.

**Year of Course** The required number of years for a student to complete a course. It is normally three years for a Bachelor degree. It is four years for Bachelor of Business in Catering and Hotel Management (**BBAC**) and Bachelor of Business

in Travel and Tourism Management (*BBAT*) courses as students were required to have one year compulsory industrial training.

## 1.1 Institutional background to the study

The context of higher education in Australia for international students has gone through considerable processes of change and development in the past 50 years. Indeed, the history of Australian universities' hosting international students over this period records that there has been an important shift from hosting *exchange students* to taking full fee-paying *international students*. This change took place in a number of steps as the brief description below indicates. The description is given as a background to the implicit question of how international students can be better supported in their study in Australian universities, and how the benefit of international education will be maximised for both students and institutions by understanding the adjustment challenges experienced by international students.

In the early 1950s, the Colombo Plan was established, which was the first large-scale scheme for sponsoring the education of Asian and Pacific students in Australia (Barker 1990a; Burke 1997; Auletta 2000). As part of this Plan, the Australian government provided university scholarships for overseas students to study in Australia in an attempt to aid the progress of developing countries in South and South East Asia. At that time, overseas students were not seen as a potential 'market' for Australian education, but rather as part of a system designed to contribute to the economic strength of the general region. However, as the economic situation in countries in the region strengthened, there was an increase in demand for, and interest in, Australian tertiary education by students in Asian countries, particularly in the areas of science and technology (sponsored students) and 'business' type courses (private students). This pattern of increasing demand continued into the 1980s (Auletta 2000).

Indeed, by the mid 1980s, a subsidised student program was in operation, where anyone wanting to study in Australia had to gain a place in the quota allocated by Foreign Affairs to that particular country. Fees were levied for this scheme, increasing from

\$1,500 to \$3,500 over the life of this program (Barker 1990a; Burke 1997). In the late 1980s, another shift in policy saw a full-fee recovery policy implemented and the subsidised student program was abolished (Burke 1997). Towards the end of the decade, Australian Government policy emphasis had decisively shifted from a position of assisting the region with educational aid, to one of delivering education to a large potential market consisting of a diverse student population (Williams 1989; Nesdale, Simkin, Sang & Fraser 1995). Consequently, the attitude to international education in Australia had been transformed from an *aid* focus to a *trade* focus, and in the process, Australia has transformed itself from a *sponsor* to a *seller* of higher education (Auletta 2000). With the new policy, all new international students were required to pay the full cost of their education, and those funds previously spent on the subsidised program were transferred to a new scholarship scheme (Burke 1997). Figure 1.1 illustrates the timeline of the shift in policies.

1950s	<b>Colombo Plan</b>	sponsoring students
mid 80s	<b>Subsidy Program</b>	subsidised students
late 80s	<b>Full-fee Program</b>	full-fee paying students

**Figure 1.1 Australian Government policy on international students: timeline**

At the time when this study was designed in 1993, the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) figures showed that at the initial height of this surge in international student enrolments in 1992, Australian universities had 39,500 international students, making up seven percent of the total student population (DEET, 1993a). Whilst Australia drew overseas students from 80 countries, Asian countries provided just under three quarters of all overseas students, with Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore together accounting for almost half of all overseas enrolments (DEET, 1993a). According to the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, formerly DEET) and the Australian International Education Foundation (AIEF), there were 64,188 students enrolled in higher education courses in Australia in 1997. This represents an increase of international student enrolment in higher education

of almost 28,000 students or 76.1% since 1993 (DEET 1997). In 1997, it was noted that the top five source countries in the higher education sector were still Asian, and found that students' home countries, in numerical order, showed that the greatest number were from Malaysia, followed by Singapore, Hong Kong, Indonesia and India (DEET 1997). The latest DETYA figure showed that the number of international students enrolled in Australian universities both onshore and offshore was 95,607 in 2000 (DETYA 2000). Hence the number of students has more than doubled in less than a decade. The significant numerical size of this group of students, coupled with their considerably different academic and cultural background from domestic students, underlined the importance of serious consideration being given to understanding their academic adjustment experiences by those interested in higher education.

With this move away from an *aid* emphasis to a *trade* emphasis, Australian universities were permitted to shift their enrolment program from one of *selecting* a fixed number of students from the quota allocated to various countries, to *attracting* students on a commercial basis, particularly in high status courses. One positive outcome of this ability of Australian universities to market their courses and services to fee-paying students, was that it put international student issues onto the academic and economic agendas and thus it encouraged institutions to focus attention upon the servicing of these students' needs (Browne & Dale 1989; Williams 1989; Burke 1997; Volet 1997).

The program shift in universities from enrolling *exchange* student to *fee paying international* students also irrevocably changed the nature of the relationship between international students and the enrolling institution. The current cohorts of international students are no longer *guests* in their institution who have certain rights and responsibilities according to this position, but rather they are *clients*, who are in the position to demand value for money for their education. Whilst Australian universities therefore are in the position to access significant financial opportunities in taking on the role of a provider of higher education to international students, they face increased academic challenges and social responsibilities. Indeed, universities across the country have seized these opportunities to earn much-needed dollars in the current climate of



continuous funding cuts and use them to meet their growing financial commitments (Burke 1997, Kelly 1997). However, they also have to meet the real challenges of offering services to meet the diverse needs of increasingly large numbers of international students who are involved in education in Australia in order to, at least partially, protect their market position.

It was with this rapid increase in numbers of international students that their problems of academic adjustment to Australian university conditions became clearly apparent. In common with the majority of students entering university, international students faced a range of transition challenges as they moved from secondary to tertiary education. Indeed, these challenges faced by all students have been the subject of a great deal of recent studies (for example, McInnis & James 1995) and include social, financial, academic and personal issues. However, for international students, there is the added challenge of adjusting *culturally* to the mores of the Australian university system, and it is with these cultural challenges that this study is primarily concerned.

It was this need for understanding international students' special situations and requirements in Australian higher education, and the search for better ways to assist them in their learning, which inspired this study. The author was herself an international student in Australia, and now lectures in an Australian university. Although the main portion of the study and data collection took place in 1995 prior to two periods of maternity leave, it is believed that the information gained and the lessons learned from this work will be relevant and timely within Australian higher education for some time to come.

## **1.2 Focus of the study**

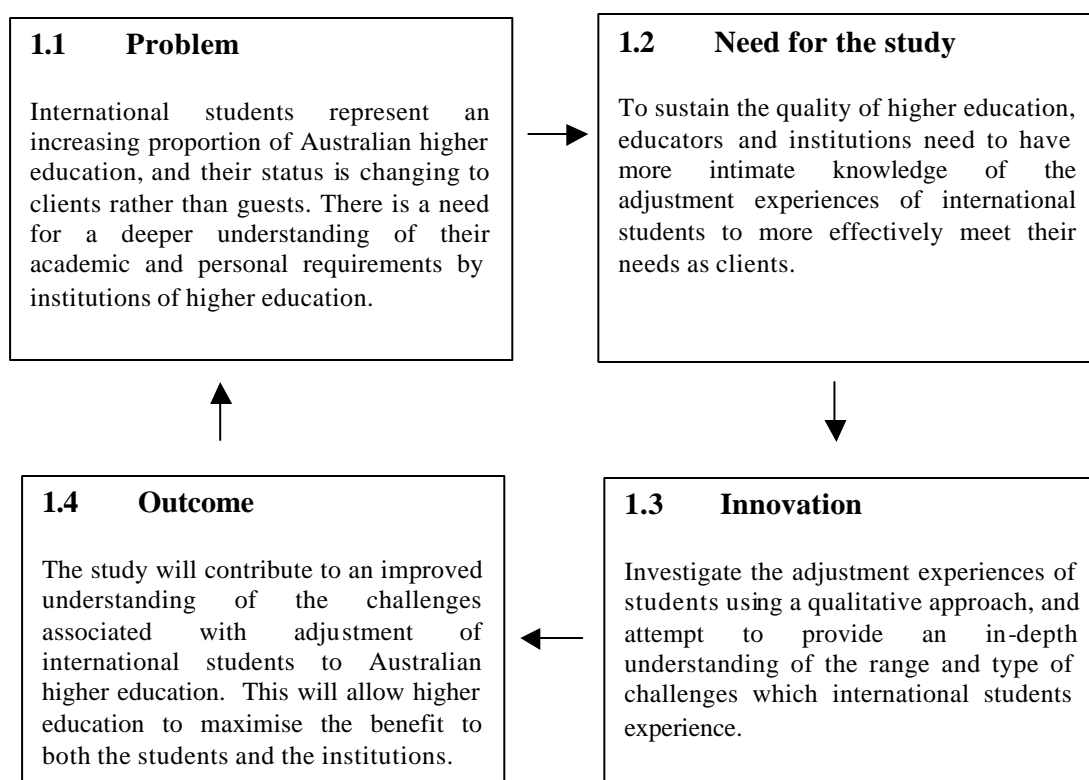
This study has been primarily concerned with the underlying cultural factors that impinge upon the academic adjustment experiences of international students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background. Whilst it is agreed with the generally held proposition that language difficulties are a prime influence in the academic

adjustment of international students, this study has attempted to move beyond this in order to garner the perceptions of the students about the most difficult aspects of studying in an Australian university. Students have been further invited to verbalise their suggestions of the possible causes of these difficulties and finally, to recall the processes or stages of their own adjustment to Australian higher education. Finally, their advice for future students and staff to facilitate a smoother adjustment experience are recorded.

The title of the study, *Valuing Student Cultural Diversity: the Academic Adjustment Experiences of Undergraduate Chinese International Business Students at Victoria University (VU)*, embodies the notion that the respectful valuing of international students' cultural traditions and conceptions of education will contribute to the unlocking of an important educational resource. If such an approach is taken by Australian universities, it will mean that we can successfully realise the academic potential of this group of students. The current study will take into account the many cultural diversity policy changes formulated and implemented by Australian universities over recent years which have increased in awareness of cultural diversity and inclusiveness in teaching and learning practice in the Australian university community. It will seek to comment on these measures and add further insight into the experiences of international students which may allow further refinement of the policy and practice of providing international students with enjoyable and rewarding educational experiences.

Currently, much of the literature in regard to international students' learning experiences refers to group studies and Asian international students. For example, Burns (1991) studied students from Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore using quantitative methods to both identify and gauge the intensity of the range of difficulties faced by international students. There have been, however, an increasing number of specific studies on learners from Confucian-heritage cultures conducted at different universities, including those from the University of Western Australia (Burns 1991) and Murdoch University (Volet 1996), which will be more closely examined in Chapter 2. In the

present study, the focus has been on Chinese learners at VU within the discipline of Business studies. By choosing to focus on international students from specific cultural background, it is believed that it will allow the provision of an in-depth exploration of the other-than-language factors which impinge upon students' academic experiences. The study attempts to identify the underlying cultural factors which influence the academic adjustment experiences of this group of international students and, in doing so, will allow recommendations to be made which will benefit individual students, the staff and institution involved in international education. To assist the reader, a concept map of the study is given in Figure 1.2.



**Figure 1.2 Concept map of the study**

This study was designed and formulated in 1993-94, and data collection was carried out in 1995. It was aimed at eliciting an in-depth understanding of the academic adjustment experiences of a cohort of these international Business students at VU in order to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the processes and intensity of their academic adjustment experiences. This, in turn, was necessary to allow a clearer

understanding of their needs and effectively facilitate future international students' transitions to the Australian higher education system.

### **1.3 Aims of the study**

As indicated earlier, with the current reduction in Federal Government funding for all areas of higher education, Australian universities have had to look to alternative sources of income. The easing of restrictions of providing full-fee paying places for international students has provided one such avenue for universities to create their own resources, and this opportunity has indeed been taken by most institutions. However, the key to the development of a professional and sustainable higher education industry will be the demonstration of international students' academic success in Australian degree courses. This study aims to contribute in a positive and practical way to the successful development of this facet of contemporary Australian universities.

The **general** aims of this study are to:

- (i) contribute to the increasing literature on international students' learning by exploring the academic adjustment experiences of international Business students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background at VU.
- (ii) contribute to the welfare and success of individual students and the institution in the area of international education.

More **specifically**, it will:

- (i) describe the experiences of international Business students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background in making academic adjustment to study at VU.
- (ii) investigate the cultural factors which influence their academic adjustment.

- (iii) seek explanation of the underlying cultural reasons behind difficulties in adjustment to study.
- (iv) identify the emerging patterns of the adjustment experiences of international Business students from a Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background.
- (v) analyse the emerging patterns to explain the adjustment processes of students for the benefit of both students themselves and the staff in planning an inclusive curriculum.

There are two objectives of this study. First it is to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by international students as they adjust academically and culturally to higher education study in Australia. Such understandings will mean that the institution would be able to put in place structures and activities to assist these students to more effectively achieve academic success. The second objective is to promote an awareness of issues connected to the range of cultural diversity in higher education sector of VU, so that both the institution and students would be able to maximise the advantages that diverse cultures bring to Australian higher education.

#### **1.4 Significance and anticipated outcomes of the study**

The 'export' of higher education is an expanding concern. Australian universities are not only taking international students as full-fee paying clients on domestic campuses, they are heavily involved in teaching students on international campuses. In order to meet its professional commitments and to compete with other centres of university learning, it is essential that the cultural backgrounds and special needs of international students are well understood and respected by Australian university staff, and that their adjustment to the Australian university system is appropriately facilitated.

A key belief underpinning this study is that cultural mis-conceptions and misunderstanding can lead to negative academic experiences which result in frustration for

both students and lecturers. A respectful understanding of how international students learn will benefit not only students but also the staff and the university. If students know what to expect from lectures, tutorials, laboratory classes and lecturing staff, they will be in a position to more effectively prepare themselves for their learning experiences, and hence be more likely to reach their academic potential. If lecturing staff have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the student's situation, they will be in a better position to plan and prepare inclusive curricula which will enable students to use their cultural and background knowledge to their advantage. This explicit valuing of the cultural diversity will hence enable greater participation in educational events by international students and foster a greater, and more valuable, understanding among students and staff.

Finally, the benefits associated with international students in ultimately achieving academic success at VU are not solely confined to the individual, but will also significantly accrue to this University and to the community in general.

## **1.5 The research questions**

The current understanding of international students' situations by the VU community is often general, fragmented, and sometimes confusing. This study will redress this need for more systematic and coherent information in that it will provide an in-depth contribution to answering the general question of '*How do international students from ethnic Chinese cultural background adjust to study in the Faculty of Business at VU?*' It will further examine the question of '*What are the specific experiences of international students from ethnic Chinese cultural background as they adjust to the Australian education context?*'

In particular, the study will attempt to couch answers in terms of the *cultural influences* on students' adjustment experiences. Whilst the study is not intended to seek definite solutions to this question, it will attempt to clarify the current situation and to make

some first steps in an effort to modify educational practice for the benefit of both the international students and the institution.

## **1.6 Limitations of the study**

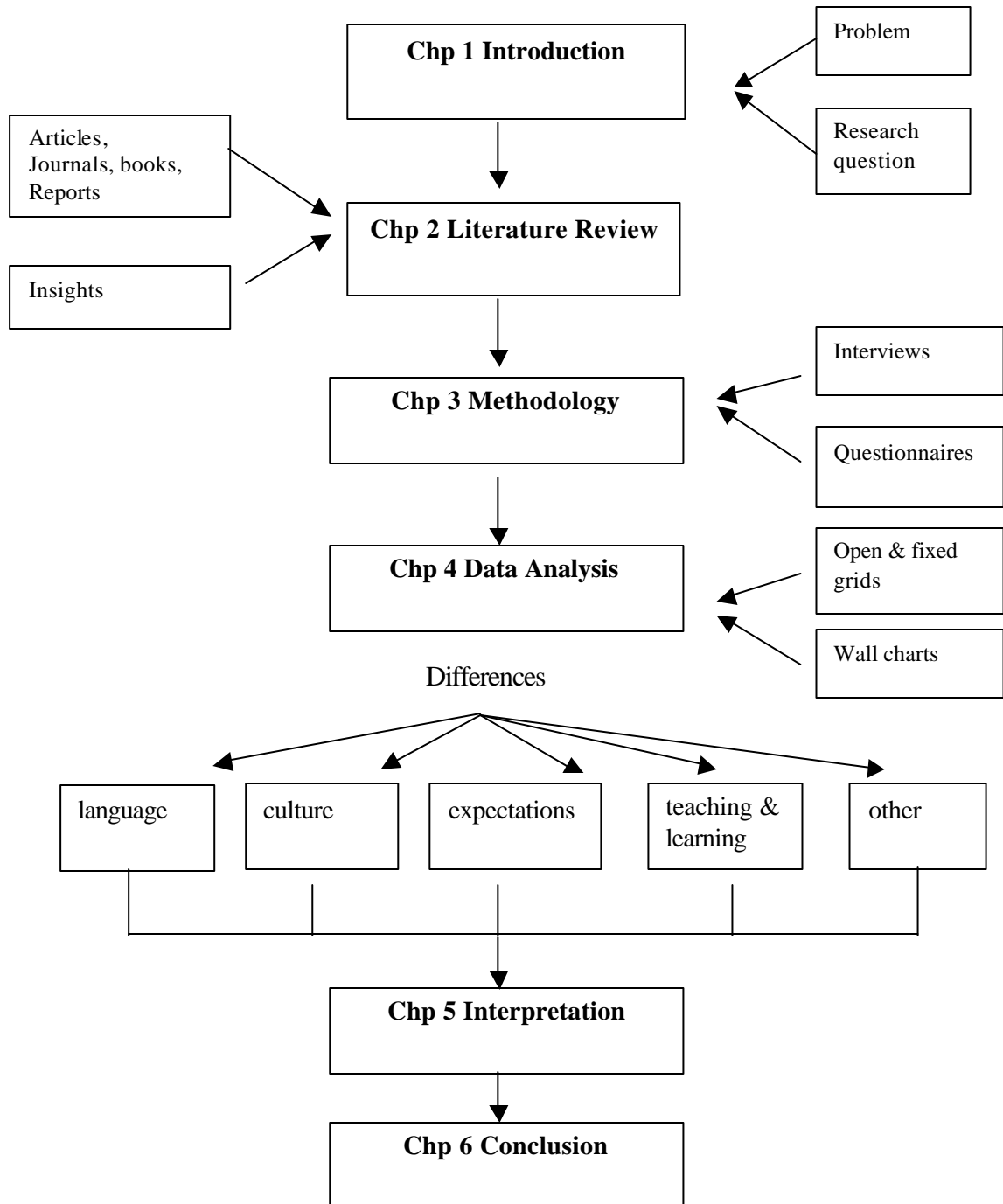
The scope of this study is confined to the academic adjustment experiences of international students studying for an undergraduate Business course at VU. The learning requirements and environment of other disciplines and other universities will have their own distinct character, thus making some specific details of the study unique to our situation. However, whilst the findings will reflect on the experiences of this cohort of students at VU, it is suggested that there will be a significant amount of information which will stand translation to similar contexts in other institutions.

In addition, it is acknowledged that while this study has been purposefully designed to focus on students' own accounts of their academic adjustment experiences, there remains the possibility that there are differences between what the students actually experienced and what they recollect and say of the experience. Such possibilities exist in all qualitative investigations of this nature because of the general unreliability of memory of respondents during times of stress and because of overlapping experiences within the intense context of the academic calendar. However, in an attempt to minimise these effects, personal observations made by the researcher, whose roles include being an international student support staff member, together with empirical works of other researchers in the area, have been deliberately incorporated in the interpretation of the data collected during the study.

## **1.7 Summary of the study**

The Introduction to the study given in Chapter 1 has been designed to set the context of the study by introducing the reader to the recent history and development of international education in Australia, and in so doing has justified the importance of the study. The concept map given in Figure 1.2 outlines the specific focus and direction of

this study in terms of the *problem*, the *need for the study*, the *innovation of investigation* and the anticipated *outcomes* (Sillitoe 1994; Sillitoe & Crosling 1999). The more detailed diagram in Figure 1.3 below shows the relationship between the chapters of the thesis indicating how the study developed.



**Figure 1.3 Structure of the thesis**



The Literature Review in Chapter 2 presents a broad review of relevant research work in order to contextualise the problem which international students face, in a more focused and detailed way. This understanding is further enhanced by reporting the findings of previous studies regarding the needs of, and challenges faced by, international students.

The methodology that was chosen for the study is fully explained in Chapter 3. Because this study incorporates a number of techniques for data collection and data analysis, to aid the reader to a clear overview of this phase of the work, the processes are depicted in Figure 3.1. Analysis of the collected data is discussed and presented in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 gives interpretation of the findings. The conclusions and recommendations are drawn, based upon the specific objectives of the study, in Chapter 6. A comprehensive reference list, using the Harvard Business reference system, is provided at the end of the dissertation

## Chapter 2

## Literature Review

The focus of this study, - *'The academic adjustment experiences of Chinese international students at VU'* is both complex and broad. It is complex because it involves issues related to aspects of international education, cross-cultural adjustment (or adaptation), teaching and learning, the First Year Experience, and the academic culture of Chinese learners. It is broad because it covers and crosses the boundaries of several disciplines: namely education, anthropology, and psychology. Because of the particular setting and focus of the work, it is believed the nature of this investigation is most conveniently described as 'educational research', and its methodology and process will follow those most usually found in the educational field.

Within these pragmatic boundaries that have been set for the study, the efforts are focused on the major themes of particular significance to higher education. The literature review will first discuss the notion of 'international students'. In the first section past research studies on international students will be reviewed, thereby setting the context for the study. The second section will look into theories of cross-cultural adjustment specifically relevant to this study. It will then review Australian studies focusing on challenges facing international students, followed by reviews of global research on the learning experiences of international students. Finally, it will discuss some 'models for educational research', in an effort to establish a theoretical framework for the study.

### 2.1 The notion of 'international' students

As discussed in Chapter 1, the past fifty years have seen a gradual change in the values and attitudes towards educating international students within Australian universities (Randell 1989; Nesdale et al. 1995). These changes are clearly reflected, for instance, in the terms used to refer to international students in the literature. In the earliest studies, they were referred to as 'foreign students' (Rao 1976). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, they were referred to as 'overseas students' (Burke 1986; Ballard & Clanchy

1984, 1991; Ballard 1987, 1989; Williams 1989; AVCC 1990; Barker 1990a); but since the mid-1990s, the term 'international students' has been widely used in the literature (Ballard & Clanchy 1997; Burke 1997; Volet 1997; Ballard 1998; Barker 1999; Ramsay, Barker & Jones 1999).

The observation here is that this change in terminology indicates a subtle and gradual change in the attitudes towards international students by the host institutions of higher education. The substitution of 'international' for 'foreign' represents, for example, an increased sensitivity to the negative connotations of the term 'foreign', and provides a social cue for more positive and understanding attitudes towards international students during their period of education in Australian universities. This change in addressing the full fee-paying group of students as 'international', in an economic climate where international trade and international relations are highly valued on the Government's policy agenda, also represents a positive shift in values of Australian universities.

It has been suggested that this change in referring to international students has been accompanied by an increased interest in gaining some understanding of these students' learning needs and of their experiences in Australian universities (Burke 1986). This implicit shift in attitudes from 'negative' to 'affirmative' has accompanied, if not caused, a change in the appreciation of the level and type of needs experienced by these students. It appeared, for example, that in the early 1980s initiatives that were undertaken to assist this cohort of students seemed to stay at the level of recognising symptoms of academic difficulty rather than attempting any strategies that might be linked to addressing the causal factors. Consequently, in this period problems and difficulties experienced by international students were frequently seen to be 'language related' (Zhang, Sillitoe & Webb 1999). However, later literature (Burke 1986; Ballard & Clanchy 1991, 1997) indicates that there has been a gradual shift throughout the higher education community to positive efforts to understand and address deeper issues related to the education of international students. Such positive efforts indicate the willingness of Australian universities to look at 'both sides of the coin' (Sameulowicz 1987; Ballard 1987, 1989), and underscore their increasing attempt at accommodating

the efforts of student and institutions to act in concert in the process of cross-cultural education (Volet 1997).

In this chapter, a general background to early work with international students will precede more specific comments on those investigations and approaches to the education of international students that focus upon the individual factors that are thought to significantly influence students' success in higher education. These factors include language issues, cultural differences, expectations, and teaching and learning styles. Finally, some comments will be made on the various approaches that have been used to investigate student learning issues, particularly in cross-cultural and 'transition' situations.

## **2.2 Cross-cultural communication in international education**

Of significance to this study is the concept of culture. However, as is often the case in academic pursuits where one attempts to be specific, there is no single, widely accepted definition of culture that can be accessed as an unequivocal basis for this study. Indeed, according to Groeschl and Doherty (2000), 'the term culture is used in a wide range of social sciences, and it has therefore different meanings in the different fields'. These authors came to the conclusion that many recently developed definitions of culture are mainly based on two early premises; the first involves *value orientations*, whilst the second relates to *predictions of common human problems*. As will be discussed below, it appears that most authors agree that culture is a very complex term and difficult to define. Exacerbating this difficulty is the situation where 'culture' appears to consist of several elements, some of which are explicit whilst others are implicit.

A first useful definition of culture was made by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952). They carried out a comprehensive study of the definitions of culture, and reported more than 160 attempts. They concluded that most social scientists generally agreed that:

culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially attached values (p.161).

This definition is very useful to the current study for two reasons. First, it spells out the notion referred to above that culture consists of *explicit* and *implicit* patterns. In the context of international education, the cross-cultural interactions between international students and staff are typically characterised by situations of meetings between two or more cultures. Within these patterns of behavior, the explicit parts are relatively easier for both parties to communicate. The greatest challenge is with the implicit part. This point will be further discussed and elaborated in section 2.3.3 of this chapter. Second, this description suggests that the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and values that are intangible and deeply embedded in customs and socially shared understandings. In terms of this study, it is the attempt to unlock these embedded ideas and values that makes this investigation most challenging.

One useful approach to understanding culture has been to use the 'layers of an onion' as a metaphor. Hofstede (1991), for example, used this metaphor to illustrate that the 'core of culture' is formed by values. In a later work, but with a similar theme, Groeschl and Doherty (2000) suggested: 'The shallow, first layer [of culture] is behaviour and represents the explicit culture. Implicit culture includes a second and deeper layer, namely values. The core of culture is formed by basic assumptions' (p.14).

King (2000) asserts that many scholars have defined the notion of *cultural diversity* in a variety of ways. For example, Thomas (1995) suggested that cultural diversity is: 'the mixture of items characterised by differences and similarities' (p.246). In this view, cultural diversity involves a combination of numerous personal, situational, and organisational elements. McInnis, James and Hartley (2000) commented: 'the notion of diversity was complex and extended beyond the usual differences in age, gender, place of living, ethnicity and socio-economic background, to include diversity in *values*,

*attitudes and expectations*' (p.1). The broadening of the notion of diversity in this respect is useful. It is a conscious effort towards understanding the underlying beliefs of students in a teaching and learning context.

In one contribution to cross-cultural understanding, Barker (1990b) identified five barriers or obstacles to the practice of intercultural communication. These barriers are, in summary: (1) language; (2) non-verbal communication; (3) perceptions and stereotypes; (4) the tendency to place different values on the same behaviour; and (5) high anxiety. The identification of these barriers is very useful. They not only signpost the most likely areas for potential misunderstandings, but they also indicate the most profitable directions for initiatives designed to make communications work.

Clearly, the recognition of the explicit and implicit parts of culture, combined with the observations mentioned above of the likely obstacles in cross-cultural communication (Barker 1990b), provides some key considerations for this investigation. Barker's points numbered (2), (3) and (4) are important for this study because not only do they indicate where cross-cultural misunderstandings can arise, but they also give clues to where difficulties in academic adjustment experiences are generated for international students. These 'intangible, symbolic rules and values' (Banks 2001, p.70), which arise during cross-cultural interactions, leave much room to be explored. This will be further elaborated in section 2.3.3.

### **2.2.1 Culture shock and cultural adjustment**

Notwithstanding the chosen focus upon educational issues and the literature that pertains to it, it is believed that there are equally important contributions to the understandings of international students' learning, cultural adjustment and adaptation from psychological perspectives. For example, *culture shock* has been identified as a common experience among international students, and it has been claimed that most international students experience culture shock to some degree (Burke 1986). Indeed, there are a number of authors who claim that culture shock is a *predictable part of the normal cycle of*

*adjustment* as the student comes to terms with new academic, cultural and social expectations, and learns to negotiate the academic system in an unfamiliar setting (Bochner 1972; Furnham & Bochner 1986; Kim 1988; Barker 1990a). Barker (1990b) related these cultural shock experiences to the psychological ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ experienced by students during their first contact with the new host culture, and further suggests: ‘On arrival there were high expectations, and a confidence that skills learnt at home will serve to ensure success in Australia’ (p.10). However, this initial experience may also be ‘a time of stress, anxiety and temporary reduction in normal capacity to adapt and cope’ (p.10). It is this emotional tug-of-war that is experienced by international students that generates the confusion and disorientation referred to as culture shock.

There were many attempts made to identify the ‘stages of adjustment that individuals go through in an unfamiliar culture. Oberg (1960), for instance, described four stages:

- (1) a ‘honeymoon’ stage characterised by fascination, elation, and optimism;
- (2) a stage of hostility and emotionally stereotyped attitudes toward the host society and increased association with fellow sojourners;
- (3) a recovery stage characterised by increased language knowledge and ability to get around in the new cultural environment; and
- (4) a final stage in which adjustment is about as complete as possible, anxiety is largely gone, and new customs are accepted and enjoyed.

These and similar adjustment stages have been often referred to as ‘curves’, indicating the patterns of change over time in satisfaction in living in another culture. Theories or hypotheses which involve this changing pattern of behavior will be investigated in more detail later in the chapter.

### **2.2.2 Academic adjustment**

There are many different phrases describing the phenomenon of an international student’s ‘academic adjustment’ to the host culture in the literature. It is referred to as ‘academic adjustment’ (Ramsay, Barker & Jones 1999; Zhang, Sillitoe & Webb 1999)

or 'academic adaptation' (Anderson 1994), but for the purposes of this thesis, these terms will be taken as synonymous and the term 'academic adjustment' will be used throughout.

It would appear that adjustment challenges facing international students originate from the differences between Australian and the students' own cultures regarding their attitudes to teaching and learning (Sameulowicz 1987; Ballard & Clancy 1984, 1991, 1997). This suggests that an important factor in the successful adjustment of international students to the Australian higher education system requires a significant amount of cross-cultural adaptation. In this regard, Anderson's (1994) 'model of adaptation' gives some insights into cultural adjustment, and therefore has some relevance to the current study. Anderson claims there are four *stages* involved in a student's introduction to an unfamiliar culture, and they are cultural encounter, obstacles, response generation and overcoming phases. Anderson has given an in-depth analysis of each of these phases for the cultural and learning adaptation of international students. This detailed analysis indicates that within each stage, there are three dimensions involved in the students' adaptation, which Anderson terms the affective, cognitive and behavioral responses.

In a later work, Barker (1999) explicitly linked cross-cultural adaptation to successful adjustment in this way:

Socio-cultural adjustment pertains to culture-specific skills, the ability to negotiate the host culture, and general behavioral competence. It can best be interpreted within a social learning context, and is influenced by knowledge about the new culture, amount of contact with host nationals, length of residence in a new culture, cultural identity, and cultural distance (p.6).

Clearly, both of these contributions again illustrate the complexity of this issue of cross-cultural adaptation and adjustment, indicating that simplistic or one-dimensional approaches to the problem are not likely to be fruitful.



In a related study, but from a slightly different perspective, Hofstede (1991) identified four dimensions of national culture which are termed 'power distance', 'individualism-collectivism', 'masculinity-femininity', and 'uncertainty avoidance'. The relevance of this analysis to the present work is seen by the significantly different descriptions generated for Australia and those countries from which international students predominantly come. Using Hofstede's schema, Australia is positioned in the group of countries with 'small power distance' and 'individualist' orientations. By comparison, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia are in the group of countries with 'large power distance' and 'collectivist' orientations. Although this approach of cultural mapping is not explicitly used in this study, Hofstede's theory is very helpful in understanding inter-cultural communications, particularly in terms of identifying group behaviour. For example, students from a 'collectivist culture' are not disposed to speaking out in class because they conceive themselves as part of a group (Hofstede 1991). It is, however, also believed that there are marked individual differences in students, even between those in the same cultural group, which makes the identification of strict typologies somewhat difficult. Although this approach of cultural mapping is not explicitly used in the current study, the concept of 'Confucian dynamism' introduced by Hofstede provided a useful construct for this work. Hofstede claimed that 'persistence' and 'respect for tradition' (pp.165-166) are core values held by those Chinese scholars surveyed in his work, and that these values seemed to spring from the teachings of Confucius. This has clear implications for the present study, since all of the students interviewed came from a strong Confucian traditional background.

Many academic adjustment challenges facing international students originate from the differences in explicit and implicit attitudes to teaching and learning between Australian students and international students (Sameulowicz 1987; Volet & Renshaw 1996; Ballard & Clanchy 1984, 1991, 1997). Again, the point should be made that international students not only face the need to adjust to cultural differences in the host community, but, at the same time, have to make the university 'first year transition'. This transition, which is difficult enough for Australian students entering higher education for the first time or after absence of some years, is exacerbated for international students who are

unfamiliar with the academic mores of the host country. In an effort to understand this complex issue, some useful models, constructed from a number of perspectives, have been reviewed below.

Briefly described here are a few early models, for example, Lysgaard (1955) introduced the U-curve hypothesis, which described the stages of adjustment to a host culture by a visitor as initial elation, followed by dissatisfaction, and finally recovery and optimum adjustment. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) extended this U-curve hypothesis to a W-curve, in order to account for the process of re-adjustment to the home culture. Each of these early models emphasises the dynamic nature of the adjustment process, and draws the attention to the possibility of different strategies being needed at different times in a student's university course.

One useful study by Tinto (1987) specifically flagged the time frame of adjustment, although it was mainly focused on the personal attributes of students and the causes of students' leaving college. He claimed that the critical period of adjustment was in the first year, especially during the first semester.

Baker (1990b) looked into the several theories regarding 'adjustment in terms of the stages that sojourners experience in the new culture' (p.9), and suggested:

Successful adjustment is defined as a combination of three factors: good personal adjustment; good interpersonal relations; and task effectiveness. According to this criterion, overseas students are successful if 'they feel satisfied with their life in Australia, enjoy good relations with Australians and obtain the qualification they seek' (p.6).

It would appear from these comments from previous writers in the area, that the phenomenon of 'academic adjustment' involves a range of independent yet overlapping issues which a student must work through. In the next section, some of these challenges that students face are identified, and the ones which will form the major foci of this study are discussed further.

### **2.3 Challenges of academic adjustment facing international students**

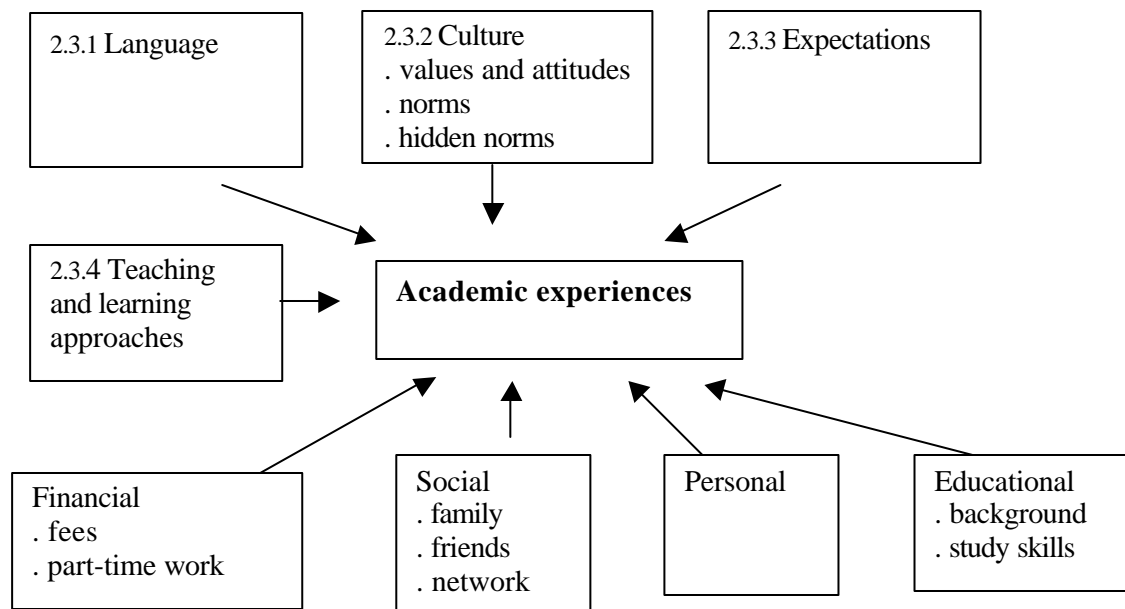
Studies (Rao 1976; Bradley & Bradley 1984; Burke 1986; Samuelowicz 1987; Tay & Smith 1990; Ballard & Clanchy 1984, 1988, 1991; Burns 1991) indicate that international students, especially those from Asian countries, face a range of unique challenges in their study in Australian universities. The identified challenges include language, lack of a support network of friends and family, homesickness, accommodation, finance, living independently, adjusting to different teaching styles and different learning styles. These have been well documented as factors influencing academic success. According to Beasley (1990), particular challenges include: reading and writing skills, and the difficulty in adjusting to Western educational traditions which stress independent learning, critical analysis, and the linear development of ideas.

Language poses as an immediate and the most obvious challenge to international students in their day-to-day communication and classroom function. In the academic pursuit of reading, writing, understanding lectures and participating in tutorials, language skills can help or hinder their progress. Most often, staff attribute the lack of progress of a student to lack of language proficiency, and in many cases students themselves attribute language as the major cause of difficulties in their studies.

However Ballard and Clanchy (1984, 1991) and Burke (1986) have identified that culture, as well as language, contribute to the challenges facing international students in their study in Australian universities. For example, in traditional Chinese culture students are expected to listen in class most of the time and follow the instructions issued by the teacher. The teachers are highly respected, and are expected to provide answers to questions. This is in sharp contrast to the Western culture, where the active participation of students is sought and encouraged. Teachers work as facilitators to students' learning (Cortazzi & Jin 1997).

Closely related to and overlapping with culture are the different expectations which students bring to the learning experiences, and the unfamiliar teaching and learning approaches used in Australian universities. They present further challenges to international

students. Whereas all students go through a transition in the first year study at universities in the areas of adjusting to the increasing independence of tertiary education, and the different learning and teaching approaches (McInnis & James 1995), international students need to make these transitions, as well as adjusting to a new cultural and educational environment.



**Figure 2.1 Dynamics of educational experiences of international students**

Some or all of these factors may interfere with an individual international student reaching his or her potential in higher education. Those factors influencing the learning experiences of international students that have been chosen for this work are language, culture, expectations, teaching and learning styles (Burke 1986; Volet & Renshaw 1996; Ballard & Clanchy 1991, 1997). Figure 2.1 summarises the dynamics of the academic experiences of international students, and indicates these issues which will be discussed in some detail below.

### **2.3.1 Language**

The needs of international students are complex, especially for those coming from a non-English speaking background. As discussed earlier, they face the challenges of adapting to a new language, a different academic environment, and an unfamiliar

culture and society. Studies done in a number of Australian universities in the last decade (Burke 1986; Samuelowicz 1987; Burns 1991; Ballard & Clanchy 1991, 1997) indicate that many academic support and teaching staff have empathy for the challenges faced by international students. However, as Ballard (1987) writes: 'students and staff often attribute the difficulties largely to an insufficient proficiency in English' (p.116). Indeed, it is observed by the researcher and supported by the literature (Ballard & Clanchy 1991) that individual students quite often regard their lack of proficiency in English as the single cause of difficulties in their studies. This is often reinforced by staff who make the comment that students make little progress in their studies because of language difficulties. Consequently, many universities once offered language classes as the only mode of concurrent support to students based on this understanding of their needs.

The term 'language difficulty' however, encompasses a number of specific areas of concern. For example, studies done by a number of support service staff in different universities confirm that Asian international students experience language difficulties in reading, speaking, listening and writing (Bradley & Bradley 1984; Burke 1986, 1989). Although most of these previous studies were conducted in different universities (Samuelowicz 1987; Burke 1986, 1989; Ballard 1987, 1989; Burns 1991; Ballard & Clanchy 1991, 1997), the findings are strikingly similar. In general, Asian international students are described as quiet members of class who seldom participate in discussions. They tend to prefer to see their lecturers and tutors after class if they have questions (Ballard & Clanchy 1991). It is also observed by Ballard and Clanchy that staff confronting a silent student tend to conclude that either the student did not prepare adequately for class, or the lack of proficiency of English inhibits the student in speaking up. They suggest that whilst language may be part of the reason for the silence of students, it may also be due to a lack of confidence. Personal encouragement from staff rather than direct language tuition may be needed to help students to take the first few steps in participating in classes.

Ballard (1987) also established that language is only *one* of the many issues involved in international students' transition. Ballard claimed that teaching and learning styles, cultural values and tradition also affect the adjustment of international students to university study in Australia (Ballard 1987, 1989; Ballard & Clanchy 1984, 1988, 1991). The development of identifying *culture* as a significant factor in influencing the learning and adjustment experiences of international students in Australian universities is very important. It broadens the views and understanding of international students. Indeed, when international students enroll in Australian universities, they embark on a journey of learning, ideally, both educational and cultural.

### 2.3.2 Culture

A study of perceptions of academic staff by Samaelowicz (1987) supported Ballard's (1987) view. Upon leaving their familiar home culture, Samaelowicz noted most Asian international students experience a period of homesickness and emotional instability before settling in. In some instances, it may not occur to the university community that the education system in another country might be culturally different from the Australian education system and this, together with the differences in teaching approaches, assessment methods and learning approaches contribute to the difficulty in making successful academic adjustment to Australian university studies by international students.

Burns (1991) at the Australian National University, carried out a quantitative study comparing the experiences of first year international students with that of first year local students. The result of this comparative study indicated that both groups experience similar types of difficulties in their university studies, but they were manifested to different extents. For example, local students faced the challenge of making transitions from secondary school to tertiary education, while international students needed to make further adjustment from their home culture to Australian culture.

In addition, the relationship between teacher and student, the *expectation* of critical analysis, active participation in tutorials, the teaching strategy of questioning, and the attitude towards knowledge and authority all contribute to the cultural adjustment

difficulties of international students (Ballard & Clanchy 1991). This view is shared by Burke (1989) who claimed that overseas students commonly and simultaneously experience study shock and cultural shock; and international students from Asian countries need to go through a period of academic and cultural adjustment to Australian university study. This is a very important observation, and is central notion in this study. It is believed that an understanding of international students' academic adjustment will better enable the institutions to facilitate and accommodate their adjustment needs, and a critical element in this understanding is the making explicit of the expectation universities have of students. The pioneering work by Ballard and Clanchy (1984, 1991, 1997) and Burke (1986, 1997, 1999) has been instrumental in shaping the directions and the basis of the study in this regard.

### **2.3.3 Expectations**

In inter-cultural communication situations and inter-cultural encounters, the parties interact using previous experiences, perceptions and stereotypes. Difficulties arise in these situations when there is gap in these expectations. To make matters more complex, verbal and non-verbal communications are an important part of the interactions. It is often these implicit norms or codes of behaviour that lead to a mis-match of expectations and consequent misunderstandings. In addition, mis-communication occurs if the parties interpret different values and meanings on the same behaviour (Kim 1988; Barker 1990b).

The five barriers or obstacles to successful cross-cultural communication were identified in section 2.2.1. Such insights and identification are very useful in that they signpost potential mis-understanding, allowing the opportunity of avoiding them, hence making communications work effectively. Clearly, reciprocal understanding of background and learning culture is needed for both international students and staff for optimum cross-cultural communication (Volet 1997; Maxwell, Adam, Pooran & Scott 2000).

Asian international students from Confucian heritage cultures often have different expectations of higher education compared to those of their teachers, which leads to difficulties in that students do not know what is the appropriate behaviour in the new study

situation and unfamiliar culture of an Australian university. For example, Asian international students have much higher regard for their lecturers than many staff themselves are aware of. Also, in Western culture, the development and extension of knowledge is highly valued and encouraged; while in Eastern culture, the respect of written knowledge and authority is the norm, and critical analysis is not required or encouraged (Ballard & Clanchy 1988, 1991). The differences in these practices lead to the mismatch of expectations between students and staff. These are implicit expectations which are hidden by obvious language difference, and therefore are not immediately obvious.

Students' expectations of Australian universities are two fold in cross-cultural communications. In the context of higher education, on one hand international students have expectations of Australian universities. Students' expectations of the appropriate classroom behavior, assignment requirements, independent time management, relationships with staff, and so on, are based on their previous educational background and previous educational experience. They may be very different from what they really are. On the other hand, Australian universities have expectations of them. The difficulty of trying to determine what is expected of the students is often quite significant. This was described by an articulate post-graduate student as 'what was required of her was never made explicit' (Aspland 1999, p.31).

Difficulties arising from this mis-match in expectations between staff and international students is compounded by the majority of international students having recently exited secondary school in their home country, and entering tertiary education for the first time in Australia. As mentioned earlier, there are differences in learning culture from secondary to tertiary education as commonly experienced by first year students (McInnis & James 1995), and even for local students, there is the transition from high school to university. The need for developing appropriate study skills, time management skills, independent learning and social skills falls under the general aegis of teaching and learning approaches.

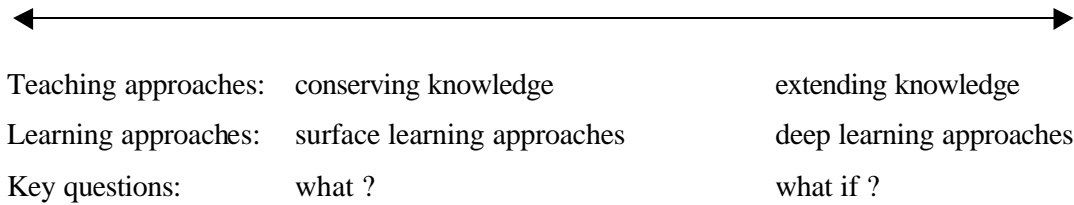


### 2.3.4 Teaching and learning approaches

There are significant *cultural differences* in the approaches to teaching and learning strategies in Australian and overseas contexts. Ballard and Clanchy (1991, 1997) have summarised these key differences suggesting that in western culture, tertiary education is oriented towards *extending* knowledge. As a consequence teaching approaches adopted are designed to develop the analytical and speculative ability of students. By comparison, in more 'traditional' cultures, for example, Chinese culture, the education systems are mainly oriented towards *conserving* knowledge, and the teaching approach emphasises the reproductive ability of students. It would, therefore, seem that students who, prior to entering a university in Australia, have only been provided with specific materials by their teachers would be disoriented and disadvantaged when they realize that they have to study independently. In addition, they will need to read more widely than their prescribed texts to meet the requirements of their studies, and they would be unfamiliar with their lecturers posing a question and leaving it unanswered. In many students' home countries, the words of teachers are highly credited and the students' expectations are that teachers will always supply answers for students, which the students are expected to memorise and reproduce (Ballard & Clanchy 1991).

Because the majority of international students enter Australian higher education with overseas secondary schooling and have no exposure to analytical or speculative styles in education, academic adjustment to this situation is clearly a difficult one. It should be noted that sometimes students from Western high schools also seem to have had little exposure to analytical or speculative education, and for them too, the transition to higher education is difficult.

Figure 2.2 illustrates the significant differences between learning and teaching approaches in Western cultures and more traditional cultures as presented by Ballard and Clanchy (1997).



**Figure 2.2 Opposing orientations to knowledge generation**

Source: Adapted from Ballard and Clanchy, 1997 *Teaching international students*, International Development Program, Australia, Canberra, p.12.

These *cultural differences* in attitudes towards knowledge, teaching, learning and values in education which international students bring with them, generate particular orientations to learning and to university practices (Aspland 1999). In order that Australian universities cater adequately for these students' needs and welfare, it is very important that university staff and administrators understand these particular academic orientations. With such understanding institutions are better able to facilitate students' learning.

The findings of research described above lead, on the one hand, to the understanding of the deeper issue of culture embedded in teaching and learning. On the other hand, as a result of simplistic interpretations made of such research, Chinese learners are widely believed to exclusively use reproductive approaches in their studies. A note of caution regarding the temptation to make such simplistic cross-cultural generalisations is, however, sounded by Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse (1993). Whereas they agree that teaching philosophy and practice in Chinese culture is directed towards memorisation (Johnson & Wren 1990), Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse suggest that it is too facile to link Chinese education with surface learning and poor understanding, as has been claimed to be the case with the Western learner (Marton & Saljo 1976, 1984). Rather, they suggest the traditional Asian education practices of memorisation and repetition can have *different intentions* which, in the context of the Asian education system, can deepen and develop understanding.

Biggs (1996) also studied the learning approaches of students from Confucian heritage cultures. In order to understand the strategies used by Chinese learners and to explain their remarkably successful learning outcomes in the Western education system, Biggs

investigated the apparent paradox that Chinese learners, who were perceived to use surface learning approaches, are high achievers, not only in Australian universities, but also in the United States and the United Kingdom. Biggs' study found that these learners tend to have high motivation and make greater effort to succeed, in addition to other positive attributes such as setting goals, which may be masked by their quiet demeanor in class.

The importance of this observation for the current study is that it highlights the difficulty of making legitimate cross-cultural generalisations, particularly in cases where stereotyping is common. It is clearly necessary to exercise caution when making assumptions about the learning styles, practices and outcomes of students from another culture. These differences in learning styles, without the awareness of their implications either by students or teachers, can lead to misinterpretations on both sides. Students will feel a sense of loss in direction in their course of study, and staff often feel frustrated by the unsatisfactory performance with regard to independent learning behaviour of students (Ballard & Clanchy 1991). These problems are to some extent caused by misunderstanding between students and lecturers, in terms of the mismatch of expectations in the functions of lectures, tutorials and the role of lecturers. It should be noted, of course, that some of the outcomes of the Asian learners are skewed negatively because of the difficulties with accurate communication.

The recent developments in research and practice in international education such as these have helped to broaden the understanding of international students, especially those Chinese learners from Confucian heritage cultures. They have also helped practitioners in their day-to-day interactions with international students in teaching and administration roles. The significance of the current study is that it attempts to add a new dimension to the depth and breadth of the interpretation and explanations of the experiences of the cohort of these students from VU.

Australian universities have made significant policy shifts in addressing and facilitating cultural diversity. Many universities have established a cultural diversity policy to facilitate the expansion of onshore and offshore international education, and to assist

integration of the multi-cultural student population. Efforts have also been made to upgrade skills of staff, teaching and administrative alike, in cross-cultural interactions. The University of Melbourne ([www.unimelb.edu.au](http://www.unimelb.edu.au)); Curtin University, Western Australia; and the RMIT University ([www.rmit.edu.au](http://www.rmit.edu.au)) have developed cultural diversity policies to accommodate *human diversity* and *cultural diversity* in education; and to accommodate the diversity in educating international students.

The literature reviewed so far has been mainly concerned with research on international students in Australia. Now the research done globally, particularly in the United States, Canada and Britain will be reviewed, to determine if any significant issues have been overlooked.

## **2.4 Global research on international students**

Research done globally has shown that the types of challenges facing international students are very similar in nature. For example, a study done in the UK (Wier 1982) found that language is only one of the difficulties experienced by international students. Other factors include academic difficulties, and adjusting to English society.

Research in the United States and Canada seem to confirm the common areas of challenges to international students. Stoyhoff (1996) carried out studies at US campuses designed to elucidate how international students learn and what contributes to their academic success. The study particularly sought to explore whether self-regulated learning strategies can enhance student achievement. In a later study, Stoyhoff (1997) identified factors associated with international students' academic achievement. Here, it was found that high achievers are distinguished by their more frequent use of social assistance as a learning strategy. They regularly used peers and teachers to help them learn. Other findings suggested that more academically successful students: better managed their study time; were better able to prepare for and take tests; were better at identifying the main ideas in spoken and written discourse; made better use of social

support systems; and spent more time studying than less academically successful students.

Tompson and Tompson (1996) devised a study of international students attending American business schools, giving special attention to the operations of managing diversity in the classroom. Faculty members reported that international students did not participate fully in class discussions, and would rarely debate issues in class, disagree or challenge the status quo. They did not ask for clarification of issues of assignments that were unclear, preferring to study or work in groups comprising only other international students, and sat only with other international students in class. From the students' perspective, Tompson and Tompson found that the most critical and difficult aspect of adjustment was developing a social network. Students reported that loneliness and the fear of not 'fitting in' kept them preoccupied until an acceptable level of stability in the social domain was achieved. The second most critical adjustment issue was language. Language difficulties contribute to lack of participation in class, and choice of seating in class with another international student. Finally, the third most difficult factor was that of norms, rules and regulations. This ranged from the expected behaviours in classes or norms, to not knowing how much studying is expected, not knowing how to address different categories of people, and getting used to driving on the wrong side of the road. An interesting comment was also made by Tompson and Tompson on the issue of 'working ethics', which referred to the practice of students working together. It is possible that this was an issue for international students because of reasons that sprang from the culturally specific understandings related to Hofstede's (1984, 1991) identification of individualism and collectivism. Tompson and Tompson finally noted that students strongly prefer instructors who clearly articulated their expectations for specific assignments rather than being left to figure out what was required.

In a more recent study at the Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), Maxwell et al. (2000) addressed similar issues to Tompson and Tompson (1996), but which were related to under-graduate hospitality management education at GCU. Maxwell et al. believed that for optimum learning to occur, adjustments were required by both the

South East Asian students and GCU academic staff. The report focused on learning adjustment in terms of students' experiences, expectations and inclinations and the corresponding academic staff interpretations and facilitations of effective learning. It was noted that the results of a questionnaire survey indicated that there is a marked difference between the lecturers' and students' pre-understandings, perspectives and expectations, which the authors concluded would be likely to influence negatively the students' academic performance. An example given of this difference in perspective was the absence of responses by South Eastern Asian students in class, which was usually interpreted by academic staff as a lack of engagement in the learning process.

In this Scottish study, students openly admitted that there were wide differences between their previous academic experience and expressed their initial 'shock' at the teaching styles at GCU. One student described his first two weeks in class as: 'a blur... I was initially lost', and most agreed that it took them about a month to feel comfortable in class. In addition, it was only through time that the students became used to individual lecturers' speech (in speed and accents) and style. The difficulties experienced by the students in adapting to teaching at GCU included (in no order of rank):

- addressing and approaching lecturers;
- being more independent in their learning; for example in sourcing materials, selecting topics and expressing an opinion;
- working in groups, role play and student-led seminars;
- understanding what is expected in the wide range of types of assessments;
- peer assessment;
- organising their own study time;
- feeling that some lecturers treat them differently from the local students.

It is only with an understanding of the South East Asian students' wider cultural and educational frameworks that a ready appreciation of how bewildering the initial learning experiences at GCU must have appeared to these students. According to this study at

GCU, students are immediately aware of the marked contrast in cultural and pedagogical referents, and their unfamiliarity with the learning approaches, manifested in alien attitudes, behaviours and practices. This served to increase their anxiety and simultaneously interfere with their ability to learn effectively.

A further dimension of this study carried out by Maxwell et al. (2000) investigated those successful strategies that were used by international students. It appeared that the more successful international students spent more time in study than their less successful counterparts. They also used social support networks, friends, staff support, and were able to acknowledge and value social diversity. On the other side of the lectern, successful teaching and adjustment strategies by staff were those that slowly and patiently eased international students into the academic culture. An example given by Maxwell et al. related to lecturers posing questions on social customs. This strategy was successful in generating a good response from international students, enabling the lecturer to then move on to other questions. An insightful comment made by the Maxwell paper was that whilst international students are different from local students, they also share the attribute of being individuals with individual needs. As Maxwell et al. (2000) put it:

A more positive position would be to consider overseas students as possibly having academic needs different from home-based students, as distinct from special needs, but also, like home-based students, individual needs too (p.4).

Although these studies reported above were carried out at geographically and culturally different locations, the nature of the challenges facing international students appear to be very similar. Ballard (1987) summarised this complex situation by writing: 'the problems of overseas students *are more than merely geographical or linguistic in origin*' (p.113). Their course of study in Australia, 'is seldom the logical and intellectual continuation of their previous training' (p.112). Asian international students need to make necessary cultural adjustment to Australian university study (Ballard 1987). In making academic adjustment, Asian international students experience challenges in areas of time management, effective reading, assignment writing, exam techniques, computer skills and

actively seeking advice about services on campus (Barker 1990a; Ballard & Clanchy 1991). The available literature (Burke 1986; Samuelowicz 1987; Ballard & Clanchy 1991; Burns 1991) also suggests that finances, accommodation, living independently, homesickness and lack of support networks are among the difficulties experienced by Asian international students. However, these issues are directly associated with financial, social and personal adjustment experiences rather than academic adjustment experiences. Therefore, they will not be the focus of this study.

In summary, the literature clearly indicates that cultural factors as well as language issues influence the academic adjustment of Asian international students to Australian and overseas universities. However, most of the previous Australian studies in the area (Bradley & Bradley 1984; Burke, 1986; Samuelowicz 1987; Tay & Smith 1990; Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Burns 1991) have investigated international students or Asian international students in general, and there have been a few instances of studies on a specific cultural group, for example, students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultures. From the perspective of the current study, the question still remains of 'How do international students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background adjust to study at VU?' Also, there still is the need to understand their experiences of adjusting to study at VU. The current understanding by the VU university community is often general, fragmented, and sometimes confusing. This study will attempt to redress this gap in that it will build on previous studies and aim to explore the academic adjustment experiences of international Business students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background at VU. In addition, the understanding of aspects of study adjustment by international students is largely based on the studies of international students in other universities. This study will contribute to the literature by having a focus on international Business students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background at VU, and seek an understanding of their academic adjustment experience. In particular, it will highlight *cultural influences* on their adjustment experiences. This study is not intended to seek definite solutions to these questions, but rather it is an attempt to clarify the questions and to take the first steps in an effort to suggest modifications to educational practice for the benefit of both the international students and the institution. Knowledge and understanding of the cultural



factors will assist in educating international students. It helps to have empathy to their experiences. It is rewarding to institutions to use positive models in educating international students.

In an attempt to meet these aims, the literature review so far has taken a detailed look at the educational milieu in which the students are immersed. In the next section, some models used for educational investigations are reviewed, and the one chosen to help clarify the investigation is discussed in some detail.

## **2.5 Models for educational investigations**

Increasing student diversity, mass education and the rapid introduction of educational technology have marked recent changes in Australian universities. These gross changes, which have been investigated in some detail by McInnis and James in their work on first year transition (1995, 2000), have significant implications for the adjustment experiences of international students. Because of the added pressures on academic staff to accommodate the large increase in student numbers, teaching strategies have been forced to more impersonal modes of lecture delivery, and opportunities for interaction with students by teaching staff have been reduced. At the same time, the offering of extra places to international students on a fee paying basis has required staff to consider the special needs of these students in terms of communication and introduction to the mores of Australian higher education.

To systematise the work in this area, a suitable model has been sought for analysing educational investigations. Many recent models on student learning, such as Entwistle and Ramsden's (1983) *Approaches to Study Inventory* (ASI), Biggs' (1987) *Study Process Questionnaire* (SPQ), and Biggs' (1996, 2000) 3P Model of *Presage, Process and Product* focus upon the *learning styles and approaches* which characterise different students. However, because this current investigation is concerned with the adjustment of international students to an unfamiliar culture, the *environment, or milieu*, in which the learning is taking place becomes centrally important. Consequently, it has been

fixed upon the relatively early model of Schwab (1973), who refers to the ‘four commonplaces’ of education as being central to the educational experience. Schwab summarised these four commonplaces or ‘irreducible elements’ of education as the *student*, the *teacher*, *curriculum* and *milieu*. Such a model is considered most appropriate for the current study because of the environmentally determined nature of the investigation in terms of the focus research questions being asked.

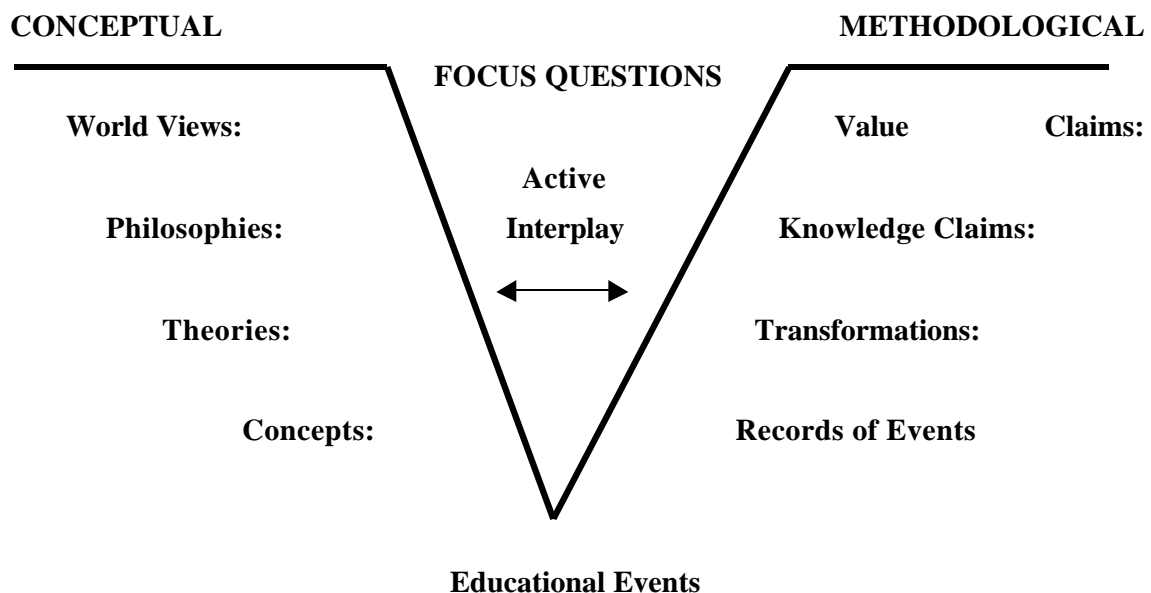
The work by Schwab (1973), which is used as a theoretical framework for the investigation, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, which outlines the methodology for the research study, and details the relationship between the research questions and the collection of data.

## Chapter 3

## Research Methodology

The choice of a research methodology for any study is determined by the nature of the research problem under investigation. To guide the study design for this thesis, the approach of Novak and Gowin (1984) was used. These authors explicitly illustrate, in terms of their Vee heuristic, the interactive elements involved in focusing on the educational event to be studied, the conceptual theoretical framework guiding the investigation, and the methodology used to carry out the research (Figure 3.1).

The research is focused on the educational event. The choice of the most appropriate research methodology is based on the nature of the investigation and focus of the research question. On one hand, the choice is determined by the underpinning world views and the guiding theoretical framework of the investigation. On the other hand, the world views and theories should be in harmony with the methodology chosen for the study. This involves an ‘active interplay’ between the educational event, the methodology and the theoretical framework.



**Figure 3. 1. The Vee Heuristic**

Source: Adapted from Novak and Gowin, 1984, *Learning How to Learn*, Cambridge University, London, p.150.

In this study, the educational event under investigation was the academic adjustment experiences of international Business students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background at VU, and the research focus was on these students' perspectives. It was proposed that this dynamic educational phenomenon could be understood by systematic inquiry into the 'reality constructed by those directly involved' (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander 1995). The nature of experience is a very personal attribute which only has 'reality' with the person involved. Hence the knowledge claims made at the conclusion of the study will relate only to the feelings and experiences which have emerged from the study. This suggested that a qualitative methodology is the most appropriate for data collection, since it will allow these personal and individual attitudes and experiences of students to emerge.

To help with the focus of the study for both the researcher and the reader, Novak and Gowin's (1984) Vee Heuristic is detailed in terms of the key aspects of the current study. Figure 3.2 illustrates the interplay of the conceptual framework and the methodology chosen to conduct this educational investigation.

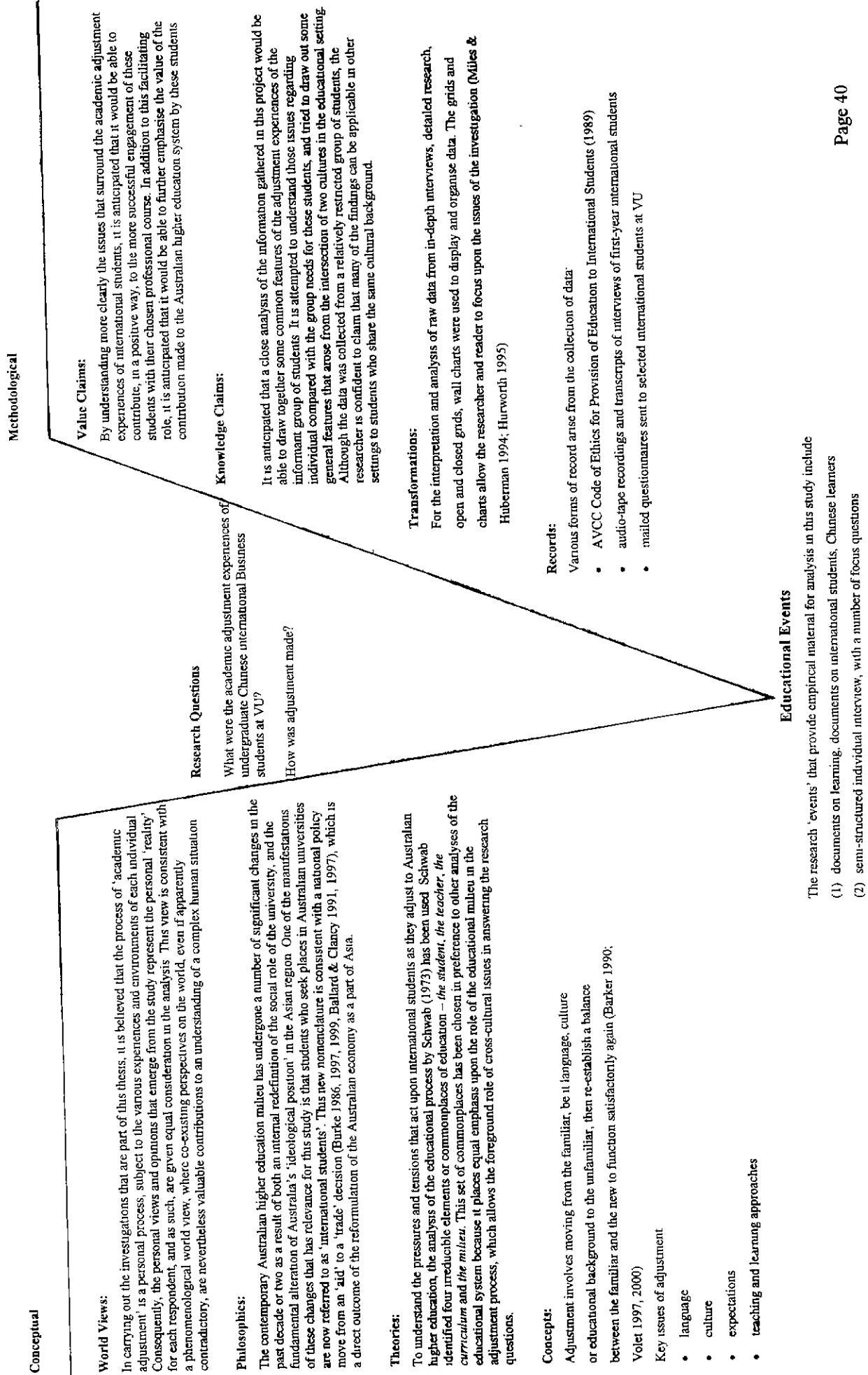
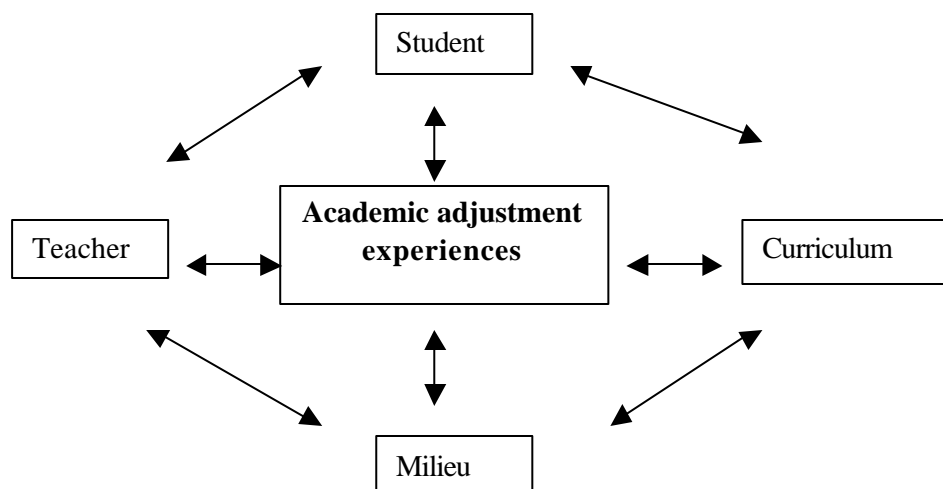


Figure 3.2 Analysis of the research study using Novak and Gowin's Vee Heuristic

It is believed that the educational experiences of international students are shaped by contributions arising from the four ‘commonplaces of education’: the *student*, the *teacher*, the *curriculum* and the *milieu* (Schwab 1973). Figure 3.3 illustrates the dynamics of these students’ educational experiences. Because this approach implies that all the commonplaces are equally vital in shaping educational practice and hence contribute to the academic adjustment experiences of these international students, it has been chosen to be the theoretical framework guiding the investigation. As a consequence, students were encouraged to make comments related to the above four commonplaces of education whilst giving an account of their personal experiences, thus allowing the possibility of cross-cultural issues, which are part of the milieu, to emerge as a natural outcome of the choice of framework.



**Figure 3.3 Dynamics of academic adjustment experiences**

Source: Developed from Schwab 1973, ‘The Practical 3: Translation into Curriculum’ *School Review* Vol. 81.4.

Two considerations influenced the choice of methodology. First as indicated earlier, because this was a study ‘involved with the understanding of human behaviour from the respondents’ perspective’ (Strauss & Corbin 1990) a qualitative methodology was considered to be the most appropriate. Second, although there is a large amount of literature on international students, it is predominately based on quantitative research using surveys or questionnaires for data collection (Rao 1976; Burke 1986; Burns 1991). As a consequence, little research can be found that has been done on the deeper perspectives that international students might have of their experiences, and it is believed that

qualitative methods provide very useful approaches for conducting research into these relatively complex human issues.

### **3.1 Grounded theory**

Grounded theory is an inductive qualitative technique which uses successive interviews to allow the underlying ideas of a group to emerge. Open questions based upon ‘what’, or ‘how’ are posed to allow informants to provide their own accounts of their experiences. Individual interviews with the members of the group are continued until the data is ‘exhausted’ or ‘saturated’, meaning that no new insights or ideas emerge from the interviews. The theory, (or generalization, or insight) into the culture of the group is then inductively drawn from the data, and the result is said to be ‘grounded’ in the data (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Clenitz & Swanston 1986; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Grounded theory has been chosen here since it is an approved and very useful methodology to inform this investigative type of research. Sherman and Webb (1988) claim that:

Grounded theory offers a systematic method by which to study the richness and diversity of human experiences and to generate relevant, plausible theory which can be used to understand the contextual reality of social behaviour (p.127).

The research model of establishing initial contacts with informants by letter and subsequently collecting data through individual interviews followed that used by Teschendorff (1993). Teschendorff successfully used this model to study the adjustment experiences of Philippine nurses to Australian nursing practice. A minor modification was made to Teschendorff’s approach in that a different approach to the number of rounds of interviews was taken. In the present study, we deliberately restructured the study to only one round of interviews in accordance with a suggestion by Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1995). In the case of single round of interviews, these authors point out

that data collected through a single in-depth interview may be legitimately regarded a personal reflection of the reality perceived by the informants *at the time of the interview*.

## **3.2 Data Collection**

The procedures of systematic data collection were guided by the general principles of grounded theory described earlier. In this study a range of sources of data collection was judged to be appropriate, including the investigator's personal observations, public documents and published literature (Strauss & Corbin 1990). However, the majority of the primary data, which reflected the personal understandings and opinions of the informants, was collected using semi-structured, individual in-depth interviews.

### **3.2.1 Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews**

Following the suggested procedures and processes of grounded theory, semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were used to gather information about the research question in the informants' own words. Using this approach, an appreciation of each informant's perspectives on the focus questions was gained. Although, in Minichiello et al.'s (1995) terms, these perspectives relate to the informants' individual 'construction of reality', from the data this research was able to observe the emergence of common themes and general perspectives that these individual constructions began to reinforce. This is further illustrated by Marton and Booth's (1997) contention that with interviews, one does not get uniform understandings nor completely different understandings from informants, but rather *groups* of answers, which form categories of understandings which give these common themes.

To facilitate a deeper investigation of the general research question, 'How did these international students make the academic adjustment in their first year of study at VU?' six focus questions were formulated. These questions were designed to assist in developing a systematic approach to the semi-structured in-depth interviews. These six questions are:

- (1) What were each student's previous educational experiences?



- (2) What did they perceive was the difference between their previous educational experience and their first year experience at VU?
- (3) How did each student go about making changes in their academic approach to meet the demands of the new environment?
- (4) What were the major stages they went through during this period of adjustment?
- (5) What were the students' explanations of the need for these changes?
- (6) What advice would each student give to new international students?

Three levels of inquiry were initiated in the six focus questions in exploring the research question of the *academic adjustment experiences* of the targeted students. Questions (1) to (3) addressed the students' *adjustment* experiences, establishing their starting point in terms of their initial understandings of the educational process, discussing their perceptions of the essential and important differences between their previous educational experiences and those at VU and investigating the strategies which each student used to overcome these differences.

Question (1) set out to establish where students were. The background information gave information as to the highest level of education each student previously had, what their previous experiences had been, thus giving some background for comparison with the education at VU. Focus question (2) contributed to the research question by establishing the need for where academic adjustment arose. It attempted to pinpoint the differences in educational convention and practice by asking if their education at VU was different from their previous educational experiences, and what were the differences that the informants perceived? As the focus of the study was from students' perspectives, it was very important to establish, in some way, this understanding of their previous experiences.

Hence the first two questions were posed to set the scene for the investigation, and looked to highlight if there were any significant differences in the background of the informants. Question (3) explored the specific adjustment students made during their study at VU, asking informants to give account of the actions taken to make the adjustment which they felt was necessary. This was the core of the research question of *academic adjustment*.

Questions (4) and (5) were more analytical questions, which were aimed to address the stages and causes of the *adjustment*. These questions were designed to assist informants to analyse their own experiences to see whether they perceived any major *stages* in their adjustment, and, if so, what did they perceive as the cause or reason for the adjustment. It is from these possibly diverse personal reflections that we hope to identify common terms and opinions. We believed it was important to listen carefully to the voices of the informants on the matter, and because of the complex nature of some of the issues, we were prepared to pursue the investigation in the informants' own terms.

As with any research study, the outcome is of limited use if one is content to remain in the analysis stage. The real usefulness of any research is demonstrated in the way that it addresses the problem, studies the causes and give recommendations as to the innovation in future practice. Question (6) explored the direction for change in future practice, focusing on students' perspectives and experiences. This question was set to address the strategies for change in practices both relating to learning and teaching of international students. Again the perspectives from those informants were carefully sought.

An interview schedule was used to structure the interviews (Appendix B). As indicated earlier, the students were encouraged to make comments related to the four commonplaces of education (Schwab 1973) giving their experiences in terms of the students, the lecturers, the curriculum and the milieu. During the conduct of the interviews, the transcription, and the initial analysis of data were concurrently carried out to develop and ensure a systematic data collection (Minichiello et al. 1995). The analysis is detailed in Chapter 4.

### **3.2.2 Questionnaire**

To complement the interviews, at the first stage of data collection, a questionnaire was sent out to collect demographic data and inform students about the study. The questionnaire also served the purpose of saving time at interviews as the background information of informants was already obtained (Teschendorff 1993), and the researcher could use the interview time to explore issues around the focus questions. Nine questions were asked. This approach was informed by McInnis and James' (1995) study of university first

year experience, where students' background information was obtained to understand their learning experience in Australian universities. The requested information included age, gender, source of income, employment, type of accommodation, and so on. Although this study was designed in 1993-94, very similar issues were considered to be important to this investigation, and an attempt has been made to elicit comparable relevant background information from the informants. The issues under consideration were gender, age, usual country of residence, language spoken other than English, previous education, current course of study, length of study since arriving in Australia, and year level of study at VU.

#### (1) Gender

This question was asked because the literature suggests that female and male international students in business courses have differences in their motivation and strategies in learning (Beasley & Pearson 1999). For example, these authors found that female international students, many of whom were from Singapore, and neighbouring South East Asian nations, were more prepared than male students to seek help. The research considered that in the present study, there may be themes arising regarding significant differences in terms of the academic and cultural adjustment experiences by students of different gender, although the literature warns that it is a complex issue to address.

#### (2) Age group

This question gives an indication of the possible previous educational experiences of the informants - be it secondary school, work experience or tertiary study. It may also give useful information as to the life experience that individual informant had, which may relate to their pursuit of education at VU. It has been included to complement the first question in the interview.

#### (3) Usual country of residence

International students enrolled in undergraduate courses in VU's Faculty of Business from ethnic Chinese background, have been chosen as the target group for informants as

they tend to form the largest group among international students enrolled in Business courses (DEET 1993b). However, there are sub-cultures among students from individual countries, even though they are from ethnic Chinese cultural backgrounds. It is therefore important that the usual country of residence is identified to allow for sub-cultural variations. This information will also give indications of the type of educational background which students are coming from.

#### (4) Language spoken other than English

Language is a central part of culture, hence indication of the types of language spoken other than English will illuminate the cultural background of the informants.

#### (5) Number of years in Australia since first arrival

The time of residence in Australia prior to entry into VU may play a part in easing the challenges encountered by students in their academic and cultural adjustments. As reflected in the literature, the passage of time plays an important part in the cultural adjustment or acculturation of people experiencing a different culture. As discussed in Chapter 2, Kim (1988) reviewed the theories on the stages of adjustment, some of which were described as 'curves', this indicated the patterns of change over *time* in adjusting to an unfamiliar culture. He further illustrated the cultural adjustment or adaptation in stress-adaptation-growth dynamics as 'growth over time' curves, suggesting:

Stress, adaptation, and growth, together, define the internal dynamics of strangers' cross-cultural experiences in a 'draw-back-to-leap' pattern similar to the movement of a wheel. (p.56)

This stress-adaptation-growth cycle involves communication activities that shift between out-looking, information-seeking behaviour and tension-reducing, defensive retreat, and the resultant capacity to see a situation 'with new eyes'. This alternative theory of cultural adaptation viewed culture shock differently from previous attempts (Lysgaard 1955; Gullahorn & Gullahorn 1963). Instead of viewing culture shock as negative, problematic, and undesirable, it shows the unity of stress and change in the

adaptation process. Such a view is in harmony with the ‘cultural learning’ position by Furnham and Bochner (1986).

#### (6) Previous education

The information on whether the students’ study experience was completed in their home country or whether they had some exposure to Australia education, for example TAFE, Year 12 or commercial college, may have implications on the extent of ease in their adjustment experiences.

#### (7) Current course

This question is a lead-in to Question 8, so informants would identify their course of study, and be prepared for recalling their motivation and aspiration for their chosen course.

#### (8) Main reason for choosing the current course

This question may bring light to students’ aspiration for the chosen course because as McInnis and James (1995) reported, aspiration is one of the important factors affecting the learning outcomes of students.

#### (9) Year of study

The length of time that a student has spent in a new cultural milieu has an implication on the degree of adjustment as Kim (1988) suggested in the model of adaptation and growth over time. This question was asked to estimate the length of time that informants took in adjusting to study at VU.

### **3.2.3 Pilot study**

Four informants were selected for the pilot study. Although they technically did not qualify for the defined population of informants for the study, it was felt that useful information would be obtained from them without reducing the already small pool of actual informants. Two of these pilot informants were international students from Chinese cultural background who had become Australian residents because of change of visa status. One of

the pilot informants was an international African student who was clearly confronting similar adjustment issues. The final pilot informant was a local student from a Vietnamese cultural background who was attending university for the first time and who had also experienced similar transition difficulties to university study as the target group.

Refinement of the focus questions and familiarity of the researcher with the techniques of rapport-building, interviewing and recording data (Anderson 1990) were well developed through the pilot study. In addition, further insight into the issues confronting international students during their academic adjustment were gained, allowing analysis of the pilot responses to further develop the shape of the research.

### **3.3 Selection of informants**

International students from an ethnic Chinese background enrolled in undergraduate courses in the Faculty of Business in 1995 at VU, were chosen as the target group for this study as indicated earlier, because they tend to form the largest cohort among international students enrolled in Business courses. However, it should be noted that whilst most of the East Asian societies such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore share an obvious Confucian tradition (On 1996), there are recognisable sub-cultures among students from individual countries. The task of addressing and generalising learners from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background introduces another level of complexity to the study. Differences in the sub-cultures arise from differences in countries of origin, and their economic, political and historical diversities. While this will not be explored in the current work, it could be the source of a further detailed study.

A letter of introduction with a questionnaire was sent to the entire pool of 50 target students by the Student Administration (Appendix D), and responses were encouraged by the inclusion of a stamped addressed envelope (Foddy 1993). The letter informed the students about the study and invited them to participate; and the questionnaire allowed the collection of demographic data. Information from the questionnaire enabled a balanced sample to be constructed, and made available all the pertinent background

information on the informants which in turn allowed the researcher to use the full interview time to explore the focus questions (Teschendorff 1993). Of the twenty-two replies, eleven of the students indicated that they would be willing to be involved in the study.

Ten interviews took place, taking between sixty and ninety minutes each to complete. They were conducted in an office on the students' home campus between August 8 to September 11, 1995. Data were recorded by field notes and audio tapes where the participant agreed. Whist interviewing was conducted predominantly in English, in some circumstances, Mandarin was used. This occurred when the personal and complex nature of the issues being discussed caused the informants to feel more comfortable expressing themselves in Mandarin.

Following the general process of qualitative research suggested by Minichiello et al. (1995), in this study initial data analysis was completed immediately after each interview. This allowed the researcher to refine the focus questions in the interview schedule, then to conduct subsequent interviews with refreshed knowledge and insight into the issues emerging from preceding interviews. Because of the large volume of transcripts involved, the data collected from the interviews were displayed using the contextual matrix developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This assisted the analysis of the data and conceptualization of the findings in terms of emerging themes and general perspectives.

The demographic information obtained from the initial questionnaire proved to be very useful in establishing rapport during the conduct of the interviews since the interviewer had already gained some knowledge about the informants (Teschendorff 1993). A brief description of each informant is given (pp.53-55). The profile of the informants is also summarised in Table 3.1.

Prior to the interviews, the informants were contacted personally and briefed on the nature of the questions in order that they could gather their thoughts on the areas of exploration.

**Table 3. 1. Summary of the Informants' Profile**

<b>Informants</b>	<b>Audrey</b>	<b>Burnie</b>	<b>Colin</b>	<b>Dinah</b>	<b>Edward</b>	<b>Frank</b>	<b>Gordon</b>	<b>Hattie</b>	<b>Irene</b>	<b>Jassie</b>
<b>Age</b>	30-35	21-25	21-25	25-30	25-30	25-30	30-35	25-30	25-30	21-25
<b>Gender</b>	F	M	M	F	M	M	M	F	F	F
<b>Usual country of residence</b>	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	Malaysia	Hong Kong	Taiwan	China	Taiwan	Singapore	Malaysia
<b>Years in Australia</b>	Three	Three	Three	Three	Four	Four	Three	Three	One and a half	Four
<b>Language spoken other than English</b>	Cantonese	Cantonese Mandarin	Cantonese Mandarin	Cantonese Mandarin Malay Indonesian	Cantonese	Mandarin	Mandarin	Cantonese Mandarin	Cantonese Mandarin	Cantonese Mandarin Malay
<b>Course code *</b>	BBAT	BBAC	BBAB	BBAC	BBAN	BBAC	BBAA	BBAT	BBAB	BBAN
<b>Previous education completed</b>	High school in home country; TAFE in Australia	High school in home country	Private college in Australia	High school in home country; TAFE in Australia	High school in home country; year 12 in Australia; TAFE in Australia	High school in home country; college in home country	University in home country; TAFE in Australia	College in home country	High school in home country	High school in home country; year 12 in Australia
<b>Year of course *</b>	Year 1,2 and Year 4 study b/c exemption	Year 2	Year 2	Year 4	Year 2	Year 4	Year 3	Year 2	Year 2	Year 2

\* See glossary for details



This proved to be useful for two reasons: first, it gave a sharp focus to the interviews; second, informants had some knowledge of what to expect, and were mentally prepared.

To help to focus the interview conversation, a standing paperboard card with each focus question was placed before the informant and changed as the conversation proceeded during the interviews. As indicated earlier, the interviews were mainly conducted using English, but where the need arose, more difficult concepts and perspective were pursued in Mandarin, which is the majority of this cohort of students' one common language. Such a bilingual protocol has a precedent in the work of Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse (1993), where Chinese learners were interviewed about their learning styles. As a proficient speaker of both Mandarin and English, the researcher conducted the entire set of interviews. When informants responded in Mandarin in the interviews, the translated text was shown in *italics* and was noted with (translation) in the transcript document (Appendix C).

### **3.4 Ethical consideration and issues**

Ethical considerations were carefully observed during the entire process of research. In the candidature phase of the research, the approval of VU's Human Research Ethics Committee was obtained\*. As indicated above, this procedure involved the co-operation of Student Administration when initially contacting the informants in order to safeguard the privacy of the pool of potential informants. During the data collection phase, each informant was required to complete a consent form before the interview (Appendix A) and they were also informed verbally that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they so wished.

It is noted that when contacting the entire pool of potential informants, the researcher did not personally know all of the students. However, of the 22 respondents, all of the 11 informants who indicated willingness to participate in the study were known to the researcher. As the researcher did not have any role of teaching or assessing them during the time when the investigation was undertaken, especially during the interview stage,

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\* The VUT Human Research Ethics Committee number for this study is HRETH 79-94.

any distortion that may have occurred was minimised. It was noted that rapport was quickly established during the interviews, probably because the informants and interviewer were known to each other prior to the interviews.

Pseudonyms were used in transcriptions of the interviews to protect the identity of the informants. The data storage follows the VU Human Research Ethics Committee guidelines. Accordingly the audio tapes are locked in a filing cabinet, and will be kept for five years. In the final reporting of the findings, no names of the informants are given. Only the characteristics of the groups are identified for analysis purposes.

### **3.5 Profile of the informants**

Audrey is from Hong Kong, in the 30 to 35 year old age group. She speaks fluent Cantonese in addition to fluent English, and has been in Australia for three years. Audrey completed high school in Hong Kong and studied marketing, travel and tourism courses in TAFE colleges in Australia. At the time of the interview, she was studying for a Bachelor of Business in Travel and Tourism Management. She was studying first, second and final year subjects as she was given exemptions for ten units. The interview was conducted from 1:45pm to 2:30 pm on August 8, 1995.

Burnie is from Hong Kong, in the 21 to 25 age group. He speaks Cantonese and Mandarin in addition to fluent English, and has been in Australia for three years. Having completed his high school education in Hong Kong, he was studying for a Bachelor of Business in Catering and Hotel Management and was in his second year of study. The interview with Burnie took place from 2:00 pm to 2:45pm on August 9, 1995.

Colin is from Hong Kong, and aged between 21 to 25 years old. He speaks fluent Cantonese, a little Mandarin and very fluent English. He has been in Australia for three years, completed an Associate Diploma of Business Management course at Holmes College in Australia, and was in his second year of study for a Bachelor of Business in

Banking and Finance. The interview with him was from 2:45 pm to 3:50pm on August 14, 1995.

Dinah is Malaysian, in the 25 to 30 year old age group, and speaks Cantonese, Mandarin, Malay, Indonesian, Hakka, Hokkian, Tiociu and very fluent English. She has been in Australia for three years. Having completed high school in Malaysia, Dinah studied half a year of Year 12 in Australia before studying hospitality in a TAFE college in Australia. She was studying for a Bachelor of Business in Catering and Hotel Management and was in her final year of study. The interview with her was conducted from 5:00pm to 6:00pm on August 28, 1995.

Edward is from Hong Kong, in the 25 to 30 year old age group. He speaks Cantonese in addition to fluent English, and has been in Australia for four years. Edward has completed high school education in Hong Kong, and also studied Year 12 in a TAFE college in Australia. At the time of the interview, he was studying in his second year of the Bachelor of Business in International Trade course. The interview with him was from 3:20pm to 4:00pm on August 31, 1995.

Frank is from Taiwan, in the 25 to 30 year old age group. He speaks Mandarin and fluent English. Frank has been in Australia for four years, and has completed high school and a Diploma course in a college in Taiwan. He was studying for a Bachelor of Business in Computing and is in his final year of study. The interview with him took place from 12:00noon to 1:00pm on September 5, 1995.

Gordon is from China, aged between 30 to 35. He speaks fluent Mandarin and fluent English, and has been in Australia for three years. Gordon has completed a university degree course in China, and studied accounting in a TAFE college before enrolling in the Bachelor of Business in Accounting course at VU. He was in his final year of study. The interview with him was conducted from 12:00noon to 1:00pm on September 6, 1995.

Hattie is from Taiwan, in the 25 to 30 year old age group. She speaks Cantonese, Mandarin and fluent English, and has been in Australia for four years. Having completed a Diploma course in a commercial college in Taiwan, she was studying in the second year of a Bachelor of Business in Travel and Tourism Management course. The interview with Hattie was from 9:20am to 9:45am on September 7, 1995.

Irene is from Singapore, in the 25 to 30 age group. She speaks Cantonese, Mandarin and very fluent English. She has been in Australia for one and a half years. Irene has completed high school in Singapore. She was studying for a Bachelor of Business in Catering and Hotel Management, and was in her second year of study. The interview with her was from 2:00pm to 2:45pm on September 8, 1995.

Jassie is from Malaysia, aged between 21 to 25 years. She speaks Cantonese, Mandarin, Malay and fluent English. Jassie has been in Australia for four years; she completed high school in Malaysia and studied Year 12 in Australia before she enrolled in the Bachelor of Business in International Trade course at VU. She was studying second year subjects of the course. The interview with her was conducted from 2:00pm to 2:45pm on September 11, 1995.

### **3.6 Validity and limitations**

Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this study because the procedures appropriate to this approach enabled a systematic picture of the experiences of Chinese learners to be constructed. The emerging themes and insights, which are 'grounded' in the data, are reliable and valid within the limitations of the methodology. These limitations relate to the usual caution which must be observed in the analysis and interpretation of data which has been collected on the basis of informant opinion. There is always the chance that there are differences between what the informants did or felt, and what they report in interviews. Under these conditions, the quality of data is to a large extent dependent upon the skills of the interviewer, the setting of the interviews, and the opportunities which arise for triangulation. As an example of the latter point, observations by other researchers in the

same area and reliable evidence from secondary sources in the literature were continuously consulted. Care was taken to minimise any distorting effects arising from the position of the interviewer as a member of the staff of the Faculty of Business by planning the interviews at a time when the researcher did not have any role in teaching or assessing the work of the informants.

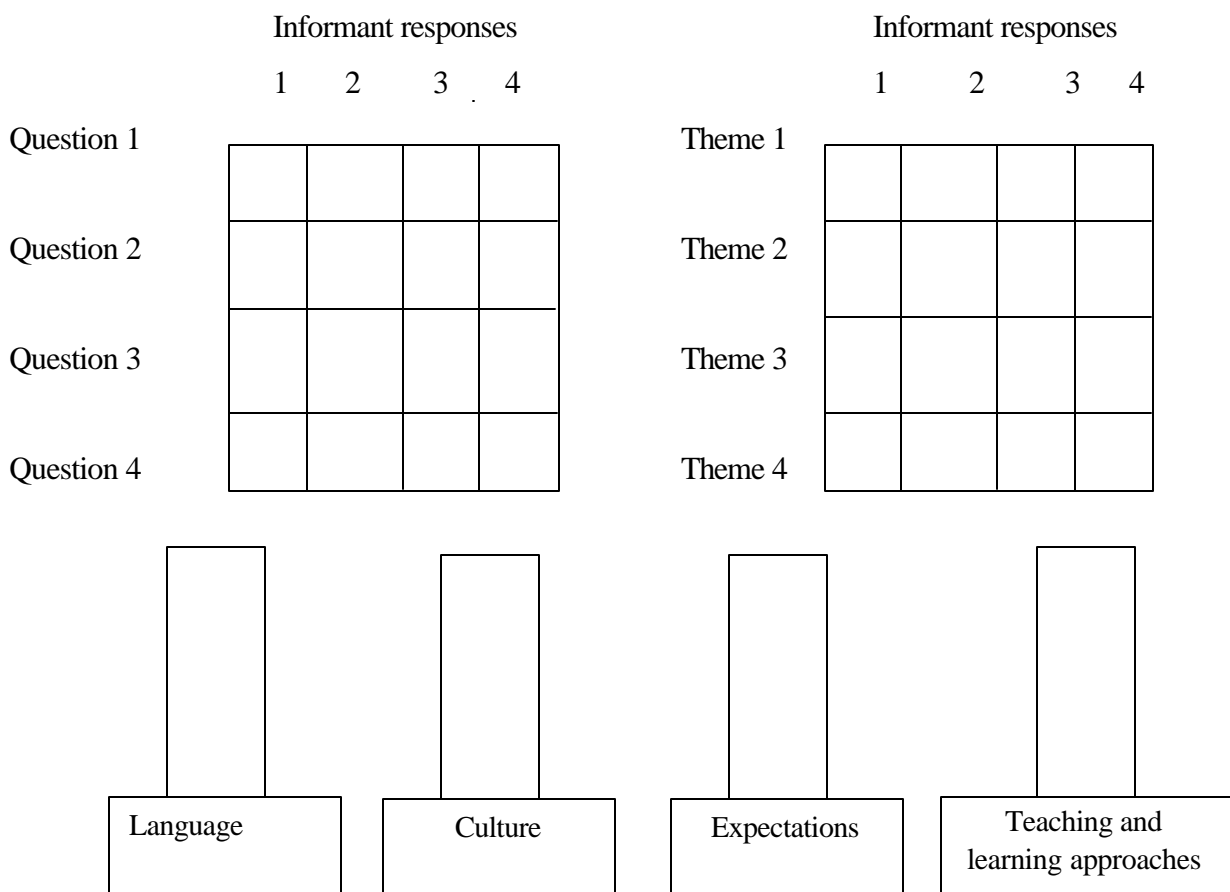
### **3.7 Data analysis**

‘The processes of analysis and interpretation of data involve disciplined study, creative insight and careful attention to the purposes of the study’ (Patton 1987, p.144). Patton explains that analysis and interpretation are conceptually separate processes, analysis being the process of ‘bringing order to and organising data into patterns, categories and basic descriptive units’ (p.144). Interpretation, on the other hand, he suggested: ‘involves attaching meaning and significance to the analysis, explaining descriptive patterns and looking for relationships and linkages among descriptive dimensions’ (p.144).

Patton (1987) also advises that data analysis themes can be drawn from two sources: ‘(1) ... questions that were generated during the conceptual and design phases of the project and (2) analytic insights and interpretations that emerged during data collection’ (p.144). ‘The focus in the analysis of qualitative data comes from the questions generated at the very beginning of the ... process (Patton 1987, p.145). The use of both *fixed* and *open* grids can aid this process considerably as they are constructed to link with the questions, themes and topics included in the semi-structured interview schedule. A ‘fixed grid’ is a matrix constructed to include a cell for each question, topic or theme, explored in the semi-structured interview which are subsequently repeated for each informant. The open grid on the other hand, allows flexibility for new or emerging questions which in this study arose from the interviews. An open grid format acknowledges that a question, theme or topic may only be applicable to one or more informants, with the result that a cell or a number of cells may remain unfilled (Hurworth 1995). The information contained within these grids was then further refined by streaming the data into a number of ‘bins’ classified under the headings identified in the literature review. These are

*language, culture, expectations, teaching and learning approaches*. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated the advantages of this matrix approach to data analysis is that: ‘it requires you to think about your research questions and what portions of your data are needed to answer them; it requires you to make full analysis, ignoring no relevant information; and it focuses and organises your information coherently’ (p.239).

An example of the fixed and open grid system and the bin format used in the analysis of data for this project is outlined in Figure 3.4.



**Figure 3. Fixed and open grids depositing data into bins**

Theoretical sensitivity for issues arising from the research was developed by reviewing the literature, and from reflecting upon years of professional and personal experience. It is even more importantly forged in the analytical process. In the repeated comparisons, studying of

the data, thinking about the data, links between the research questions, categories, and subcategories of the data emerge, and the relationships between categories evolve.

Literature was continuously reviewed throughout the study. It was used to form the theoretical framework, as secondary sources for triangulation, and for the organisation of data in the analytical stages. Chapter 4 will detail the analysis of data.

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the procedures used in transforming and analysing the data collected by interviews will be discussed. Figure 4.1 shows the structure of the Chapter, and details the five areas of particular concern (4.4 - 4.5) to this investigation.

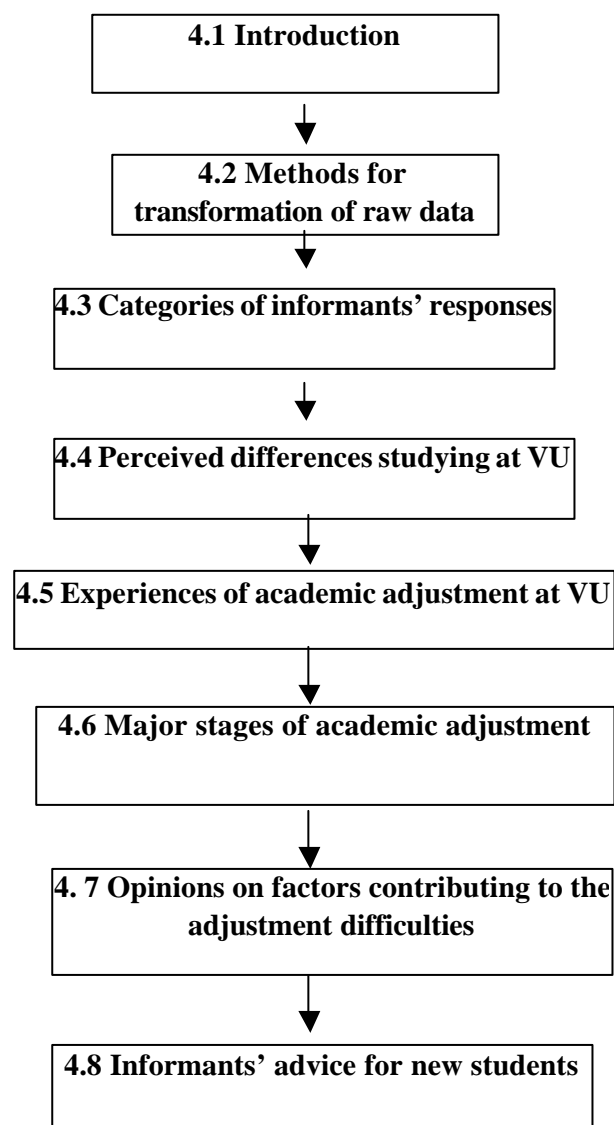


Figure 4.1 Summary of the Structure of Chapter 4



## 4.2 Methods for transformation of raw data

Following the general process of qualitative research suggested by Minichiello et al. (1995), in this study data transformation and initial analysis were completed immediately after each interview. This allowed the researcher to refine the focus questions in the interview schedule, then to conduct subsequent interviews with refreshed knowledge and insight into the issues emerging from preceding interviews. The transcript was typed, in one format, with broad left and right margins, allowing notes to be made during the initial analysis. Each informant's responses were subsequently analysed under the themes of the focus questions previously detailed in Chapter 3.

Because of the large volume of transcripts involved (Appendix C), the extracts of data taken from the interviews were displayed on wall charts using the contextual matrix developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The wall charts allowed data to be categorised and analysed under themes of focus questions identified from the literature review. The responses from each informant were grouped and categorised to allow themes and ideas to emerge. This assisted the analysis of the data and conceptualisation of the findings in terms of these emerging themes and general perspectives.

In the process of critical data analysis, *open* and *fixed* grids (Hurworth 1995) were developed and systematically used in presenting and organising ideas and observations (Figure 3.5). On a small scale, open and fixed grids were used under the categories of the focus questions for each informant, so the key data are available at a glance for systematic observations and searching for ideas.

## 4.3 Categorisation of informants' responses

<b>Question one</b>	<i>Tell me about your previous study before enrolling at VU.</i>
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As indicated in Table 3.1 in Chapter 3 (p.51), the majority of informants had completed secondary education in their home country. However, whilst most informants' previous educational background indicated that their experience at VU would involve the transition from secondary school to tertiary education for the first time, one of the ten informants had completed a Bachelor degree in his home country. In addition, two of the informants graduated from commercial colleges in Taiwan, both of them having studied for five years. This mix of academic background adds to the complexity of analysing the adjustment experiences of this cohort of international students, but it nevertheless probably represents a realistic range of experiences for such a group. However, what the group does have in common is that they all needed to make the adjustment to a new culture, and to an unfamiliar educational environment.

Whilst it is recognised that each informant's experiences of adjusting to the academic requirements of Australian higher education are unique, one useful simplification for the purposes of analysis can be made. If it is assumed that informants from the same country will have generally experienced the same educational system prior to enrolling at VU, an assumption supported by inspection of Table 3.1, there are five broad 'categories' of informants involved in this study. Therefore, to streamline the analysis, students' responses have been consolidated in the categories described below.

In the first category are informants Audrey, Burnie, Colin and Edward, who are all from secondary schools in Hong Kong. These informants perceived the initial educational experience at VU to be very different to that which they had gone through in their previous schooling. For example, they all mentioned that 'study style', and 'teaching methods' in particular were perceived to be particularly different aspects of the VU situation when compared to their previous experience. One informant said: 'The difference is when we were studying in Hong Kong, we were in secondary school, and everything was organised by teachers. The homework, the exam and the readings were all organised by them' (Colin C13). Edward believed that accessing the language used in higher education is particularly difficult, and it is the major reason for the difficulty in adjusting to the new conditions. Other challenges that these informants mentioned were

‘note taking in lectures’ and ‘engaging in tutorial work’. In regard to this latter point, the feeling of isolation of each of the informants was a common experience. Edward admitted that: ‘Sometimes it’s difficult for me to speak, ask the question, answer the question. The language is hard for me’ (Edward C30).

Dinah and Jassie fall into category two, because they are both from secondary schools in Malaysia. With these students, both found the most significant difference in their initial experience was the expectation of greater independence on students at VU and were surprised by the extent of the academic freedom that the students had. Interestingly, Dinah had mixed feelings about education in her home country. On one hand, she stressed that students were expected to do as they were told. On the other hand, she felt that she had benefited from the strict training, saying that: ‘I think it was a very good training that I got at home. They force you to do things. You basically learnt a lot. You have a solid foundation already’ (Dinah C21). Jassie shared the view that there is much greater freedom both in studying and living in Australia. She observed that the difference in Australia was that: ‘Here is much, much more free. We can make our own timetable ourselves. We can arrange things more independently’ (Jassie C50). Jassie also commented on the student - staff and the student - student relationship, saying that: ‘Students have to take initiatives to do their homework’ (C52). With regard to the teaching style, Jassie thought that in Australia it is much freer, pointing out: ‘In Malaysia, it’s stricter. Students had to copy and remember what was written on the blackboard’ (Jassie C52).

Frank and Hattie, who are both from Taiwan, have been placed in category three. Both informants graduated from commercial colleges in Taiwan before entering VU. Frank’s first impression was that: ‘teaching styles are different ... in here, lecturers teach you how to study; in Taiwan, teachers teach you how to behave’ (Frank C32). With regard to tutorials, Frank said: ‘I just listen. That is Chinese behaviour ... Australians talk. Chinese don’t talk, ... we were taught: children don’t talk, just listen’ (Frank C32). Hattie also mentioned the difference in teaching styles indicating that in Australia, lecturers just gave rough ideas, whereas in Taiwan, they teach in more detail, step by

step. Referring to her experience of classroom participation, Hattie noted that: 'In my country, the students don't like to talk in the class. Even if they have questions, they prefer to ask the teacher after the class' (Hattie C41). This view is consistent with other informants' experiences and reflects the views of staff members (Samuelowicz 1987; Maxwell et al. 2000).

Gordon obtained his Bachelor degree in China before taking up study at VU. He has been placed in category four. His previous higher education experience makes his perspective unique in this study, as he was able to compare university study in Australia with university study in his home country. The major difference, he believed, is in the teaching style and learning styles that are expected in the different situations. Students are expected to be more independent learners. Gordon commented: 'In Australia, no people push you to study, but the teachers in China push you. You must do that, if you don't do that, I give you a special mark' (Gordon C36). For example, Gordon has observed that there are significant differences involved in preparation for exams. In Australia, students focus on specific questions using past exam papers, while in China, students must review the whole book. Interestingly, Gordon thinks that tutorial classes are similar. He said: 'I think tutorial class is similar. In China, tutorial work includes two parts, one part is to summarise concepts of lecture, the second part is to work out solutions to the questions. In Australia it is very similar' (Gordon C35).

Irene has completed high school in Singapore, and comprises category five. Irene was 'quite lost' (Irene C45) when she first arrived in Australia, but felt 'quite settled down' (Irene C45) at the time of the interview. She found that it was more relaxed in Australia because there was more academic pressure in high school in Singapore. For example, in her home country the examination assesses the entire three years' study, whilst, by comparison, just one semester is assessed at VU. Irene found that there is greater freedom studying in Australia. She commented that the whole week's study was planned in Singapore, while at VU, the timetable is just planned for twelve hours, the rest you have to plan yourself. In addition, student - student relationships, student - staff relationships are quite different. She recalled: 'Sometimes we happen to see classmates

for one semester if we are doing the same subject. In Singapore, we will be seeing the same people for three years (Irene C46).’ Later, she added: ‘In Singapore, one teacher will lead you all the way until the final exam. The teacher will know your strength and weakness. While here you just have the teacher for one semester. That’s it’ (Irene C46).

Although the individual informant’s experiences are, in the main, unique, it is interesting to observe that there are distinctive ‘group characteristics’ that emerge from the interview data. In the following discussions, extracts of the responses to focus questions that made up the in-depth interviews are given. A brief comment is made after each section, highlighting any common or otherwise salient features that emerged.

#### **4.4 Perceived differences studying at VU**

**Question two**      *What aspects of studying at VUT are very different from studying in your home country?*

1. Audrey

It is quite different from here. Normally when we study in Hong Kong, we just listen, we seldom speak (C2). We used to have assignment every day. Now we need to do research and survey. I seldom used library at home, but it is important here (C2). Socially overseas students are in a separate group. It is hard for university students to get together. You know, in Chinese tradition, we have to respect the teachers, so I was just afraid to talk to them. Study style is the very different aspect. Teachers in Hong Kong gave as much study guide as they could, but in here, you have to do it all by yourself. That’s very different (C3).

2. Burnie

I think it’s quite, totally different, ... teaching style, teaching methods are quite different. In Hong Kong, they (teachers) gave you a lot of things, you have to digest yourself. It is flexible in arranging timetable at VU. The very different aspect is the teaching method. The first few days at lecture were real hard for me. I felt like a stranger. Understanding English was hard, note taking was hard (C8). In tutorials, I just kept silent, sat at side. I just kept silent, even if I had done the tutorial exercise... because I felt myself a stranger. But I was confident in tutorial of a familiar subject (C9).

### 3. Colin

The difference is when we were studying in Hong Kong, we were in secondary school, everything was organised by teachers. The homework, exam and the readings were all organised by them (C13). (We) respect teachers. The hardest thing was feeling lost. I did not know the way to go (C13)... ... I didn't know where to get information, I didn't know how to go to Student Administration. I know now, just at that time I didn't know where everything was because I didn't attend the orientation day, ... ... I thought I could cope with that, but in fact, it's not that easy for me to cope without attending the orientation day. Well, I got through it though, but with a little bit of unnecessary effort (C14). The other difficulty was to find someone to talk with (C14). I enjoyed the lecture experience, although I found it difficult understanding accent, and note taking was hard. Speaking up in tutorial is quite challenging for Asian students, especially Hong Kong students, because we grow up in a culture, we don't talk much in a class, but in here, we speak quite a lot, for expressing our ideas, answering questions on our own will. The important thing is *at our own will*. Well in Hong Kong, we normally only answer the question when the teacher points us out (C15). For the first semester, I was not well in managing study. I tried harder, putting a lot more effort on reading and studying in spare time. I believe in one thing - confidence. 'If you think you can, you can (C16).' a saying from a Hong Kong TV program. My motivation to study is future career (C16). I read news, learn about business world, and relate them to the study (C17).

### 4. Dinah

The difference I find is that in university, you have to do a lot of things by yourself. ... You have to do the research, and to look for information, you have to read, sum up everything. You have to do it according to the standard they set out for you (C20). But in high school, I did not have to do all these things. The teacher normally will prepare the things for you. You just study. It's your responsibility to study whatever the teacher said. You just do whatever the teacher said, you will be all right (C20). It's totally different. The way the teacher's name is addressed. You have to call the first name in here. I have to call you Christabel, at home it is impossible. You have to greet the people with respect because they are teachers. It takes time for us to adjust to the situation now. The first time when I was studying in TAFE, the teachers always asked me to call their first names, I was not used to it. I always say Sir or Madam... They say it's OK, why do you have to do that. We are trained to be like that for so long, you can't ask us to change immediately to the situation in here. And the culture is different again, we always think you are the teachers, we are the students, we can't cross the line, that's it (C20).

The first day I went to school, it was shocking to me, then I realised it was different (C21). They encourage you to give your point of view, ... They are not expecting you to learn everything, whatever he says is right, and whatever he does is right. This stimulates you to do things (C21). In high school, the teachers expect you to learn the material they give you, ... you have to do everything they expect you to do. But in here, they are not forcing you to do it. They want you to be the initiator to do things (C21). It's totally different (C21). I just tried very hard for the first year, I can't deny it, it was extremely hard for me. I tried, I tried. The most important thing is that you have to do all the work by yourself (C21). They (the teachers) would definitely like to help you as long as you put the effort in. You show it to them that you've done the work, but you still do not understand. They will definitely give you help (C22).

#### 5. Edward

It's quite different (C29). (When recalling the first few days at the lectures), ... it's like a cinema. ... I think it's the largest in VU (C30). Note taking was hard. The difficulty of listening and writing at the same time happened at the beginning, and it was still happening a year later (C30). Sometimes I can't do both things. I have to listen and write at the same time. It's a bit difficult for the students.... Some lecturers are good, let you finish writing first, then explain (Edward C 30). Sometimes it's difficult for me to speak, ask the question, answer the question. The language is hard for me (C30).

#### 6. Frank

Teaching styles are different. ... In here, lecturers teach you how to study; In Taiwan, teachers teach you how to behave (C32). I didn't understand what a tutorial was. I got confused the first time. ... In here, lecturers don't ask questions. In tutorials, students ask questions, tutors ask students questions. In Taiwan, teachers talk, they teach. Students listen (C32). I just listen. That is Chinese behaviour. ... Australians talk. Chinese don't talk, ... we were taught: children don't talk, just listen (C32).

#### 7. Gordon

This accounting course is much different from that of my country, China. I find that main thing in China, this course takes a long time (C35). ... First thing, the teachers here at VUT just give you rough idea, just give you some main points... You must know something before you attend the lecture. But in China, it's different, ... they just teach you from the beginning. Here it's like leader leading you how to go, but in China, maybe it's like carrying you how to go. It's different. (C35). The second thing is in China, if you understand the lecture, you feel easy and relaxed. But in here, it's different, if you finish the lecture, you've got a lot of paper work that needs you to do by yourself. You must prepare everything and do a lot of work, a lot of readings, otherwise you can't follow the lecture. You feel lost. The two different things, one is teaching method, just give main point. The second point need more time to review, do you own

work (C35). I think tutorial class is similar. In China, tutorial work includes two parts, one part is to summarize concepts of lecture, the second part is to work out solutions to the questions. Here is much similar (C35). Here no people push you to study. The teachers in China push you. 'You must do that, if you don't do that, I give you a special mark (C36)'.

#### 8. Hattie

It's very different my experience in my country and here (C41). But in Australia, I feel the teacher just gives you the concept or question. You have to find the answer (C41). ... The teachers in my country tell you in more details, and step by step. ... In Taiwan, it was difficult to enter university, but very easy to pass. But here I feel difficult. Maybe because I'm an overseas student, I have a language problem. I feel difficult (C41). In my country, the students don't like to talk in the class. Even they have questions, they prefer to ask the teacher after the class (C41). In my country, because I studied at the college, I have the same classmates everyday. We were doing the same subjects. But here if you are doing different subjects, you have different classmates. I remember when I was doing the first semester at VUT, it was very difficult because I didn't have friends. I didn't have the western educational background. I didn't know how to do the assignment, so it was very difficult. ... If you have friends, you can discuss, exchange information (C42). In Taiwan we respect teachers. And we can't leave the classroom before the class finishes. ... I was surprised to see sometimes students eat food, they drink. But now it's OK (C42).

#### 9. Irene

I was quite lost (C45) when first arrived, but felt quite settled down (C45). It is more relaxed here, there was more pressure in Singapore. For example, the exam assesses for the whole of three year's study; while here, just one semester (C45). The first few times I was quite lost, because I was not used to the Australian accent when they speak, especially if they speak too fast. Actually we don't understand, maybe there is a language problem. In Singapore, we use English, here is English as well. But it's different (C46).

#### 10. Jassie

Here is much, much freer (C50). We can make our own timetable ourselves. We can arrange things more independently (C50). I found so strange. I had no idea. I found it difficult to catch up because of the freedom. You have to do it by yourself. We have to do everything (C51). I enjoyed learning from lecturers, tutors and friends. In Malaysia, it's stricter. Students had to copy and remember what was written on the blackboard (C52).



All (ten out of ten) informants perceive their study experiences at VU to be different from their previous educational experiences. Whilst all of them used phrases such as: “It’s quite different” or “It’s quite, totally different” in their responses to the question of the perceived differences studying at VU, there was a range of differences in the details of their responses.

Category one informants (1, 2, 3, 5) mostly reported that in their previous study everything was organised by teachers, the assignments, readings and so on. Edward used ‘spoon feeding’ to indicate the situation in his home country. While this might originally represent the difference between secondary schooling and tertiary study, it may also reflect the differences between the educational systems in these informants’ previous education and the higher education in Australia. Two of the informants attended TAFE in Australia before enrolling at VU. One attended a commercial college. The exposure to Australian education at TAFE and a commercial college gave an initial introduction to the expectations upon higher education students at VU. Both Audrey and Colin acknowledged the value, for their preparation for university, of computer skills and essay writing skills that they learned from their colleges. Colin also mentioned the experience of getting used to the different way of addressing their teachers, indicating that one of his Australian lecturers would often say: ‘Don’t call me Sir, call me Rod or Walker’ (Colin C13).

Category two informants (4, 10) both commented that previously in secondary schools in Malaysia, the teachers organised readings, assignments and so on. At VU, the students had to do a lot of things such as researching, looking for information, reading, summarising and arranging timetables themselves. This highlighted the expectation in Australia upon the students for greater independence in their tertiary study. Further to this awareness, both informants also commented that in their previous study in their home country, they were expected to learn everything the teachers taught. But at VU, it is different. Students are given more responsibilities and initiatives in their own learning. Dinah said:

They (the lecturers) encourage you to give your point of view, ... They are not expecting you to learn everything. ... This stimulates you to do things. In high school, the teacher expects you to learn the material they give you, ... you have to do everything they expect you to do. But in here, they are not forcing you to do it. They want you to be the initiator to do things (Dinah C21).

Jassie found that the greater freedom living and studying in Australia was a challenging experience. She commented: 'I found (it) so strange. I had no idea. I found it difficult to catch up, because of the freedom. You have to do it by yourself. We have to do everything' (Jassie C51). Like the informants in Category one, Dinah recalled that addressing lecturers and tutors at VU was a different experience. She had the initial experience at TAFE. When she was at VU, she already knew what to do. This indicated that the awareness of the differences could lead to the preparation for it, and subsequent active adjustment to the new way.

Category three informants (6, 8) had very similar previous level of education, both completed commercial college of five years in Taiwan. They mentioned that high respect was paid to teachers in their home country, while in Australia, it seemed that students behave quite casually towards their lecturers and tutors. Both commented that in their home country, the expected classroom behaviour of students was being quiet. One of them commented that students just listen in class, and that is Chinese behaviour. This reflected the difference in cultures and behaviours between Confucius-heritage cultures Chinese students and Australian students. In addition to the expected role of students, the expected dual role of teachers as source of knowledge giving and moral disciplining was also stressed in the responses. One commented: 'In here, lecturers teach you how to study; in Taiwan, teachers teach you how to behave' (Frank C32). This expectation of lecturers was the traditional role teachers have fulfilled for thousands of years in Confucius heritage cultures. Students have the expectations, therefore, display greater respect to lecturers. However, they work out that it is different in Australia, the lecturers do not necessarily perform the role of moral discipline. It is one of the areas of adjustment in the new environment.

In Category four, Gordon (7) commented that the lectures in Australia give outline of information, while the lectures were more detailed in China. This was also mentioned by informants in Category three (6, 8). There was a greater amount of independent learning demanded of students apart from the contact hours with lecturers and tutors. Gordon also mentioned the dual role of lecturers in China as source of knowledge teaching and disciplining students to work hard.

The Category five informant (9) experienced a difference in the more relaxed way of study at VU, for example, she commented that in Singapore, the timetable was fully arranged for the week, while at VU, only twelve hours were arranged in a week. Students can arrange timetable themselves, which is a great freedom. She found the Australian accent was initially difficult to get used to. Other factors such as transport and accommodation were mentioned as things to get used to. Although these factors do not fall into the academic area, they do have influence on the academic performance of students.

#### **4.5 Experiences in academic adjustment at VU**

##### **Question 3** *What did you do to adjust to study at VUT?*

1. Audrey

Normally I would try to use the library to look at past assignments, reports for style and requirements (C4). I learnt how to use computer, essay and report writing in ESL Course. When I studied ESL, I already had to do some research, and they trained students quite well in this respect (C5).

2. Burnie

... go home, sit down, do a lot of reading, a lot of preparation for the next lecture, next tutorial. I have a lot of friends now, ... and not like a stranger there, so more participation (C9).

3. Colin

Try harder, put a lot more effort on reading and studying and reading in spare time (C15). I believe one thing - confidence. 'If you think you can, you can' (C16).

#### 4. Dinah

Try harder. Do all the work by yourself. Put more time on it (C21). Work really hard. Go home and read. Have discussion and team study, get a lot of reference for different ways. Read before lectures (C22).

#### 5. Edward

Concentrate, listen and study very hard (C29).

#### 6. Frank

Parents want the children to go to university to get degree. My parents want me to finish on time. I know how to do it. I study hard. I take notes, to home to study. In first year, I seldom go out. I studied on Saturday and Sunday. I get help from friends and all possible sources. For the first time, when I was doing the assignment, I didn't know what to write down for a report. After I did it, I knew how to do it. We have friends, we do it together. For case study, I got help from my landlord (C33).

#### 7. Gordon

I study with friends, always asking why. If you want to explain anything, you must know everything about it. Read before lectures. If you are working, you can get involved in Australian life. ... You can learn the culture quickly. I enjoy working and studying. It's very different, the first semester, the first year, it was very hard. The second semester, I get used to the study (C38).

#### 8. Hattie

The first year, I didn't like to meet people, thinking that English is a problem. The second year, I prefer to stay at school in the library. Read the chapter before the lecture or just read the topic or title. I feel if I read before I attend the lecture, it will be easy to catch up (C42). For assignment, ask friends or ask tutor (C43).

#### 9. Irene

Watch TV to improve listening. Actually TV helps a lot with my listening. Both countries use English. Written English for me is no problem, but when it comes to listening, I have problem listening in lectures (C47). Read newspapers. Set timetable for yourself. Be self-disciplined in attending lectures. I may have one lecture on Monday. I will spend one hour travelling time to school, one hour travelling time home. Sometimes I don't feel like to come to the one hour, I just force myself to come. If you skip once, you will skip the other (C47).

#### 10. Jassie

Plan, plan for test, exam and assignment. Attendance is important (C52).

Most informants adjusted to studying at VU by making more effort and studying hard. For example, some spent more time studying. Some used weekends to study. One informant recalled: 'In first year, I seldom go out. I studied on weekends' (Frank C33). They also sought help from staff, senior students and classmates. Group study, revision using past exam papers were also strategies used by informants in ensuring their successful adjustment to study at VU.

Informants in all categories mentioned making more effort, doing more reading. Two of the informants (Dinah in Category two and Frank in Category three) talked about the expectations their parents had for them, so they want to do well in their study. Colin in Category one mentioned the financial support from his family to his study. The majority of informants said that they seek help from friends, meaning either classmates or friends they made in Australia.

#### **4.6 Major stages of academic adjustment**

For this question, not all informants gave responses, or some responses did not answer the question. Only the appropriate responses are presented here.

**Question 4** *What were the main stages you may have gone through in making the adjustment?*

4. Dinah

It took one semester to adjust. For the first semester, I was struggling a lot. I do not know many students... Once you know the way, what they expect from you, you should be OK, I think. For me, it took me one semester (C23).

7. Gordon

The first year it was very hard to get used to. You don't know what you could do. ... everybody got the feeling. For a new subject, maybe the first three weeks, you don't know what you are doing. ... After three weeks, maybe you know some ideas about the subject. Then you feel better. First you don't know how I can go, where I'm going, how to study. You don't know the

environment. You don't know your teacher, you don't know your classmates. You study by yourself. You feel lonely. After the first semester, the second semester, I get used to the study very easily (C38).

9. Irene

I think the first semester, I was quite lost, because when we first came, we had to look for accommodation, we had to get used to the weather, we had to get used to the transport system. We were not used to taking trains, and changing, all those things. We had to get used to the culture. When people meet, they greet, then sometimes they talk about the football. The culture is different. We had to get used to all these things. ... We didn't know our way around, actually quite lost this building to that building. That is the start. Just quite lost. The test, assignment, we didn't know what would be tested. Actually everything is quite different. It takes some time to sort out. You just don't know. So second semester was all right, because you got the accommodation, you have more time to study. I think it takes about one semester (C48). At the time, I was feeling very difficult, especially for the first month, I just felt like giving up and go home. After the first month, it gets easier. Now it's easy. ... I will say it's not too hard. But at the time, I felt very hard. Now it's actually not too hard (C48).

10. Jassie

Here I found hard the first semester, the second semester was much better. The second year is totally OK. I know what is happening (C53).

As the experiences of adjusting are quite individual, it was expected that the responses to this focus question would be varied. Of the responses received, first semester was commonly regarded as the most difficult time for making the adjustment to the new situation. The challenge of getting used to a different accent, different culture, different learning and teaching approaches, working out the implicit expectations of them, and adjusting their own expectations of what it means to study at VU. One of the informants responded that the first year was predominately a time of adjusting to studying at VU.

Most students were not aware of the adjustment, until they had gone through it. The previous study experiences at TAFE or Year 11, Year 12 in Australia helped individual informants' adjustment to study at VU as expressed in the responses by informants in Category one (1, 3, 5), Category two (4, 10) and Category four (7).

## 4.7 Opinions on factors contributing to the adjustment difficulties

### Question 5 *What in your opinion are the reasons for the adjustment difficulties ?*

1. Audrey

It was hard, but it was all right. It took about one semester to feel comfortable, or at ease.

4. Dinah

I think adjustment is not that hard, and language is the problem (C23). I have English problem (C26).

5. Edward

The only reason is language (C31).

8. Hattie

I think it's easy. My problem is the language problem (C44)

9. Irene

It takes time to iron out things, just takes time to get used to the way here. Maybe language is one of the problems (C49).

10. Jassie

I'm not sure (C53).

The responses from informants indicated that language was perceived to be the contributing factor to the difficulties. '*Language ... the most important thing is language. ... It's just the language itself makes it harder for me*' (Dinah C23). Besides, most informants also had to cope with the pressure from study, from the expectations of the teachers and from their parents. '*My problem is the language problem*' (Hattie C44). Interestingly, this sort of comment was also heard from very articulate informants with very fluent English.

## 4.8 Informants' advice for new students

### Question 6 *What advice would you give for new students to adjust more easily to study at VU?* 1. Audrey

Many students think they studied in their home country. But the education is quite different. ...

I think it's better for them to take maybe half a year or one semester to study English and preparation course. Need support services. Seek help from friends. Use support classes on offer (C7).

#### 2. Burnie

Prepare well before coming here. And the advice is do a lot of research in their own country about the school which they want to study in. And ask someone who got previous overseas experience, and go to find some books or some information about that country. And that's what I think, they must prepare. The language is important if you want to study overseas (C11).

#### 3. Colin

... speak more. Listen more. Read more (C17). Think in English, do not translate. Think everything in English, like when you speak, when you talk, when you are learning, when you try to understand certain words. Jot down notes when reading. Use the subject guide, and read outside class materials. The student guideline is absolutely very very helpful. If you can follow everything on subject guide, and (keep) up to that, if you can read some articles some lecturers, some tutors advise you to, ... ... Link things to real world. I want to let other students know that we have to link everything to real world. ... ... If students can feel interested in it and look into it, it will be useful for the whole course, because it's not for the subject, many subjects link to each other, especially for Business students. When you have to memorise, do not just memorise, but understand it first, too. What the best way to do I find out is that you can study ahead of the lecture. Read before the lecture. Try to understand as much as you can.. ... When you finish the lecture, you go back home and try to read once again ... you find you can answer every question raised by the tutor in the next tute (C18).

#### 4. Dinah

Form study group. Group study is really, really a good suggestion ... for all the students. Study with Asian students in a group, share the same background, attitudes and care more about study. Do exam revision in the group, share notes, ideas. Understand it (the material) first, then explain it to the group (C22). Learn English, listen, read, try to think in English, don't translate everything into your own language. Study hard, work in groups. Pass on notes, then concentrate on listening in the lecture (C23). Try harder. Speak with someone when got the chance. Do all the work by yourself. Put more time in it. You just have to face the reality that this is different, this is totally new to you. You have to work really hard (C24). The first year is the transition



time. ... but you have to be the initiator to overcome the problems... Accept it that you have to do everything by yourself. Accept it and learn from the beginning. You just have to put effort in it. Try to mix with Australian student and learn... Go and ask your lectures for help (C25). Get some work experience in Australia, it helps to build up confidence. It's easier for you to adjust to everything. It's very interesting (C26). Practise what you have learnt, observing what went on in an organisation. Put what you learnt into practice (C27).

5. Edward

Learn more English before studying here (C31).

6. Frank

Take extra tutes. They are useful. Take notes. Do assignment before due date. Help each other. Do research, use reference books. When you have questions, you can always ask the lecturers (C34).

7. Gordon

Discussion is very important. Team study and groups study ... (C37). For first semester, I always tell overseas students: 'You must study very hard, get pass, then it gives you confidence' (C38). Know some lecturers and tutors. Have good relationship with the lecturers. Make your own timetable. See your tutor if you have questions. Learn to make an appointment. Learn to make a time to fit into lecturer's schedule. Try to follow the lecture (subject) guide. Prepare every tutorial question before you go to the lecture or tutorial. For lecture, a quick reading of fifteen minutes, just to know what the lecture is about. Note taking, write down some key words. Listening is very important (C39). Practise presentation with friends (C40).

8. Hattie

Read newspapers to improve English. Use library and study in the library. Spend more time in the library. You need friends. Spend time at school, and could get unexpected information. Pre-read the textbook before attending the lecture (C44).

9. Irene

Manage your time properly. Get help from senior students. Before the semester start, just ask about what is expected from each subject. We need advice on choosing subjects after the first year. Get advice from senior students or course co-ordinator in choosing subjects. Get involved in activities like learning to drive, visiting places (C49).

10. Jassie

I think overseas students like us should be more active because they have to spend more time on homework. I recommend overseas students have to be more active, play some sports to freshen

your mind... So students can relax, not to work too hard. Planning. Plan for their assignment, test. Attendance to classes is important. If you stop attending class, you will find it difficult to catch up. Ask questions (C52). Sometimes we have difficulty to catch up what is going on, tutors need to take care of us overseas students. Sometimes it's easy for us to get lost in the class (C53). Subject outline which gives you a lot of information for the whole semester. Plan your time according to the subject guide. It's very useful. Sometimes the lecturer or tutor mentioned something, we were surprised and asked why you knew it. They say from the (subject) outline. Then we knew. I think it's very important. Talk with friends and find out what is happening (C53). Don't live too far. You may skip classes. Students live far away. Then it takes time to wake up and travel. I suggest them not to live too far. ... Sometimes you say, it's too early, I'm not going to school. That is not good (C54).

As language was perceived to be the major factor contributing to the difficulty of adjustment by the majority of informants, issues related to language development were most frequently suggested to new students to address their adjustment difficulties. Making more effort in study was also the consistent advice from many informants. The categories of respondents were not significant in terms of their advice for new students.

Category one informants (1, 2, 3, 5) advised new students that learning English is important. Other advice included specific study skills such as using a computer, essay writing, putting more effort into reading. One informant (Audrey) gave a very insightful suggestion that new students should not assume the same kind of education in Australia as in their home country.

Informants in Category two (4, 10) advised new students to prepare for lectures, tutorials and group study activities. They also suggested using the subject guides to plan learning activities. Advice was also given on participation in class, mingling with Australian students and actively seeking help from staff members. Such informants' articulation of successful strategies reflected the desire and effort of taking initiatives to gain greater benefit from the educational experience in Australia by international students.

Category three informants (6, 8) gave advice to new students based on what worked for them in their study. Preparation, using the subject guides, learning English and seeking help from staff and friends were listed as important things to do.

The Category four informant (7) emphasised that first semester is very important. He recommended that students gain confidence by studying hard and passing first semester. Group study, preparation before lectures and tutorials, and using the subject guides were considered useful.

In Category five, Irene (9) stressed that time management skill and choosing the right subjects help one to succeed in study.

The advice given by informants relates very closely to what challenges they had experienced, and what had worked for them to succeed in their study. There are very genuine concerns held by informants for the successful adjustment of new students to study at VU.

To sum up, this chapter reported the analysis of the data using the themes of the focus questions in the individual in-depth interviews. The responses of the informants indicate that the experience of studying at VU is quite different to what they had experienced in their previous education. The dimensions and degree of differences are quite varied in individual informants' experiences. In addition to the transition from secondary to tertiary study, most of the informants faced the challenges of adjusting to a different *language, culture, different expectations, and different ways of teaching and learning*. These are the major themes identified in the literature review detailed in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. Chapter 5 will detail the interpretations of the analysis based on these four themes.

## Chapter 5 Interpretation

This chapter elicits meaning from the transformed data of Chapter 4 and makes explicit the relationships that the organised data present. In this interpretation of the data, four major themes, identified in the literature review earlier, consistently came up in the responses of the informants. Consequently this chapter will interpret the transformed data under these themes of *language, culture, expectations* and *teaching and learning*.

### 5.1 Language

Most students rank language as the number one difficulty in adjusting to studying at VU. Almost all informants mentioned at some stage in the interviews that they had difficulty understanding the Australian accent, or understanding Australian English in lectures or tutorials if lecturers spoke English too fast. For example, Burnie recollected that understanding English was hard, and note taking was hard. Edward ranked note taking as a significant difficulty in his adjustment experience. Hattie, Dinah and Irene stated that understanding the accent was initially a difficulty. In responding to the reasons for the challenges of adjusting to study at VU, Dinah, Irene, Hattie and Gordon specifically stated language was the main reason for their difficulties.

When informants made comments about their language difficulties, comments were often quite broad. They may, for example, have referred to the words, or concepts, or the interpretation or communication in the teaching and learning environment. It is not clear from the informants' responses whether it is only one of these elements or a combination of more than one or all the elements that led to the language difficulty. In a university Business course, it is highly likely that the difficulty with new words, combined with new concepts, causes significant difficulty in many students' understanding of lectures or tutorials.

To add further emphasis to this issue, most of the informants explicitly advised new students to develop good English language skills if coming to study in Australia.

Suggestions such as studying English language before taking up the course at VU; practising using the language; listening, speaking and thinking in English, rather than translating ideas into their own language; and restricting the use of a tape recorder, were all consistently given as advice to future students. Another strategy suggested by informants was watching the television news, because it helps to improve listening skills.

On one hand, this is consistent with opinions in the literature (Burke 1986; Ballard & Clanchy 1991) that language proficiency is significant in students' academic adjustment. On the other hand, even the very articulate informants still reported that language is the cause of the difficulty in their academic adjustment. This strongly suggests that, at maybe a deeper level, there is something more than language that is underpinning the adjustment experiences of international students. Contributions from the literature suggest that this might include the *values* and *norms* of the diverse culture of the students.

## 5.2 Culture

In this investigation, it was observed that the majority of students did not explicitly mention culture as the cause of the difficulties that they encountered. Nevertheless, several students did realise that cultural tensions appear to be a factor, and this observation of a small number of informants being aware of other-than-language factors is general in the situation with both staff and students. As Cortazzi and Jin (1997) pointed out, the third element - culture, beyond communication and learning, is often underestimated:

Culture is seen in terms of principles of expectations and interpretations which are often taken for granted and therefore overlooked (p.76).

This section will look at some ways in which hidden assumptions about culture infuse teaching and learning, and will relate these to the informants' responses. In this section, cultural influences are conceptualised in terms of academic cultures, cultures of

communication, and cultures of learning. Briefly, academic culture refers to the cultural norms and expectations involved in academic activity. A culture of communication refers to the expected ways of communicating and of interpreting others' communication in a cultural group. A culture of learning refers to cultural beliefs and values about teaching and learning, expectations about classroom behaviour, and what constitutes 'good' work. A key feature of the interaction between culture, communication and learning is that participants do not only carry cultural behaviour and concepts into the classroom, but they also use the specific framework of their cultures to interpret and assess other peoples' words, actions, and academic performance (Cortazzi & Jin 1997).

Cortazzi and Jin (1997) go on to discuss the notion that *academic cultures* are the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically. For many academic staff, many aspects seem obvious but are rarely made explicit. They suggested that one reason for this is that culture 'works' precisely because participants do not have to think about making it work; one simply does what is expected (p.77).

### **British academic expectations**

Individual orientation  
 Horizontal relations  
 Active involvement  
 Verbal explicitness  
 Speaker/writer responsibility  
 Independence of mind  
 Creativity, originality  
 Discussion, argument, challenge  
 Seeking alternatives  
 Critical evaluation

### **Academic expectations held by Chinese students**

Collective consciousness  
 Hierarchical relations  
 Passive participation  
 Conceptualised communication  
 Listener/reader responsibility  
 Dependence on authority  
 Mastery, transmission  
 Agreement, harmony, face  
 Single solution  
 Assumed acceptance

**Figure 5. 1 Academic culture differences between the expectations of British university staff and those of some overseas students**

Source: Cortazzi and Jin 1997, 'Communication for learning across cultures', in MacNamara & Harris (eds), *Overseas Students in Higher Education*, Routledge, London, p.78.

Although Figure 5.1 reports British academic's expectations and the expectations of overseas students studying in Britain, the cultural aspect is equally relevant in Australian universities. The challenge in making the cross-cultural interpretations about values and expectations is stated by Weeks, Pederson and Brislin (1979) as: 'Values come out of one's cultural background. They are difficult to track down to a particular source and are often part of a person's unconscious behaviour (p.26)'. Further, these authors claim: 'within any particular culture a person's values are usually very logical. They make sense in that culture (p.26)'. Although it is difficult to pin down a precise relationship between values and particular behaviour, these two 'tracers' are useful in helping to understand international students' background in teaching and learning situations. The interpretations presented in this thesis are aimed at building a bridge for the deeper understanding of the aspirations and expectations of international students from Chinese Confucian heritage cultural background.

One example of the tension between cultures clearly emerges from the students' responses. As one informant pointed out: 'In Chinese culture, children are to be seen, not to be heard' (Frank C32). They were required to be quiet and just listen in class in their previous educational setting, and to speak without clear permission would have represented a major transgression in classroom behaviour. Therefore, it presents to the students a significant challenge when they are expected to speak on their own in tutorials at VU. This subsequently affects students' learning approaches. For example, another informant recalled: 'I prefer to ask the teacher questions after class' (Hattie C41), but in many large lecture situations at VU this represents an undesirable learning situation for both students and staff member.

In the context of this study, it is important for the reader to appreciate that teachers have a dual role in Confucian traditional cultures. Education in the Chinese language is '*jiao yu*', where '*jiao*' means to teach and '*yu*' means to nurture. Teachers are expected to be the source of knowledge and the role models for their students. They are generally highly regarded for their knowledge; in addition, they are expected to teach students appropriate moral values. The genesis of this behaviour is encapsulated in a series of

pedagogic tales, known as the Trimetrical stories. Chinese cultural heritage, crystallised from thousands years of civilisation, has been summarised in *San Zi Jin*, the Trimetrical Classics (Wen, Zhou & Fan 1994). This book is a small encyclopedia, suitable for primary age children, and its contents cover philosophy, moral education, literature, history, geography and astronomy, mathematics, science and agricultural concepts. The sentences are short and concise, using three characters to each line. It gives a brief explanation of traditional values and a basic knowledge about the world. Until relatively recently, children were taught to chant and memorise the book, although in modern times, it no longer is the main textbook at schools. However, the traditional values and knowledge outlined in the book have been embedded firmly in the Chinese cultural heritage. In 1990, UNESCO included the book on its lists for children's moral education (Wen, Zhou & Fan 1994). One example of such a Trimetrical story or lesson is:

<i>Yang bu jiao</i>	<i>Rearing children without a proper</i>
<i>Fu zhi guo</i>	<i>education, is a father's mistake.</i>
<i>Jiao bu yan</i>	<i>Teaching without discipline,</i>
<i>Shi zhi duo</i>	<i>Is the fault of teachers (p.9).</i>

This high respect and expectation for education comes from the tradition that Confucius himself was regarded as a great thinker, educator and philosopher. One informant said: 'In here lecturers teach you how to study. In Taiwan, the teachers teach you how to behave' (Frank C32). Another informant commented: 'No people push you to study (at VU), teachers in China push you' (Gordon C36). These comments indicated that there was the awareness among the students that the dual role expected of the teachers may not necessarily be the case at VU. When exhorting children to work hard at their education, teachers would use the following Trimetrical lesson:

<i>Yu bu zhuo</i>	<i>Jade becomes jadeaware,</i>
<i>Bu cheng qi</i>	<i>Only when carved and chiseled.</i>
<i>Ren bu xue</i>	<i>A person cannot tell right from wrong,</i>
<i>Bu zhi yi</i>	<i>Unless he or she is well educated (p.13)</i>



Furthermore, the effort and persistence which students of Chinese Confucian heritage cultures are expected to put into learning, can be reflected by the proverb *tie chu mo chen zheng* 'Filing an iron bar into a needle'. This proverb, about a well-known Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai's learning experience, is meant to teach the value of hard work and effort in one's study.

*One day when Li Bai was walking by a river, he saw an old lady filing an iron bar on a piece of stone at the river bank. He asked her what she was doing, the old lady replied that she was trying to make a needle out of the iron bar. Li Bai asked how long it would take her to get the needle made. She replied that when rain dropped on a stone drip by drip, eventually the rain made a hole in the stone. In the same way, if she kept filing, one day, the iron bar would be made into a needle. Li Bai was struck with this lesson and applied the spirit of hard work and persistence in his study, he made great a contribution to Chinese classic poetry (translation from the Chinese version in Xin Hua Ci Dian New Chinese Dictionary, 1980, p.837).*

In their interactions with staff, international students traditionally have high regard for, and show deference to, their lecturers or tutors. Students manifest their respect by addressing their teachers only by their family name and using the title *lao shi* (teacher). The genesis of this behaviour is illustrated in the Trimetrical Classic.

<i>Wen ren zi</i>	<i>As children,</i>
<i>Fang shao shi</i>	<i>You are in early stages of life.</i>
<i>Qin shi you</i>	<i>Respect teachers and friends,</i>
<i>Xi li yi</i>	<i>Learn courtesy and good manner (p.15)</i>

However, at VU, students were expected to address staff very differently. One respondent said: 'It is totally different. The way the teacher's name is addressed, you have to call the first name in here. ... at home it is impossible' (Dinah C20). This situation contrasts sharply with students' prior experience, and especially highlights the international students' initial difficulties in tutorials and lectures in Australia.

### *Student - staff interactions*

As discussed earlier, most international students regard staff highly as is expected in their tradition and culture. Respect for a teacher is shown both in the students' way of addressing and approaching staff. These differences in addressing lecturers, which reflect the different cultural value towards teachers was illustrated by one of the informants who commented: 'We respect teachers in Taiwan, [and are] surprised to see the casual behaviour of students' (Hattie C42). Similar feelings and experiences were recalled by another informant of her first day at VU. 'It was shocking to me when I saw my Australian classmate argue with the teacher on certain point of view, ... then I realised it is different. ... They encourage you to give your point of view. This stimulates you to do things. ... It's totally different' (Dinah C21). The expectation of students taking initiatives and being independent reflected in the above comment represents a fundamental cultural shift for international students.

Because of the expectations on students to be more independent, lecturers at VU require students to do independent reading and researching for their learning. From the students' perspective, because of their previous dependency on authority for learning materials, a tension between the different cultures becomes apparent when students attempt to seek help from staff, because Australian staff expect students to be able to do it themselves. The degree and scope of assistance students get from staff is sometimes very different from what students have expected. What they may expect is a detailed discussion, but they may in fact get some general guidance referring to a book and page numbers. This is where international students can get quite confused in their initial study experiences. In an effort to understand such unexpected behaviour a student might mistakenly think that the lecturer is possibly a racist or perhaps the lecturer does not want to help. The tension between cultures is reflected in the following account of seeking help from staff, perhaps mainly due to differing expectations of the role of each party:

But here you can't get too much from the lecturer. ... They don't want to talk to you too much. Some lecturers I find very hard, if you have a particular question and if you bring that question to ask a lecturer, actually you expect the lecturer to

explain it to you. The lecture will say you should know, you can read by yourself. It's very clear in the book, you can read that and understand that. So it makes the student not feeling good, next time maybe the students don't want to go there and ask again. But some lecturers are very good, it depends on different person and personality (Gordon C36).

From the study, it appears that the relationship between student and staff member means different things to different students. One type of reaction is that the relationship is closer at secondary school than at university. Students in secondary schools have a teacher for a few years, and this teacher knows each student's strengths and weaknesses, while at VU they often meet the lecturer or tutor for just one semester. This comment comes from a student who did secondary study in Singapore:

In Singapore, one teacher will lead you all the way until the final exam. The teacher will know what your strength and weakness is. While here you just have the teacher for one semester. That's it (Irene C46).

A contrary opinion is that staff at VU are friendlier and students can discuss things with them. A Malaysian student commented that: 'The teacher is nicer. They are not too strong. In Malaysia, whatever they [the teachers] say you have to listen, you have to follow' (Jassie C51).

#### *Student - student interactions*

The experiences of student - student relationships vary considerably. The opinions range from finding friendship closer, to the other extreme of difficulty of meeting friends. Some informants reflected that they were more reliant on friends for help in their study and for organising their life in Australia, as they have no family close by. In case of difficulty, friends often offered help. Some students, by contrast, found that it is hard to meet other students. One informant stated: 'Overseas students are in a separate group. It is hard for university students to get together' (Audrey C3). Another informant said: 'There was less chance to meet, as students do different courses. First semester, it was very difficult because I did not have friends' (Hattie C42). In an Australian university,

students attend different lecture streams and attend different tutorials. There are less formal contact hours and therefore fewer opportunities to meet and find study partners. Students indicated that at home, one can make friends easily, but in Australia international students mostly speak a different language, and are a different race. As a consequence, whilst student - student relationships are friendly at home, one student felt uncomfortable at VU because their behaviour is different from that of their fellow students: 'In Taiwan, student and student relationship is friendly. If you ask, they will give you a hand. We make good friends. Here I feel uncomfortable because our behaviour is different' (Frank C33).

Hattie, who is also from Taiwan, expressed the same opinion, but from a slightly different angle. She noted that the student - student relationship is not so close at VU, saying: 'If you have a problem here, in my opinion, you must actively ask somebody.' Hattie went further:

In my country, because I studied at the college, I have the same classmates everyday. We were doing the same subjects. But here if you are doing different subjects, you have different classmates. I remember when I was doing the first semester at VU, it was very difficult because I didn't have friends. And also I didn't have the western educational background. I didn't know how to do the assignment, so it was very difficult. ... If you have friends, you can discuss, exchange information (Hattie C42).

A similar opinion indicating that the student - student relationship was closer in the home country was given by a student from Singapore. Again, students have the same classmates for a few years and hence form strong social bonds. In Australia classmates only meet if they are studying the same subject, and as Irene said:

I guess it's closer in Singapore. You have classmates for a few years, while in here I know my classmates if we are doing the same subject. Sometimes we happen to see each other for one semester, then that's it. In Singapore, we will be seeing the same people for three years (Irene C46).

The second kind of reaction is that friends are more important in Australia, because if you are in trouble, friends help you out. The forming of relationships is reciprocal; it requires initiatives from both parties. One informant gave quite insightful comments about the experiences, noting:

Try to mix with Australian student and learn... first I thought maybe they didn't want to talk to us. After first year, they respect you, especially (if) you do the work in the class. They expect you to participate in the class. Sometimes it just gives you something different, you are more confident when you express yourself in class. They understand you more as well. Don't expect they understand everything. They are not racist in a way. They are just scared that they will do something wrong that will make you upset. They don't know your culture, you don't know their culture. You have to respect each other. Some of my Australian friends, they really respect me as well (Dinah C25).

This account indicates that a sound student - student relationship requires positive effort from both parties in cross-cultural communications. Such an idea might be applied in cross-cultural teaching and learning situations and represent a very positive model of academic adjustment.

The last type of response was unique because the informant had attended secondary school and university in Australia. The informant enjoyed the student - student relationship in university. After having had the experience of finding it hard to make friends at an Australian high school, she commented: 'In uni, students are nicer, you can make friends. In uni, lecturers and tutors are good, we can discuss any problem with them. I'm quite happy here (Jassie C51).'

### **5.3 Expectations**

As discussed in 5.1, and illustrated in Figure 5.1, the staff and students' expectations of academic orientations are vastly different. Teaching staff expect students to have greater independence in obtaining clear ideas of subject requirements and assessment, while

students expected to be reminded of them. This point was emphasised through their lack of knowledge of the importance of information such as the subject guides.

One student commented that they rely wholly on the prescribed textbooks, sometimes without realising that one of the reference books may provide a better alternative to understand certain chapters. Because of the difference in expectations, neither the staff nor the students realise what the source of difficulties really is until some time into the semester. Nevertheless, in this way students mature through their experiences. They eventually understood what is expected of them as a result of interactions with staff, other students and course materials.

As discussed earlier, international students' expectations of a teacher include the traditional dual role of teacher as teacher and mentor. Cortazzi and Jin (1997) summarised that international students not only tended to depend on the teacher for knowledge, but also for care, concern and help. Students expect teachers to teach and care for them like a parent (*shi zhang*). In the social context, it includes an important moral dimension: a good teacher is a moral example for students to follow, and he or she will not only teach the 'subject' content but will teach students about 'life'.

#### *Expectations of curriculum*

In the sense it is used here, the term 'curriculum' can include many aspects of the educational process. In this thesis, emphasis is put primarily on lectures, tutorials, assignments and exams. No comment was made by any of the informants as to the content aspect of the curriculum or the structure of the courses. One possible explanation might have been that because most of the students had only had secondary education previously, no useful comparison would be available. The aspect of attending lectures and tutorials, however, was often explored.

In attending lectures, international students experienced similar transition stages as local students, such as the need to learn and develop critical listening and note taking skills. In addition, they experienced the need for an adjustment to the Australian accent, and

overcoming the feeling of strangeness among a large group of students in lectures. Typical student comments were: 'The first few times, I was quite lost, because I was not used to the Australian accent when they speak, especially if they speak too fast. ... maybe there is a language problem' (Irene C46). 'It was really hard for me. I felt like a stranger, understanding English was hard. Note taking was hard' (Burnie C8).

By comparison with local students however, participation in tutorials was a different experience for most international students. One informant recalled: 'It's quite different from here. Normally when we study in Hong Kong, we just listen, we seldom speak' (Audrey C2). Another informant said: 'In Taiwan, teachers talk, ... students listen' (Frank C32). Previously, most informants had only had the experience of speaking when being called upon in a classroom situation. Facing the challenge of speaking by their own volition and making contributions in tutorials, international students need to actively make the effort to adjust to the new classroom culture. It appears that feelings of strangeness in the tutorials significantly prohibited international students' participation. One of the informants recollected the experience: 'I was scared to attend the tutorials, I couldn't contribute. In first semester, it was very difficult because I did not have friends' (Hattie C42). Some were overwhelmed, and had feelings of inadequacy. Most students attributed this discomfort to language difficulty, as addressed in 5.1, but as the last account indicates, it probably is a cultural as well as a social difficulty.

Participation of international students in tutorials is generally perceived to be low (Samuelowicz 1987; Ballard & Clanchy 1984, 1991). Students themselves also regard participation as one aspect which is difficult for them to adjust to. One student said: 'In fact, this point (participation) is difficult to adjust, because for me, I seldom talk in front of other people' (Audrey C4). Another student's experience was that: 'I just kept silent. Even if I had done the tutorial exercise, the tutor asked the question, I just kept silent, and sat at the side' (Burnie C9). This position of international students being quiet in tutorials may be because of the cultural influences on classroom behaviour. However, not all the international students are quiet in all the tutorials. It is observed when they

become familiar with the tutor and classmates, or when they are familiar with a particular subject, they may likely to become more active in participation in the tutorials.

For first year international Business students, especially in the first semester, the requirements of assignments and exams are not as clear as they appear to local students. Even with written materials, the interpretation of the message varies because of the different educational background and tradition of the student. Some students did not realize that there is no supplementary exam until they had completed the first written exam. As one informant recalled: 'In my country you have a second chance if you fail, like the N1 here. ... I only learnt after the exam' (Hattie C44). In this case the sense of the regulations were not clear to this student until she did the exam.

#### **5.4 Teaching and learning approaches**

Most students recalled that the independent learning approach typically required of students studying for a business degree was one of the important challenges for them in making the transition to study at VU. Reflecting on the differences regarding learning approaches, quite a few informants claimed that in their home country, learning materials were mostly provided. A single textbook was used for a subject and a structured timetable was set for all the students. Following are some of the informants' responses:

Teachers gave as much study guide as they could when I was studying in my home country. At VU, you do it by yourself to get information, do the research and survey (Audrey C3).

In Hong Kong, ... They give you a lot of things, then you have to digest yourself (Burnie C8).



Very different, the difference is when we were studying in Hong Kong, we were in secondary school, and everything was organised by teachers. The homework, exam and the readings were all organised by them (Colin C13).

All these responses indicate that previously much more guidance was given in terms of learning materials. However, at VU, students need to find the information themselves. Students are expected to be independent learners, and initiators for their own learning.

As might be expected, because of the previous educational experiences and learning style, students anticipated a similar situation to prevail in Australian universities. The reality is that they have an unstructured timetable, which gives them greater freedom to exercise independence and responsibility in arranging their own schedule for study and leisure. They are expected to be more independent learners. They are expected to shift actively from the predominately reproductive learning approach to the analytical learning approach which is appropriate in Australian universities (Ballard & Clanchy 1991,1997).

The teaching approaches used by higher education staff in Australia are, in general, very different to that previously experienced, or indeed expected by most of the international students interviewed. Many teaching staff appeared to the students to regard themselves as facilitators of the students' own independent pursuit of knowledge. One student made this comparison: 'Teachers at VU give you rough ideas, just main points. In China, they teach you from the beginning' (Gordon C35). Another comment supported this point: 'Teachers [at VU] just gave you the concept or question. You have to find the answer. In Taiwan, teaching was in more details, step by step' (Hattie C41). Comments such as these indicated that there was the implicit expectation that formal teaching was only a proportion of the academic program; a large part of the learning was expected to be outside the program. One informant summarised the point as:

Here, (the teacher) it's like a leader, leading you how to go, but in China, maybe it's like carrying you how to go. It's different (Gordon C35).

The length of time for a subject and a course is relatively short in an Australia university, and the amount of information covered in a lecture is limited to only the framework or outline of a subject. As one informant described: '[The lecturers] here at VU just give you rough idea, just give you some main points. The lecturer expects you to know something before you attend the lecture' (Gordon C35). Another informant had a similar experience, but reflected upon it in a different way. She said: 'The teacher in my country tell you in more details and step by step' (Hattie C41). 'I attended the lectures, but still could not understand' (Hattie C42). This again confirmed that in the limited time of contact in a lecture, only the main points are covered, and students need to do a lot of reading before and after lectures as independent learners. Therefore, students need to actively engage in their learning and actively seek help. The latter point, that of actively seeking, was emphasised by one informant: 'If you don't ask, maybe you still can't understand' (Hattie C41).

Whilst learning programs are flexible in Australia, in Singapore, they are more structured, and more planned. One informant said:

For lectures I can attend, I can choose not to attend. It's like everything is up to you. While in Singapore, it's different. Everything is planned. You have to follow. So you have a timetable. In here the timetable is just for twelve hours. Three hours for each of the four subjects. Just the twelve hours are planned, the rest you have to plan for yourself (Irene C46).

A lot of informants perceived learning approaches to be significantly different. Independence and self-reliance are expected of international students. This is the main area of potential mismatch between the expectations of students and staff at higher education. One of the informants recalled:

Teachers give as many study guides as they could. But in here, you have to do it by yourself: get information, do research, and survey to get different types of information (Audrey C3).

One student perceived study approaches to be the most different aspect, commenting:

It is quite different from here. Normally when we study in Hong Kong, we just listen, we seldom speak (Audrey C2).

The majority of the informants perceived *student involvement* as a new challenge in tutorial participation as it is usually the norm not to speak voluntarily in class in previous educational experience. Some informants found the experience in tutorials overwhelming for the first few weeks. Students might choose to keep silent in tutorials when they are still sorting out the differences and trying to work out the new rules in class. One informant recalled: 'I just kept silent even if I had done the tutorial exercise because I felt myself a stranger' (Burnie C9).

The majority of informants did not experience tutorials in their previous study situation. One informant's perception or understanding of what constitutes a tutorial was summarised as: 'In tutorials, students ask questions, tutors ask students questions. In Taiwan, teachers talk, they teach. Students listen' (Frank C32). What the informant did in tutorials at first was: 'I just listen. That is Chinese behaviour. ... In Taiwan, I had lectures and lab sessions, no tutorials' (Frank C32). Such comments suggest that international students need to adjust to the new form of *classroom structure* and make necessary adjustment to the tutorial *classroom culture* in an Australian university.

Thus the type of reactions to the new experience in tutorials include worrying about attending tutorials and non-participation in tutorials (Ballard & Clanchy, 1984, 1991, 1997; Barker 1990; Maxwell et al. 2000). One informant was worried about attending tutorials because she had the awkward feeling of not being able to contribute. She was also among one of those students who do not talk in class, but prefer to ask after class. International students use 'scared' to mean 'worried' (Samuelowicz 1987). This was noted in this investigation also: 'I was scared to attend the tutorial because ... I could not understand what the local students were talking. ... I could not contribute. I was scared' (Hattie C42).

This informant found tutorials a little nerve-racking, and strange, saying: ‘I just sat there. ... so I just sat at the corner (Hattie C43).’ She reported that she did not speak in the tutorials in the first semester, but at the time of the interview the situation had improved, because, as she commented: ‘I will find my friend. We will take the same tutorial [time]. I have a company, and I feel more confident’ (Hattie C43).

The behaviour of keeping silent, or just listening, which is demonstrated by many international students could be mis-interpreted, or mis-understood by the teaching staff as either a lack of effort from students or lack of language proficiency. Whereas a lack of facility with language can lead to this behaviour, it appears that a lack of understanding or familiarity with the underlying cultural norms plays an equally significant role in the behaviour of these international students. This is further illustrated, for example, in the experiences of respondents from Malaysia. There were no tutorials in Malaysia (at secondary school). In the first few tutorials, one informant was a bit nervous and scared. Clearly she found the experience strange:

I found a bit strange that we have to discuss, and we can talk in the class, before in Malaysia, we could not. We could not talk. We had to be quiet. The teacher will call your name to answer questions. ... No discussions. ... we discuss with friends and exchange knowledge. ... I found so strange. I had no idea. ... I found it so difficult to catch up, ... because of the freedom. You have to do it by yourself. We have to do everything. They are not going to say you have to do this, you have to do that (Jassie C51).

The following comments from informants summarised the experiences of those students of first few days in the lecture situation:

The first few times I was quite lost, because I was not used to the Australian accent when they speak, especially if they speak too fast. Actually we don’t understand, maybe there is a language problem. In Singapore we use English, here is English as well. But it’s different. When it comes to listening, it’s harder (Irene C46).

If you understand the lecture, you feel easy and relaxed. ... In here, if you finish the lecture, you got a lot of paper work to do by yourself (Gordon C35).

In Taiwan, I never took notes. In here, I have to take notes. The first time, I was nervous for the first week (Frank C33).

## 5.5 Other

In this section, some significant issues, other than the four major themes which have emerged from the responses, are discussed. They include the issues of under utilisation of the subject guides, greater personal independence, difficulties of living in an unfamiliar country, lack of understanding of administrative procedures and referencing in written work.

### *Subject guides*

Several informants mentioned in the interview that subject guides provided at the start of lectures are very useful. But one of the things that some students experienced was that they did not realise its usefulness until well into the first semester. As a consequence students did not use the subject guides to their advantage. As one informant recalled: ‘... actually everything is given, we just didn’t know it was there. Even for the exam, sometimes the teachers already give something, it’s just that we didn’t know. Till the second and third semester, we knew’ (Irene C48).

### *Greater independence*

Students have greater freedom in arranging their timetable at VU than they have been used to. They enjoy arranging things more independently. It initially may present as a challenge. For other informants, the location of the students’ residence may seem at first irrelevant to this study, however, it actually plays an important part in the academic adjustment experience. One of the students recollected her experience: ‘I lived too far away before, I found it hard to wake up. It is easy to find excuses to miss the classes’ (Jassie C54). The responsibility of attending lectures and tutorials requires international

students to be independent and observe the timeline for their assignments and other assessment tasks.

#### *Expectations of living in Australia*

Some students mentioned that the new experience of living in Australia required them to develop new skills. Apart from time to study, students have to spend time on housekeeping duties such as cooking, shopping and laundry by themselves. Some students found that the responsibilities which come from this independence placed competing workloads on their study. One informant said: 'I got a lot of spare time in Hong Kong. In Australia, I have to do my own cooking, laundry and shopping' (Edward C28).

#### *Administration*

Having a clear understanding of administrative procedures is very important, especially if there are significant differences in the procedures and rules at VU. For example, the rules and regulations regarding examinations at VU are very different from those international students are familiar with. One of the informants, for example, only learnt about the different rules after the first semester exams.

There were some other areas of differences that were mentioned by individual informants only once in the interviews. These included: understanding assignments; giving oral presentations; using the University library; reading textbooks and reference books; and the style of assessments.

#### *Referencing books and articles*

One significant omission from students' responses in this study is worth reporting. Whilst the issue of appropriate referencing of books and articles often came up in the literature and in studies done by other researchers, it did not emerge in the interviews with any of the informants. One possible explanation is that there are different perceptions about the issue of plagiarism. For example, in Chinese writing, a well-known quote is understood or presumed to be common knowledge, and therefore need

not to be specifically referenced in written work (Cortazzi & Jin 1997). Another possibility is that informants in this study were not aware that quoting in written work without referencing is a form of plagiarism because of their lack of experience in this area. However, it is apparent that plagiarism is a major issue in Australian universities. International students need to be explicitly educated to use the referencing systems as required in Australian universities, and assumptions of plagiarism should not be made simply because no reference was given in written work. Clearly, information and guidance in this regard will be useful in the transition period.

## 5.6 Discussion and Conclusion

The academic adjustment experiences required by international students to achieve success in their first year study at VU appear to be significant and have many individual aspects. However, there is some commonality evident which underpins these unique personal experiences. Most informants went through an initial stage of feeling lost, but then felt more confident and more settled either in the second semester or second year. A few initially experienced excitement because of the new environment or new freedom compared to the more structured previous educational experience, then become concerned as they realised the magnitude of the hidden academic demand expected of them and the need to develop new coping strategies.

As has been seen from the students' responses, *cultural differences* significantly impinged upon the academic adjustment experiences of those international Chinese Business students. However, most students interviewed attributed *language* as the cause for the difficulties of their academic experience. This is perhaps because language was the most obvious cause to be identified. Only one of the ten informants was *aware* that cultural difference was also playing a part. This highlights the need to promote awareness of cultural diversity in higher education both to students and institutions.

Most international students adjust by making more effort, which usually means spending more time on study. This is consistent with research findings at other

universities (Burke 1986; Burns 1991). Some students regard this adjustment experience as a form of personal development, although the majority of the informants were not aware of making an adjustment in the first year until they had gone through it. We suggest that by being aware of the differences which exist between the expectations of the educational systems, international students would be more involved and successful in the early years of higher education.

Simple stereotyping of international students as a homogenous group of 'Asian international students' or 'Chinese learners' is not helpful in facilitating the education of international students. However, having an understanding of the most common difficulties which beset international students may be helpful in better assisting them to make a smooth adjustment to study in Australia. Becoming aware of, and valuing, the cultural factors that underpin the academic adjustment of international students would be of great benefit in facilitating mutual understanding and respect for all students in Australian universities. It can be claimed that when their previous educational experiences, culture and values are understood, acknowledged and valued, their academic adjustment is most likely to be facilitated.

Chapter 6 will discuss the implications of the findings of the investigation presented here, also concluding the dissertation.



*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
T.S. Eliot*

To recap, the elements of the research questions set out for this study are: what are the experiences of international students, how did they adjust, and what are the factors which underpin their adjustment? This chapter will discuss the findings of the study. It will discuss the emerging themes by exploring the inherent patterns of academic adjustment experiences, the process of academic adjustment, and those successful strategies used for academic adjustment. Further, it will consider the implications for staff, students and the host institution of the findings, and make some recommendations for future practice.

### **6.1 Emerging pattern of academic adjustment experiences**

The results of the study have suggested that the academic experiences of international students during their first year at VU are very different from their previous educational experiences. Some of these new experiences are similar to those of local students in that, for the majority of the informants, a period of transition from secondary school to tertiary education is inevitable. However, international students have some quite different experiences because, in addition, they need to make adjustments to the requirements of a different social culture, to access and use an unfamiliar language, to meet different expectations in the academic milieu, and to accommodate to different ways of teaching and learning.

The experiences are unique for individual informants and it has been found that their experiences do not necessarily fit neatly into the theories presented in the literature

reviews. For example, as discussed previously, the U shape theory (Lysgaard 1955; Oberg 1960) highlighted the honeymoon, hostility, humour and home stages of the adjustment stages or process of sojourn to a new culture. However, the responses of the informants in this study indicate that the majority of them did not experience an initial honeymoon stage. Most of them recounted that the first semester or first year was the hardest time for them in their study at VU. This 'skipping' or omission of the initial phase might have been due to the orientation and welcoming phase of their course of study being quite brief, or because some of the informants did not arrive early enough to engage with the orientation programs before the formal course commenced. Consequently once the courses had commenced, the demands of reading, understanding course materials and participation in course work quickly fell onto these students, overriding any 'honeymoon' phase.

Most informants experienced the initial shock of finding that their expectations of what university study was imagined to be, compared to what it actually required, were quite different. In addition, the expectations placed by the university on students were quite different to what these informants had anticipated. Strategies that had worked for them at home did not quite seem to work at VU. This point is further elaborated in Figure 6.1.

Whilst these differences posed significant challenges to this cohort of international students, their responses indicated that the majority of them successfully adjusted their expectations and approaches to studying. They took initiatives and made changes in the way they perceived and carried out their study, they changed their perception of the role of the lecturers and modified the way in which they interacted with the staff, and finally they successfully adapted to the unfamiliar teaching methods. Most students found that while some of the old ways of studying were working for them, other ways that were not satisfactory and had to be changed. For example, the expectation of the teaching staff providing all the material for learning that was common in their previous experience, was not met. This required the students to make a significant adjustment about the expectations of teaching and learning, suggesting that students in Australia are expected to be more independent in their learning. A deeper level of implication is that

the curricula in Australian universities are structured in a way that only permits the formal contact hours to cover the framework of the course and an outline of subjects. Students are expected to have, or obtain, the relevant background knowledge, to independently do research on the relevant subject matter, and to go into the world to find out more about the applications of the theories covered in the course.

By contrast to the students' previous experiences, a majority of the workload of a student in Australia is in the non-contact hours. Understandably, students commented on the apparently greater degree of freedom they experienced in studying and living in Australia. They commented that just 12 hours of contact hours seemed to be a light workload, but, in fact, the hidden workload is that for each contact hour, an additional three hours at least is needed. This time is needed for reading and researching before lectures and tutorials, and consolidating ideas afterwards. This type of expectation is intrinsic in Australian academic culture, and in the experience of this cohort of students, it was seldom spelt out for students. This made the planning of their learning activities considerably more complicated. Students therefore, had to take a semester or so to experience these hidden demands, then work out the expectations themselves. It was like working out a jigsaw puzzle without a picture as a guide. As one international student commented in a related study, what was expected of them was never made explicit (Aspland 1999). Indeed, this is just like the norms in any culture; they are never explicit, but are understood, and are learnt through practice (Furnham & Bochner 1986; Hofstede 1991).

As analysed in Chapter 4, and interpreted in Chapter 5, the experiences of this cohort of international students adjusting to study at VU are those of individuals. However, it has been observed that there are certainly major issues and patterns of their adjustment that are also fairly universal. For example, this investigation has shown that the academic experiences of all individual students at VU are not the same as those of the previous studies in their home countries. For the group as a whole, the major differences are in language, culture, expectations, and teaching and learning approaches. Furthermore, from the responses of the informants, it became apparent that the majority initially were ill prepared in the sense that their study at VU is not necessarily an extension of their previous

education. Whilst it is true that advancing their educational qualification is an extension of their previous education, it is not quite so true in that they are studying in a different educational system, and in quite a different academic culture. The new culture at times seemed to be exactly the opposite of that in which they were previously educated, and with which they were previously familiar and comfortable (Cortazzi & Jin 1997). This represents their initial shock stage.

**Student’s previous orientation    Expectation of tertiary student    Adjustment required**

<p><i>A culture of mutual dependence</i></p> <p>Dependence on teacher for learning materials</p> <p>Students listen to teacher in class</p> <p>Detailed instructions for subjects provided by teacher</p> <p>Formalised respect for the teacher</p> <p>Hard work equates to good achievement</p> <p>An understanding of the requirements and demands for success</p>	<p><i>A culture of independence</i></p> <p>Independence from teacher for accessing learning materials</p> <p>Students are expected to actively participate in discussion</p> <p>Frameworks and outlines only are provided</p> <p>Informal respect for the staff</p> <p>Ability, insight and time management necessary for good achievement</p> <p>A new set of understandings, which are implicit, are required.</p>	<p><i>A significant cultural adjustment</i></p> <p>Developing greater skills for seeking appropriate learning materials</p> <p>Making an effort to participate voluntarily in class</p> <p>Developing skills for uncovering the hidden demands and requirements</p> <p>Personal comfort in ways of addressing and approaching staff</p> <p>Development of added academic skills rather than just more hard work</p> <p>Shift in understanding, especially of the hidden demands and requirements of success</p>
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**Figure 6.1 Patterns of the academic adjustment of international students**

Most informants reported that the first year or first semester was the most crucial time for their academic success. They realised that there were differences between the ways they used to study and the new demands of studying at VU. They tried to make efforts to adjust to the differences in the new learning environment. As illustrated in Figure 6.1, the patterns of the adjustment experiences can be summarised as the following: students come with

their previous orientation and background, they became aware of the differences studying at VU, then made adjustment in their expectations of university study, and made effort to meet the expectations upon them by the University.

As summarised in the Figure 6.1, it became quite apparent from the informants' responses that many aspects of their academic experiences are significantly different from what they were familiar with in previous orientations. Further, in most cases, the experiences are the exact opposite of what they were familiar with, and which were embedded in their familiar educational culture. Therefore, it requires the students to make major cultural shifts in their academic orientations to the new and unfamiliar educational culture.

## **6.2 Process of academic adjustment**

There is no consensus as to the process of academic adjustment either from the informants' responses or from the analysis, because the adjustment experiences are quite individual. However, in general, the process may involve the following four activities. There is the initial shock when unexpected differences cause cultural tension in a student's daily activities. The second stage is becoming aware of the differences, and becoming aware of the expectations upon a student in an Australian university. The third stage normally involves making some necessary changes, especially in making effort and devoting time to meet the unfamiliar expectations placed upon them as students. The final stage is eventually feeling at ease with study at VU and life in Australia in general. Table 6.1 summarises the general process or stages of the adjustment of international students.

Stage	Experience	Confidence	Competence
1. Shock	Coping with the cultural differences involved in daily activities	Low	Surviving mode, need to understand the system
2. Awareness	Realising the differences, moving from unknown to knowing the differences	growing	Understanding about oneself in the system
3. Change	Making active changes to succeed, taking action to bridge the differences	gaining	Engaging with the system
4. Competence	Being able to function comfortably in the new system, and retain some of own cultural norms.	high	Thriving mode, using skills and knowledge in the new system

**Table 6.1 General process or stages of the academic adjustment of international students**

Source: Adapted from Morgan & Beaty 1997, 'The World of the Learner' in Marton, Hounsell & Entwistle, eds, *The Experience of Learning* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, p.234.

It emerged from the informants' responses that there is no uniformity in terms of the number of stages, the intensity, or the length of each stage they had gone through. Furthermore they did not necessarily go through a particular stage at the same rate. Whilst Table 6.1 illustrates the general process of an academic adjustment, an individual student may go through all four stages or only some of the stages, with the intensity or the length of each stage varying from individual to individual.

### 6.3 Successful strategies for academic adjustment

The informants generally suggested strategies which were relevant to their own experiences in making a successful academic adjustment. For example, study in a group worked for some informants, and they therefore highly recommend group study to future new students. However, if they had used friends as networks to help them with study or selecting subjects, the involvement of friends was recommended to future new students. Other individual advice was to mingle with local students, ask teachers for help, and use resources, such as library, the subject guides, newspapers, and TV news to broaden the learning horizon. Whilst these are strategies found useful in certain cases only, the range of ideas is valuable as they give some ideas of the type of strategy an international student might attempt. More generally, advice on learning English before coming to study at VU, making extra effort, and working hard are consistently given to new students as strategies to adjust well. An insightful strategy suggested by one informant was to realise very early in the semester that studying at VU is not necessarily the same as that experienced in previous study situation. This realisation is very important in taking the first step to *actively* and *effectively* adjusting to study at VU.

### 6.4 Implications for the students

As revealed by the informants, most of them were not aware of making conscious adjustment until they had worked through it. What is suggested here is that being aware of the differences in language, culture, expectations and teaching and learning approaches is very important in making a successful adjustment. As Chan and Drover (1997) emphasised, students should be aware of the significance of the cultural differences involved in teaching and learning, and students need to be aware or made aware of these differences, and adjust to them.

The students' underlying cultural values regarding education affect their behaviour in the teaching and learning context. These values, being formed long before they entered the VU course, take time to adjust. Clearly language is most obvious; it is easy to

recognise, and is open for direct effort to improve. Culture, by contrast, is not so obvious. However, recognising its effects and being aware of the differences in cultural values helps students to develop strategies that are conducive to success. For example, two of the informants commented that ‘teachers talk, students listen in class’, revealing their deeply ingrained Chinese behaviour. This showed that a few students recognised the cultural factors underlying their learning behaviour, and were thus able to modify their actions in class.

Knowledge about the adjustment patterns and process will enable international students to more easily obtain a sense of ‘normality’ in the Australian environment, and so remove the fear of the unknown. As pointed out by McInnis and James (1995), ‘gaining a sense of the expectations and standards is a critical issue for first year students in the first semester, particularly in the early stages when many students feel insecure’ (p.10). This awareness will enable students to have a feeling of being in control, and therefore to actively plan and implement learning activities enabling successful adjustment to study at VU.

## **6.5 Implications for the staff**

Teaching international students involves the teaching staff, administration and international students in the different area of cross-cultural communication. Successful cross-cultural communications can only result from understanding and effort from all parties involved. Awareness by staff, both academic and administrative, of the different value systems, and the different expectations that students have of the staff, coupled with the initial expectations of students themselves about the interaction, are crucial to the planning of inclusive curricula which can facilitate diverse student learning.

As McInnis and James (1995) pointed out: ‘Students will perform best and be most satisfied with teaching – when they are acknowledged as active learners whose previous knowledge and skills are recognised’ (p.10). The implication here for staff is that they should respect students for their individual learning needs, and acknowledge and value



students' previous educational backgrounds and cultural heritage. This will aid them to develop inclusive curricula which will allow international students to use their cultural knowledge and skills to benefit all students. However, this is not an easy task in the current climate of shrinking resources, mass education and extensive use of educational technology. As a result, successful teaching of international students does not purely rest with academic staff. It is also the remit of administrative staff since it requires a holistic approach by the university. It is also aided by policy directions from higher levels in the university system. With appropriate strategies in place, international students can play a more active role in the internationalisation of higher education. In this way the implications of initiatives such as this can go far beyond international students themselves; it can be extended to local students from diverse cultural backgrounds, in other words, all students.

## **6.6 Implications for the institution**

Victoria University has a diverse student population with over a third of its students having non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) and 60 per cent having a non-English speaking heritage (at least one parent born overseas in a non-English speaking country) (Borland & Pearce 1999, p.5). In addition, the large number of international students now greatly enriches this cultural diversity. The results of this investigation are very relevant to the unique situation of VU's diverse student population. Effort put into understanding the breadth and depth of the experiences of international students can give an institution an advantage of more deeply understanding the situation of local students who have different values, expectations, and ways of learning. As a result, the university will be able to implement policies and practices that meet the needs of a large number of students and meet a range of student needs.

It is important to understand more clearly, and at a deeper level, the learning orientations and values of international students. This study has been a contribution in unlocking some of the underlining issues in the cross-cultural teaching and learning situations. Furthermore, it has been claimed that 'International students would like to go

and study where their own style of learning is understood and respected' (Chan & Drover 1997, p.59), which has obvious economic implications for an institution.

Since the major empirical point of this study was undertaken, a number of changes have occurred at VU which are certain to have an impact on the outcome of any subsequent investigations. The increase in new enrolment of students means that class sizes are getting larger. The combination of the effects of mass higher education and increased use of technology means less personal contact hours for students. The growing demands of research and teaching adds time pressure on academic staff, competing for the time available for student consultations. As McInnis, James and Hartley (2000) noted:

An important element in the context for the study was the growing diversity of the student population as the number of university students increased. Participation in higher education had broadened and Australian entered a period of mass higher education in the first half of the 1990s. At the time, we commented that the notion of diversity was complex and extended beyond the usual differences in age, gender, place of living, ethnicity and socio-economic background, to include diversity in values, attitudes and expectations (p.1).

Finally, internationalisation of higher education is currently reflected in one very important Government initiative - the Core Graduate Attributes. The graduate attributes emerging for universities in the new century must include understanding and knowledge of other cultures. It has been suggested the institutions should cultivate their own multi-cultural student population (Volet 2001). As far as VU is concerned, the stated Core Graduate Attributes include: '[The graduates] should also have an international orientation, respecting other cultures and other languages', and the graduates should be able to 'work effectively within culturally diverse settings' (CGA Working Group 2001)

Such Core Graduate Attributes include notions of a graduate being a cultural ambassador for world peace and advancement. Understanding between cultures and understanding among people of different cultures will certainly enhance the

achievement of universal harmony. If success in education is about responsible future generation, then the human side is as equally important as the academic side.

## **6.7 Summary**

The significance of international education to Australian universities and Australia's future economic success as highlighted in this thesis, suggests that the success of international students and the success of educational programs have a favourable effect on the growth at local, national and international level. It is now generally accepted that international students are the clients of the export of Australian education. Understanding the issues involved in the education of international students is fundamental to the achievement of economic and educational growth through improved quality, and the education industry's ability to provide services at an international standard. In order to create standards at an international level, staff need to update their skills, knowledge and attitudes through cross-cultural training. Hence policies and strategies to increase knowledge in the area of cultural diversity in teaching and learning will enhance VU's position in international education.

International students from Asian countries face a range of unique difficulties in their studies in Australian universities: language, social, finance, cultural and academic (Ballard & Clanchy 1988; Tay & Smith 1990). Far too often international students and staff attribute language as the basis for all the difficulties students display. But the challenges international students face are not merely caused by language. In addition to language, deep-seated cultural influences play a significant role as well.

It is important that there is awareness of the significant cultural factors which impinge upon the learning experiences of international students, and that effective strategies are developed to facilitate the learning adjustment of international students. The importance of such awareness can not be over emphasised. Becoming aware involves both the learners and the teachers. It involves awareness of one's own embedded cultural values or orientations about learning, and, at the same time, developing awareness of other people's embedded cultural values and orientations. Then, for both the learners and teachers, it is

possible to consciously become aware of the cross cultural differences. This shared awareness will help to prepare both the students and the staff to promote effective learning in cross-cultural situations. It prepares the students to feel confident and to feel comfortable in the realisation that their experience is normal. Whilst accepting that it is all right to be different, students can work at strategies to adjust effectively to the new study demands at VU. The belief inherent in this work is that knowledge and understanding of the deeper cultural issues involved in higher education overall will help prepare students to actively adjust to their first year of study.

Clearly, awareness by staff is also very important. In many instances, stereotyping is very common, and a student can be judged on the basis of a group characteristic. Whilst this may be understandable practice when information is limited at institutional level regarding an individual student's attributes, it is not especially useful when attempting to identify the specific needs and characteristic of an individual student. If a staff member wants to assist an individual student in his or her learning, then much more sophisticated understanding needs to be involved. For example, the notion of a positive model is important, where acknowledging and valuing students' previous educational success is significant in building trust and positive relationships in teaching and learning situations. Advanced awareness of staff in this area enables them to actively assist students to adjust. As Ballard (1987) put it: 'We can not eliminate the process of the adjustment, but ease the extent, or length of the adjustment difficulty' (p.113).

The challenges of adjusting to study at an Australian university which face international students are still with us in the new century. Just as the informants in this study went through their unique adjustment, there will be future students continuing the journey like their predecessors. Hence, all parties who have a stake in teaching and learning for international students should support the notion of valuing cultural diversity. For the students, the benefits of successful engagement with education in Australia offers an opportunity to advance their educational status by obtaining a degree. For the staff, the benefits include expanding the horizon of their teaching and researching activities, and opportunities to rethink their teaching to meet the diverse needs of students across cultural

boundaries. For the institution, the benefits are economic gains and growth in the international sector of education. For the nation, it provides a showcase of the Australian way of life. For the population, it provides a chance to exchange cultural experiences and thereby to foster understanding among peoples and countries.

Australian universities can capitalise on the rich cultural resources that international students bring with them. In the current climate of internationalisation of education, there are vast opportunities to explore, such as curriculum development using the resources of international students for deeper understanding across cultures in social, educational and business contexts both onshore and offshore.

Further, because the population of Australia is multi-cultural, a deeper understanding of the needs of international students has the most immediate spin-off effect to the multi-cultural student population on domestic campuses. This is especially the case with VU, as previously indicated. Valuing cultural diversity of student learning, and facilitating their diverse learning needs, will enhance the sustained advancement of VU's position in higher education.

## **6.8 Directions for future research**

This study has been designed and carried out with the specific purpose of looking at students in a well-defined cohort at one university. The lessons learned and the implications that emerged from this study will contribute in a small way to enhancing the conditions under which international students in this setting make their way in higher education. Although it has already been stated that these understandings cannot be claimed to be in any way generalisable to other disciplines or other universities, there was enough commonality observed in the students' responses to suggest that there may be some fundamental issues associated with the transition experiences of international students.

Consequently, it is suggested that a useful extension to this work would be to repeat the investigations with a cohort of students from a discipline other than Business, and with

students from other universities. By concentrating on students from a Chinese Confucian cultural heritage in the first instance, there would be enough commonality of previous experience to make comparisons between universities and disciplines possible.

Finally, at a more detailed level, an investigation of the experiences of students from a common Chinese Confucian cultural heritage from different countries could be a revealing one. In countries such as China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, there may be subtle differences between the secondary schooling experiences that this study did not reveal, which may have significant implications for higher education experiences.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix A**

Appendix A contains a consent form which conforms to the Ethics committees requirements. It specifically advises the informants of their rights to withdraw from the study at any time without the study being jeopardised. It also ensures that informants have an understanding that their anonymity and confidentiality are safeguarded for the interests of both the research study and the informants.

## **Appendix B**

Appendix B contains an interview schedule which is based upon the six focus questions detailed in the methodology.

All the interviews were taken during the period from August 8, 1995 to September 11, 1995, in Room A336A, on Footscray Campus, Victoria University of Technology. The specific time of each interview was noted in each of the descriptions of the informant in the methodology.

## Interview schedule

### **1. Tell me about your previous study before enrolling in the Business course in Victoria University of Technology (VUT).**

What study did you do?

How long ago was that?

Where did you do the study?

### **2. Compare aspects of studying at VUT to your previous study in your home country?**

student - eg. studying approaches

teacher - eg. teaching approaches

curriculum - eg. lectures, tutorials, assignments and exams

milieu - eg. language,

family,

student/student interactions

student/staff interactions

value of education

value of educational achievement

custom in a accessibility of staff

2.1. What aspects of studying at VUT are very different from studying in your home country?

2.2. What aspects of studying at VUT are very similar to studying in your home country?

### **3. Tell me what did you do to make the academic adjustment to study at VUT?**

3.1. What were the things that were hardest to adjust to?

3.2. What were the things that were easiest to adjust to?

### **4. Can you describe any main stages you may have gone through in making the educational adjustment?**

4.1. Can you recall what it was like the first few days/weeks?

4.2. What is it like for you now?

### **5. What, in your opinion, are the reasons for the educational adjustment you need to make?**

5.1. How will you assess the degree of difficulty of the adjustment (easy, difficult or else)?

5.2. What, in your opinion, are the reasons for the ease (or difficulty) of the adjustment?

**6. What advice would you give for new students to adjust more easily to study at VUT?**

## Appendix C

Appendix C contains transcripts of interviews with the ten selected informants. Nine of the interviews were transcribed from audio recordings, while one of them was transcribed from notes as the informant preferred not be taped (Interview Number 6). The majority of these interviews were transcribed verbatim, but in some instances, tenses, contractions were modified to minimum degree in keeping with accepted academic practice (Hurworth, 1995). When this was necessary, great care was taken to maintain the authenticity of the interview. In addition, when informants responded in Mandarin, the translated text is shown in italics and (translation) is noted in brackets.



**Audrey**

**CZ** Where about did you do the Tafe course?

**Audrey** When I first came, I studied in Swinburne Tafe. I studied ten weeks English. Then I took a marketing course. I just studied for half a year because, in fact, I was not interested in the course.

**CZ** marketing course?

**Audrey** Yes. I just studied a few subjects related to the tourism course. In 1992, I think, I studied travel and tourism.

**CZ** So you arrived in 1992?

**Audrey** 1991, in April.

**CZ** In April, so the Tafe course was also in Swinburne?

**Audrey** You mean the tourism?

**CZ** The marketing.

**Audrey** Marketing in Swinburne.

**CZ** What about the tourism. Was that also in Swinburne?

**Audrey** No, it was not available in Swinburne. When I came, there were not many Tafes having this course, so I studied in Box Hill Tafe.

**CZ** Ok, before you came here, when you were in Hong Kong, what course did you finish?

**Audrey** I just finished secondary school?

**CZ** How many years was that?

**Audrey** Five years, and we call it secondary school. High school is Form Six and Seven, it's before university study.

**CZ** Five years. In China, the secondary school included five years as well at the time when I did my study. But now it's six years. We call it middle school.

**Audrey** So after you finish middle school, you directly go to university, or you have to study more?

**CZ** No. We finish middle school, then high school. Middle school include three years, and high school two years.

**Audrey** Oh, so five years is like secondary school in Hong Kong. After that, do you need to study more before you go to uni?

**CZ** No. It took ten years hard work, five years in primary school, five years in secondary school.

**Audrey** So in Hong Kong the study period is longer.

**CZ** How many years?

**Audrey** Six years in primary school, and five years in secondary school. Then you have to study for one or two years in order to get to university.

**CZ** What do you call that one or two years?

**Audrey** In Hong Kong now we get more universities, but before that we just got two universities, one is Chinese University, one is called Hong Kong University. If you want to go to the Chinese University, it's just one year study. If you want to study in Hong Kong University, you have to study for two years.

**CZ** Oh, I didn't know that. So the competition is very strong, isn't it.

**Audrey** Yes. But now it's easier to get in.

**CZ** You don't call the one year or two years high school.

**Audrey** We call it *preparation course* (translation).

**CZ** So, it's like the preparation for the university. And the one or two years depends on which university you want to get into.

**Audrey** But now. I do not know the situation.

**CZ** So, that was the time when you were studying. If you do one year or two years preparation course, do you still need to take an exam?

**Audrey** Yes.

**CZ** You still have to. So that was your previous study. Well, now you are in Australia, studying in VUT, how do you compare your previous study experience to your study experience here?

**Audrey** I haven't done any advanced course in Hong Kong. I just did the secondary school. It is quite different from here. Normally when we study in Hong Kong, we just listen, we seldom speak. Here it's quite different. Even though you just study in public school, the teacher let you talk a lot, especially opinions. But in Hong Kong, when I studied, I just listened.

**CZ** It's the same for me. I remember at the time when I did my study, we were required to sit quietly. So we were not allowed to talk or make noises.

**Audrey** Was the teacher serious?

**CZ** Yes, very strict. They were very strict in primary school. We were asked us to sit, you know, with our back straight and hands at the back. So, it was very strict. That was referring to the class situation. What about other aspects, like study requirements? For example, the lectures, tutorials, the assignments, exams... how do you compare your previous experience to current experience?

**Audrey** When I did my study, we didn't have assignment like here. Here, at the beginning, the lecturer will give us the assignment for the whole semester. But in my study in Hong Kong, everyday you had homework. You just finished it. We didn't need to do a lot of research. But maybe, this is just in secondary school. If you study in the preparation course or in Tafe, it's different.

**CZ** Ok. But what about your study in Tafe here in Australia, what sort of assignments did you have?

**Audrey** Are we talking about the study of tourism in Tafe? It's quite similar to here. In the beginning, you receive what you have to do. Then you just finish it, do your research and survey, things like that.

**CZ** Did you get chances to use the library while you were doing your secondary study in Hong Kong?

**Audrey** No. We seldom have library in school. If we had to look for the books, we went to public library. But it was seldom required to do that.

**CZ** So, that is the difference in terms of assignment. What about aspects like your classmates, the students, how do you compare classmates you had while you were studying Hong Kong and classmates here at VUT?

**Audrey** Maybe I'm an overseas student here, I seldom talk a lot to the local students here, but with the other overseas students. We are normally just like in a separate group. But I find that when I studied in Tafe, the students were closer compared to the university students. Maybe when we studied, the studying time was longer in school. But in here we just have twelve hours, and have different lectures, different tutorials, so it's hard to get together.

**CZ** So at Tafe, the whole group of students go to the same class?

**Audrey** Yes. So when I started study here, I felt bored, because all my friends went back to their home country.

**CZ** You mean the friends you met at Tafe?

**Audrey** Yes.

**CZ** What about other aspects? We looked at the students, assignments, what about staff, how do you compare the teachers you had before and the teachers here?

**Audrey** The teachers in Hong Kong, we were just afraid of the teachers. I was scared to talk with them. Maybe just because my age was younger in secondary school. You know, in Chinese tradition, we have to respect the teachers, so I was just afraid to talk to them.

**CZ** I had similar situation.

**Audrey** But now the situation is a little bit different. I have got a friend, she taught secondary school. But she told me there was great pressure for the teacher to teach because the students now don't respect the teachers like we did. But the school has a very high demand for teachers. In Hong Kong, last year when I went back to Hong Kong, a few teachers suicided.

**CZ** Why?

**Audrey** Because of the great pressure. And my friend taught for about half a year, then she quitted. She said there was great pressure. She also studies travel and tourism in here.

**CZ** Ok. So pressure, what sort of pressure?

**Audrey** She said maybe she taught the travel and tourism which was the new course in Hong Kong. She had to prepare a lot for the subject. And the school demanded you to prepare well, you had to teach well. *You had to teach students to learn perfectly well. But now the students won't listen. Last year, three teachers suicided.* (translation)

**CZ** *You mean the respect to teachers and close relationship between teachers and students are no longer there.* (translation)

**Audrey** *It's different nowadays.* (translation)

**CZ** *The world changes fast.* (translation) Ok, thank you for that.

Well, if we compare your previous experiences, it doesn't matter whether you have done advanced courses or not because you, as a student, come into this university, you come across different issues, what aspects of studying in here do you find very different from your previous experiences?

**Audrey** I think study style is quite different, because in Hong Kong, I think, you study, the teachers will give you as many study guide as they could. But in here, you have to do it by yourself. You have to get information or do research, survey to get different types of information. That's very different.

**CZ** Ok. What aspects are similar to your previous experiences?

**Audrey** Aspect similar? I couldn't ...

**CZ** Maybe it's all different. That's why you can't think of any.

**Audrey** But I think it is easier for students from Hong Kong to adjust, because in Hong Kong the education is a little bit from British one, so it maybe easier.

**CZ** So the educational system in some aspects is similar, and it's easy for students to adjust. It could be true, because with the case of China, it would be very different, because China followed Russian educational system. Australia, I think, followed British. Ok, thank you for that.

Since previously, you did your study, there are aspects that are quite different from study in VUT, for example, you mentioned the learning style, you've got to do a lot of research by yourself. And in your previous study, you did not talk much, but now you've got to participate. What did you do to adjust yourself to study at VUT?

**Audrey** In fact, this point (participation) is difficult to adjust, because for me, I seldom talk in front of other people. I think I already changed a bit. Because when I did travel and tourism course, I had to do a lot of presentations, so I get better now to speak in front of other people. But I'm still nervous.

**CZ** It's true. For example, when I go to class the first few times, I would feel nervous as well, not necessary in the class, but before I go. It's only natural.

**Audrey** In here they require the work to be typed and very professionally presented. We have to learn a lot of other skills, like typing, computer skills.

**CZ** Have you used a computer before ?

**Audrey** No, I had no idea how to use it. So for me, when I came here, it was quite difficult. I found it quite difficult.

**CZ** I can recall my first day in the computer room up on the fifth floor in K Building. And the lecturer was talking about different things. I could understand the words, but I just couldn't put them into action. And I was completely lost. While I saw other of my classmates doing things and things change on their computer screen. Mine was just blank. I felt very bad afterwards because I felt lost. I couldn't work out what was going on.

**Audrey** I got the same situation. But when you studied in university in China, you did not use computer or did typing.

**CZ** I never used a computer then. Now they are introducing computers into universities. But when I did my course from 82 to 86, I never used a computer.

How did you find out about the requirements for your assignments, for example, how did you know they require you to present professionally.

**Audrey** Normally, if it is available, the previous students have some assignments or reports in the library, I would try to have a look at the style. The lecturers would also tell us how to do it. And when I studied in the ten weeks English, ESL, they taught us how to write a report. We learnt it from ESL course.

**CZ** So, that's really helpful.

**Audrey** Yes, it's helpful. I also learnt how to use a computer.

**CZ** That's really useful. Well, what sort of things do you find very difficult to adjust?

**Audrey** I think the way you study is quite difficult to adjust, because when I came here I thought all the study information would be provided by the lecturer.

**CZ** So you thought that the lecturer would give you the information.

**Audrey** Yes.

**CZ** How long did it take you to realize that you have to do it yourself?

**Audrey** Oh, I know. When I studied ESL, I already had to do some research, and they trained students quite well in this aspect.

**CZ** So in the ESL course, they taught you not only language but also some of the study skills.

**Audrey** Yes, lots of other skills. So I'm glad I studied ESL before I took other course.

**CZ** What sort of things were easier for you to adjust?

**Audrey** It must be related to the study, mustn't it?  
Easier, maybe I think, besides the things I mentioned,

**CZ** the educational system?

**Audrey** Yes. The other things are OK for me. During the class, you have to participate, you have to talk with others, it is a difficult one for me to adjust. The others are OK.

**CZ** The others are OK.

**Audrey** Yes.

**CZ** So in terms of doing your reading, preparing your assignments, they are OK.

**Audrey** Now, it's not a great problem for me. I still got problem, but sometime I can do it.

**CZ** So, that's good. Well, thank you for that.

Well, if you recall your experiences of coming from Hong Kong, the previous educational system, and now settling into studying in Australia at VUT, the stage you have gone through. Is there any major stage you have gone through?

**Audrey** You need to study. When I first came here, I already found that it is quite different, I have to get used to the way they teach here. Then I got through the Tafe study. It is different again, because in ESL, the teachers knew that you came here for the first time, they would look after you more. They would give you information about your living here or how to communicate with others. But in Tafe it was purely study. The lecturer would not tell you about... they would just tell you about study, they would not talk a lot about other things. So it is another change when I changed from ESL to Tafe course.

**CZ** When you say they would only talk about your study, not other things, for example, what ...? I didn't quite understand.

**Audrey** Yes, in ESL course, if I had some problem it was not related to the study, I could ask the teacher how to do it. But in Tafe, if you had some problem it was not related to the study, normally they would not... we would not ask the teacher any more.

**CZ** Oh, I see. You mean in ESL, for example, if you wanted to know, find out where a place is, you could go to your teacher for help. But in Tafe, you could not do that because they only look after you in aspect of study. Oh, I see.

**Audrey** Yes. And in Tafe, I mentioned before the relationship between students was closer.

**CZ** OK.

**Audrey** When I come here, I expect we will meet many friends. And we will get together well. But in fact it is not. I think for me, in university, it's hard for me to find a close friend or ...

**CZ** Do you have any family or relative here?

**Audrey** Yes, a few relatives, but my family is in Hong Kong.

**CZ** For example, if you have difficulty, could you go to your relatives for help?

**Audrey** Not for study.

**CZ** Not for study.

**Audrey** So, last semester, I got some help from you. I'm very happy.

**CZ** But that's OK, because that's what my job is.

Well, if you recall the first few days when you were in university at VUT, what was it like for you, The first few days, or the first few weeks?

**Audrey** I felt bored, because in the lecture, you just listen. and they didn't... normally, when I was in class I seldom talk, but I listen what they talk. In the lecture, they didn't teach. So I felt bored studying in university. But in tutorial, because you just got one hour. I find it quite different from Tafe study. And for the first semester, I studied the compulsory subjects, most of them were business subjects. It was another reason I felt bored.

**CZ** Ok, Yes, that's easy to understand because if you put anything compulsory, which means students haven't got a choice about whether to do it or not, they tend to have that resentment. Well, what is it like for you now?

**Audrey** I feel better, because I nearly finish all the compulsory subjects. Now I study more about the tourism subjects. And I did the minors, the electives.

**CZ** So, travel and tourism, that's a very interesting subject, because it's the area that is growing. Ok. Well, if we have a look at your experiences of studying in university, what do you think, in your opinion, are the reasons that you need to make some adjustment to the study?

**Audrey** Yes, you have to open your mind, the reason, is that... ?

**CZ** Why do you think you have to make the adjustment in order to adapt to study here?

**Audrey** I think because the study in university is more demanding. So you have to do more, also like research or something like that. It's easier studying in Tafe.

**CZ** Ok. So I reckon that you are very fortunate. After you've done your secondary school in Hong Kong, you came and you did ESL and Tafe course in here. That sort of prepared you for university study.

**Audrey** Yes, because I worked for a long time, then I study again, it is a bit hard for me. So if you worked step by step, it's better. If you go just study ESL, then you straight go to the university, it's a bit hard.

**CZ** Ok. So you took a good step preparing yourself.

Well, as you know that we have quite a few number of students like you and me used to be, coming here to study. So they will all face similar situation like you and me did because we come from a different educational background and educational experiences. Since you have gone through the process. What sort of advice will you give to new students to help them to make it easier?

**Audrey** Many students think they studied in their home country. But the education is quite different. If they think they come from there to here, they want to study university directly. I think it's better for them to take maybe half a year or one semester to study English, because it will be helpful. But sometimes, it depends on which school. Some school just teaches you English, it is good for your language, but the other aspects, like before you study in further education. It helps.

**CZ** That's good advice, so take some preparation course. What other advice?

**Audrey** I couldn't think of others.

**CZ** Ok. Well, thank you very much for the information. It will be helpful for us to look at the experiences and maybe work out the common stage students go through, the common areas students go through so we can help students to adjust. Thank you very much.

**Audrey** Also if the school have other assistance, because like me, I got problem in writing, if there is some department which helps students to look after their assignments, just grammar or something. I think it's better. So, some sort of assistance to help students.

**Burnie**

**CZ** How long have you been in Australia?

**Burnie** About three years and more.

**CZ** What study did you do before you study in VUT?

**Burnie** When I finished my secondary school in Hong Kong. I just went to work, and did some part-time course in some Tertiary Education, like the university or college in Hong Kong, and I did some cookery course which related to the hotel industry.

**CZ** So when you finished the secondary school, how many years was the secondary school?

**Burnie** You mean how many years?

**CZ** How many years did you take studying?

**Burnie** Five years.

**CZ** Five years, how long ago was that?

**Burnie** Five years ago.

**CZ** Five years ago, so that was 1990. When you say you did the preparation course for tertiary education, how long was the course?

**Burnie** Each course was very short, part time, not full time course, because I needed to work the day time and go to school at night. It was just part time course. When you finish, you get a certificate or award.

**CZ** You studied in Hong Kong before. Now you come to Australia, studying in VUT, so we need to go back to your memory to compare your previous experience and your study experience in VUT. How do you compare?

**Burnie** I think it's quite, totally different, the teaching style, teaching methods are quite different. In Hong Kong, it's more *spoon feeding*. They give you a lot of things, then you have to digest yourself. They won't care how much you get, they give you everything. (translation) They finish the job, then that's it.

**CZ** Ok, so that's in Hong Kong. What about in here?

**Burnie** In here, it's quite different. The teaching methods and teaching style are quite different, even in Tafe, because I studied English for about ten weeks in Tafe before studying in VUT. The teachers there were quite nice and helpful. I don't know whether we are overseas students. We pay the money, they treat us very nice, quite helpful, and something like that. I think the Tafe is more easier than VUT, the university.

**CZ** So you studied in Tafe for ten weeks.

**Burnie** Yes.

**CZ** Which Tafe?

**Burnie** Gordon, in Geelong. But here, the VUT, it's quite flexible, because you can arrange your own time by yourself, which day you want a day off. And the lecturer, most of the lecturers are Ok, some of them are quite hard to understand, quite hard to get the meaning for.

**CZ** What aspects of studying do you think at VUT are quite different?

**Burnie** The teaching method. Because I don't know. I haven't done any university course in Hong Kong, so I can't compare the difference between the VUT and Hong Kong's university.

**CZ** That's all right because most students would be in a similar situation as you, so I'm just interested in your previous study experience to your study experience here.

**Burnie** University student, if you become a university student, it's totally different from a secondary student because if you're university student, you must do a lot of reading, and do the assignment. If you are a high school or secondary student, you don't need to do the reading, even for exam. Two or three days before the exam, you can cope with the exam. But university student, you do the reading everyday or before the university, enough time to prepare for the exam, or you fail the exam. That's a difference.

**CZ** Ok. How do you find the lectures and tutorials? Did you have any of these in your previous study?

**Burnie** I don't know. What do you mean how to find?

**CZ** Did you have lectures or tutorials in Hong Kong, or are lectures or tutorials new forms of teaching to you?

**Burnie** I didn't have the kind of experience because before I came here, when I was studying, I only attended classes, no tutorials at all.

**CZ** Ok. So, how did you recall the first days you went into the lecture, what did you do?

**Burnie** It was real hard for me. It was a real hard time, because I mentioned before it's quite, totally different. All were new things, someone sitting next to you was a new face, so I felt like a stranger. And it was very hard to catch up the content of the lecture because English is used here. My English wasn't quite well at that moment. But at the moment it's very well. English was a problem for me at that moment. And the note-taking was hard.

**CZ** What about going to the tutorial the first few times? If you recall it, the first few times or first few weeks when you went to the tutorial, what happened?

**Burnie** I just kept silent. Even if I had done the tutorial exercise, the tutor asked the questions, I just kept silent, and sat at the side.

**CZ** Why, why do you think?



**Burnie** I don't know, because I felt myself a stranger, and all the things were different and I did not have many friends. So that was the experience.

**CZ** You said you prepared the tutorial work. And when the tutor asked the question, did you know the work?

**Burnie** Yes. Except one tutorial, the food and beverage, because I was a chef in Hong Kong before studying here, and the tutorial was about the cooking. For myself I consider just a piece of cake. Yes, so I put a lot of effort. I felt quite interested in the cooking in the tutorial. So I could do very well in that particular tutorial.

**CZ** It's very good, it makes you feel a bit comfortable.

**Burnie** Yes.

**CZ** What areas of studies at VUT are similar to your previous study experience in Hong Kong?

**Burnie** Food and Beverage, because I have done some course in Food and Beverage, that is only one thing similar to Hong Kong.

**CZ** Ok. That's really good, because you can prepare yourselves for that course, so that's a good foundation for you.

We looked at the differences. Well, since some aspects are very different, you mentioned teaching style, things like attending lectures, note-taking, tutorials. What did you do to adjust yourself to the study?

**Burnie** Just every day, after school, go home, sit down, do a lot of reading, a lot of preparation for the next lecture, next tutorial. I mean, that was only I could do for the first semester, for second semester in VUT, I felt more comfortable, *used to, so I didn't do a lot* (translation) reading for the lecture. Then studying here for a long time, more and more... *Now I'm quite used to it.*(translation)

**CZ** *More used to it.* (translation)

What did you do with things like note-taking? What did you do to learn the skill?

**Burnie** In the lecture, just pick up the main points, write down the main points, just put more time to listening rather than writing the lecture notes. That's it. For example, if I can get the lecture note, the transparency for the lecturer, then I just can forget writing, just concentrate on listening, do the reading after that. I think it's more useful than do the writing in the lecture because when you do the writing in the lecture, you just have no time for listening to what the lecturer is saying.

**CZ** Well, what about things like going to the tutorial? How do you feel going to the tutorial now?

**Burnie** I think it's quite different. The feeling is quite different because I've been studying here for about two, three years now, I have a lot of friends now, even attending tutorial, new tutorial, I know a lot of friends there, and not like a stranger there, so more participation.

**CZ** Ok. So, for example, if someone or your tutor ask you a question, What's your... ?

**Burnie** Just... it depends on the situation, sometimes I just keep silent, and ask another person's answer, then I can put down my answer. Then we compare, we choose the better... best one. Yes, I think in this way I can learn more than answering the question. That's my... point of view.

**CZ** So we looked at things like tutorials, teaching styles. Ok. How do you compare... you mentioned things were quite different when you first arrived. What about when you were studying in Hong Kong, your classmates, the student and student relationships, and studying in VUT here, the student and student relationship?

**Burnie** The student relationship, most of the things, I mean the relationship side, most of the things are quite similar, but some, just a bit different because in Hong Kong, I got a home in Hong Kong, and even the friends, you are not close to each other, but just only for the very, very best friend. But here, you're overseas, you study overseas, so friends are more important than your family. When you got trouble, friends will help each other.

**CZ** Yes, that's very important.

**Burnie** Yes. *We make friends from all over the world.* (translation)

**CZ** It's making friends from all over the world.

**Burnie** *It's because we Chinese are overseas, every one of us* (translation) help each other.

**CZ** *Very good.* (translation)

*There is another one, it's also Chinese saying: we rely on our parents at home, but friends away from home.* (translation)

**Burnie** *That's it. Yes, we rely on our parents at home, it says the same message.* (translation)

**CZ** How do you compare the staff, the teachers in Hong Kong, the staff in here?

**Burnie** The first thing I found, the difference between Hong Kong and here is that there are different nationalities here, but in Hong Kong, most of staff are Chinese, Cantonese, living in Hong Kong, just a few are from overseas. If you study in university, the lecturer, or the professor my come from overseas, and department head or dean come from overseas. That's quite different.

**CZ** Yes, that's true.

**Burnie** But, you know, something is the same. Studying in Hong Kong we used English, here we use English, so it's the same.

**CZ** Any other aspect?

**Burnie** Yes, in Hong Kong, it's quite convenient to go to school. You can just catch public transport, but here it's quite different, even not all the students, but a lot of students have got cars, and most of the overseas student drive to school, they do not depend on public transport.

**CZ** So we had a look at the differences, some of similarities. Is there any major stage you think you have gone through since you first arrived until now, three years?

**Burnie** I think I already catch up the style and teaching methods. Yes, because I feel I already have improvement than first studying here, because for the first three semesters, each semester, I got a fail subject. From last semester, I passed all subjects, and I even got credit.

**CZ** That's really good.

**Burnie** For myself, I can save a lot of money.

**CZ** And time.

**Burnie** Yes. *Time and money.* (translation)

**CZ** Ok. You mentioned your learning style. What do you think you have learnt over the three years about your learning style?

**Burnie** I learnt time is important. You must prepare everything well, and utilise all the time, because every semester we do four subjects. And one subject got a lot of stuff you need to do and you need to prepare. So time is an important factor for our studying. That's all. That's the major thing I learnt from study here. And the new knowledge, a lot of new things. And I know more than just in Hong Kong. I mean you go overseas, can see more, learn more, know more.

**CZ** Well, what do you think are the reasons that you have to make some adjustments in order to get used to studying in VUT? What are the reasons?

**Burnie** You mean for studying here, because for the future, because when I was working in Hong Kong, I feel my qualification, my career is limited. I want to extend my education.

**CZ** You are talking about the reason why you study here. I mean what do you think are the reasons you need to make the change from the previous study experience to now study at VUT, the adjustment?

**Burnie** I don't know.

**CZ** If we recall, in Hong Kong, you are used to certain teaching style, certain learning style, and now studying at VUT, most aspects are different, you need to make the adjustment, the study adjustment. What do you think are the reasons that you need to make the adjustment?

**Burnie** Not to fail subjects in the exam. And try to do the best, because if you don't adjust to cope with the situation, then you will be falling behind. So that's the reason.

**CZ** Ok. And there are many international students like you coming here to study, coming from different backgrounds, language background, and cultural background, what advice will you give to the new students so they can adjust more easily?

**Burnie** Prepare well before coming here studying. And the advice is do a lot of research in their own country about the school which they want to study in. And ask someone who got previous overseas experience, and go to find some books or some information about that country. And, that's what I think, they must prepare.

**CZ** So that's the knowledge. What other preparation do you think they can do?

**Burnie** The language. The language is important if you want to study overseas. So you must learn that language before you have a mind to go overseas.

**CZ** What other advice?

...

**CZ** Ok, thank you very much for your time.

**Colin**

**CZ** You did your study in Hong Kong and Tafe?

**Colin** I studied in Hong Kong, not Tafe in Hong Kong, but it was up to Form Five, equivalent to Year Eleven here. I studied Form Six for half a year, but I didn't complete it, because it was science subject, which is actually, in fact, I finally lost interest in it, which meant very hard. It didn't matter how much effort I put in, I was not interested at that time.

**CZ** How many years ago was that?

**Colin** Which one?

**CZ** Form Six, the study when you finished in Hong Kong?

**Colin** When I finished Form Five, I studied Form Six for half a year, then I went out to work. I didn't know the reason, I just wanted to go out to work, because many of my friends were working. I was a little bit attracted by the money they had, and they could buy things.

**CZ** Some of the freedom.

**Colin** I was not thinking of the future. Finally, then one day, I just realised I'm not qualified to going up further to any sort of career, and also as a matter of fact, I'm not particular in any area. So I decided to save the money and come to Australia to study further, because it was very hard to study in university for me at that moment because my studying is not quite good in Hong Kong. I was in the middle, but there were only two universities, and it was very, very highly competitive. I can say only those people who can get average high distinction can go to university. So I was not on the list.

**CZ** I heard about that, it's very competitive.

**Colin** But now it's better, they've got four or five universities, which was Tafe before, and the Government offer them to be called university, university standard. Talking back to why I came here.

**CZ** The study you did at Form Five and Form Six. Which year was that?

**Colin** It was 87. I graduated from my Form Five. I quitted in 88 at Form Six.

**CZ** So that was the time you finished your study.

**Colin** Then there's a gap between here and my finishing school in Hong Kong. I worked until July of 92. And luckily I saved one year school fees and a little bit expenses, and my Mum supported some of the total for me. I came here to study associate diploma of Business Management in Holmes College in the city. At that time, I was still not sure which direction I was going. I was just influenced by one of my friends who was studying Business Computing in the Holmes College, he is my very close friend. He suggested me to do such a short course, which will gain relatively great benefit, in terms of that short period of one year of intensive course. So I decided to study. I did not know what I wanted to study. I did not want to study computer.

**CZ** So you did associate diploma in Computer in Holmes College.

**Colin** Yes, in Holmes College. I didn't want to study computer.

**CZ** Was that the computer course?

**Colin** No, it was Business Management, because at that time, one of my flatmates was studying Business Management, too. I asked him how the course was, then I went to study Business Management, because I could not find an interest in other subjects like computing, other sort of area. I haven't decided to study Banking and Finance until just this one or two years.

**CZ** So it takes time to work out what you want to do.

**Colin** Yes.

**CZ** That's really interesting. I'll probably talk to you a bit more about that.

You studied in Hong Kong before, I want you to have a look at the areas like the educational system, the teachers, the classmates and requirements for students etc... how do you compare your previous experiences to you experiences studying in VUT?

**Colin** Very different, the difference is when we were studying in Hong Kong, we were in secondary school, everything was organised by teachers. The homework, exam and the readings were all organised by them.

**CZ** Can you give one example. When you say all organised by them, what... ?

**Colin** For example, when I studied science, they were just referring to certain pages for that chapter. At the end of the class, they would give you a certain exercise, they would show you sometimes when question was hard. But then we didn't do much self-study. That's the difference.

**CZ** You mean after work, after the class?

**Colin** Yes. We were just sort of chasing the requirement of the teacher because otherwise we didn't have extra time for other self reading and self exercising or topics when we didn't want to compromise with out teenage entertainment time.

**CZ** That's true.

**Colin** What else, the study skill is not quite good, in secondary school for most of the students because we all tend to... I mean for most of the Hong Kong students, we all tend to memorise everything no matter we understand it or not. It's very bad when you... straight after you finish the exam, or straight after you finish the question, you forget everything already.

**CZ** What about the teachers you had in Hong Kong and the lecturers or tutors in here, how do you compare?

**Colin** Well, the first different thing that is mentioned by my department Head when I was studying in Associate Diploma is 'Don't call me Sir, call me Rod or Walker', because it is what we normally do in Hong Kong.

**CZ** We do the same, we call teacher.

**Colin** Or Madam.

**CZ** What about the classmates, how do you compare?

**Colin** The quality of classmates in secondary school was fluctuating, some were actually good, some were just destructive. And I was in the middle. At least, we all speak the same language, so we can be friends to each other very easily. But, here it's quite difficult, because the language is different and racial difference. For me, I'm quite racial, and so do some of the Australians I guess.

**CZ** What do you mean?

**Colin** What I mean is I'm thinking because I'm always thinking the way I'm thinking and growing up... being different from especially that of the Australians. And I can have quite similar thinking to Asians, I can communicate with them very well, but not Australians. I know, for example, sometimes when I saw the news, the nuclear testing, and they boycott the French, things like that, I feel very ... nonsense. I couldn't understand the way they're thinking. So I wouldn't worry about make friends with Australians. Yes, I don't quite want to.

**CZ** But when you are at work with your friends, which language do you speak?

**Colin** I got Thai friends working with me in a restaurant. This term lucky I got a Cantonese speaking friend. He's from Malaysia or Hong Kong because he acts like from Hong Kong, but he said he's Malaysian.

**CZ** So you got chance to speak your mother tongue.

We've looked at some of the differences in your previous studies and current experiences. Are there any similarities in your previous study experience and current study experience?

**Colin** Let me think. Similarity... not quite. If I must point out one major thing, it's hard work.

**CZ** It's true. It's hard work being a student.

**Colin** Not many similar things.

**CZ** What are the hardest thing for you to adjust to study in VUT?

**Colin** To fit into this university. The hardest thing to fit into this University... Early this year when I first came here, I was a bit disappointed because everything sounded very good before I knew here, but when I came here, I was lost.

**CZ** You were lost?

**Colin** Like helpless, I didn't know the way to go. No one can give me a hand, things like that. After striving my own way, that's the hardest thing.

**CZ** When did you first enrol?

**Colin** At the start of this year.

**CZ** When you say you were lost, in which way were you lost?

**Colin** Like... I didn't know where to get information, I didn't know how to go to Student Administration. I knew now, just at that time I didn't know where Student Administration was, just an example, I didn't know where everything was because I didn't attend the orientation day, because I don't know, I didn't feel like... because I've been studying here for two years, I knew orientation day is like an introduction of Australian culture, things like that, the university facilities. I thought I could cope with that, but in fact, it's not that easy for me to cope without attending the orientation day. Well, I got through it though, but with a little bit of unnecessary effort.

**CZ** Ok. I can see what you mean when you are new to a place, it's always helpful if someone can provide you with some information you don't have yourself.

What other aspects are also difficult to adjust?

**Colin** To find someone to talk with.

**CZ** Why is that?

**Colin** I don't know, because the class is just rushing in, rushing out, and rushing other things, there's no chance to speak when we first arrived here, and I was sort of defensive sort of person when I went to a strange place, I wasn't active to make friends with many people, so it was a bit hard.

**CZ** What aspects are easy for you to adjust to study at VUT?

**Colin** The easy thing is to attend lectures, tutorials and do assignment because I had experience of doing big assignment when I was doing Associate Diploma, and that Holmes College is a private college, and people will tend to look down on private college, but this one is not what they think. It was Victoria Government accredited, the only one there. It was organised by that Rod Walker I mentioned before. He is the Head of the department and he was CEO and board of director before. Every time, everything of this type, every of this kind of top managing role he had to fulfil, he gave us very useful and helpful technique to how to deal with the assignment and things like that.

**CZ** So studying at Tafe had helped you with some of the learning skills.

**Colin** Yes, but I won't say it's Tafe. As I said it's private college, not classified as Tafe.

**CZ** College. I didn't realize that.  
How do you find attending lectures?

**Colin** The first semester, the most difficult lecture for me was to attend one of the US lecturer's class. He was my International Business tutor as well, because I wasn't used to the US accent, it was a bit hard for me. He spoke quite fast and at the same time I had to jot down the notes from the board. Well, I can still manage it, it's not as smooth as other lectures I attend, I guess that it would be a big problem for some of other students who just finished their Year Twelve, or foundation year because I could see some of the Asian students they get a tape, or want me to record what they say and also the kind of job of jotting down notes is not fast enough for many of the overseas students. For me it's OK, because I've been through the sort of college training, like when I jot down notes, I'll know how to make my own abbreviation, short note, so I know what they say, at the same time I can still listen to what they say. That's what I concern about for some other students. I really want to try to tell them sometime, but I'm a bit shy, that's all.

**CZ** It would be helpful if some of the students can be told about some of this.  
How do you find attending tutorials?

**Colin** Tutorials are very helpful for 99 percent, except for 1 which I won't mention. It's quite challenging for Asian students, especially Hong Kong students, because we grow up in a culture, we don't talk much in a class, but in here, we speak quite a lot, for expressing our ideas, answering questions on our own will. The important thing is at our own will. Well in Hong Kong, we normally only answer the question when the teacher points us out. So it would be quite frustrating for many of the overseas students of this kind of tutorial work... to have to force ourselves to answer the tutor's questions and raise questions for ourselves, if we are not used to it yet.

**CZ** Ok. How did you cope with that?

**Colin** I haven't really got through yet, but I'm getting there.

**CZ** Because you're aware of the difference.

**Colin** Yes, I'm getting there. And I'm doing quite well for... except for in some areas, when sometimes when the students are asked a question in a tute, for me, I'm not sure the others, I am reluctant to answer the sort of, I feel every one will know.

**CZ** Basic answer?

**Colin** Maybe someone will think I'm caning myself. but actually not. I wouldn't mind answering good questions, challenging questions, and tutor questions for what I don't understand.

**CZ** Well, different people have different ideas. If you recall what it was like for you the first few weeks when you first enrol, is there any major stages you have gone through in adjusting yourself to study here?

**Colin** Yes. In the first semester of this year, I mean the early of this year, I was not quite well in managing my studying and understanding of the subject, but what I did was to try harder to understand and do it better in the subject by putting a lot more effort on reading and studying and reading in spare time. It was quite hard for me because in the first semester, I was myself experiencing personal stress, having different expectation of this university, it was one of the reasons. And the stress, coming from the other area was personal, it's not quite convenient to talk about. So it was quite hard, but I was very happy I could cope with that stress, because I believe one thing confidence. There's a TV program in Hong Kong. There's one sentence, it said that 'If you think you can, you can'. I believe that. I believe that, or maybe even before he said that. 'If you think you can, you can'.

**CZ** That's true, mental strength.

**Colin** That's it, Yes. I think it's very important thing for students, or for people who work, too.

**CZ** Yes, I think for everybody. If you really want to do something, you've got to believe yourself. That's true.

**Colin** And also you've got to find out what area you are interested in. If you are interested in, like me, in international finance, for me, I feel it's very, very easy. But if you ask me to study engineering, I just kill myself.

**CZ** That's true. Well, looking at the experiences that students have to go through to adjust to the different style of learning in Australia, what do you think are the reasons students have to go through this adjustment?

**Colin** What are the reasons?

**CZ** What do you think are the reasons behind the adjustment students have to make?

**Colin** I don't quite understand.

**CZ** Well, studying in Hong Kong, your previous experience is quite different from studying in VUT. That's for you. For students from China as well. For example, students who come from England, students come from high school in Australia, they will have to make some adjustment, too. But the degree of adjustment I'm sure will be different for you or students in Australia,. What do you think are the reasons for the adjustment?

**Colin** The reason for my adjustment is to get higher credit on all of my subjects, the whole of my course. That's why, what I want to do. I want to get very distinctive, remarkable marks, because I have worked for quite a few years before I came here to study, I realised that if we are unqualified, and without particular skills on certain area, we'll not be able to go up to too high level within the company. So to get into high level of the company is what I want, so I have to build myself stronger on particular area.

**CZ** In order to succeed in your study. What factors do you think affect the study experience of international students? Or what reasons?

**Colin** What study experience?

**CZ** You study at VUT, and you went through adjustment experience. What factors do you think affect your study? Or what are the reasons?

**Colin** I think it's only for my career future. That's the major concern. I would like myself more professionally presented, can catch up with the real, very competitive business world, so I'll ask myself for a lot even if the lecturer or tutor would not be expecting much of the student. I would ask myself more.

**CZ** What's your understanding of the students at VUT?

**Colin** I think as I can see there are quite many students just expecting to pass some of the subjects. I don't know much about them, but as far as I know.

**CZ** What's your interpretation of what a student is expected at a university?

**Colin** My interpretation?

**CZ** Or what's your understanding?

**Colin** They are not as aggressive as me. That's my interpretation.



**CZ** Well, in terms of what a student is required in doing the study, what's your understanding?

**Colin** It requires to do a lot of reading, accumulation of reading, that helps a lot. What I mean is, for example, when I was studying the Associate Diploma, I studied financial management as one of the subjects, and some accounting management, too, so I found it's not too hard for me to study financial management in here, say Banking and Finance course, because I've been through most things at least, but not distinctive mark, so it will be easier. If one can accumulate what they study, instead of memorise it, and forget it straight after exam, it will help a lot.

**CZ** You mean previous knowledge helps. That's really helpful, that's how we learn.

**Colin** Yes. I know some students sell their books straight after the semester. I say it's not good, because sometimes you may have to refer to your previous subjects, too, to link to any notes you've taken or assignment because no one can remember everything.

**CZ** That's true. Ok. Is there anything else you want to say?

**Colin** And also, for Non-English Speaking students, if we want to learn more, gain more from lecturer, tutor, I think what we have to do is to speak more, listen more and read more. Like, now what I'm doing is I'll buy newspaper everyday, especially I'll be looking at the business sector for some of the articles that I feel interested for myself or for my subject on a day to day basis. Well I wouldn't concern much about understand the Australian accent because it's just personal. I don't feel like to learn the Australian accent. I don't appreciate it, but I do feel appreciate English speaking type of and US type of speaking. When I practise listening, I'd rather choose some US type program, especially one in very late, it's called Late Show.

**CZ** I sometimes watch that, NBC, is that the one?

**Colin** It's by CBS. It's very interesting. When I was studying Banking and Finance, I knew everything about take-over and mergers. And you can learn some of that when you read the news, especially in the business sector. Some of the program, like late show. A few weeks ago, the CBS is taken over by Westinghouse. Westinghouse is heavy industry. They never involved in entertainment. It's quite interesting. you can yourself go home and think why they act this way. You can analyse by yourself. You can check up updating in the newspaper what they said, check out whether your analysis is correct or not.

**CZ** That's very interesting, so applying what you learn to reality. That's a very intelligent way to learn.

**Colin** And also a US company was taken over straight after the take-over by Westinghouse, Disneyland. This is absolutely very easy to understand because Disneyland is an entertainment type of industry, and what they do is to try to expand themselves in a vertical integration way in terms of marketing.

**CZ** So that relates back to what you learnt in the class. Well, some very good advice. What other advice do you have for new students, so they can adjust more easily?

**Colin** Think in English. Think everything in English, like when you speak, when you talk, when you are learning, when you try to understand certain words, you try to understand by using English expression.

**CZ** What do you mean? You don't translate?

**Colin** Don't translate into their own language, because there's a difference in meaning. Sometimes when you translate it from your own language, Cantonese for example, you can't. It'll be very funny. It'll be quite funny for our own kind of culture. The thing is you have to understand why they phrase that type of sentence because their culture is such and such, but we don't such and such, we can't translate.

**CZ** What other advice?

**Colin** When studying, try to jot down notes, while you are reading because otherwise, it'll be like me in the first term, it took me more time to study. Every time when I was studying, I just read. It made me dizzy, drowsy because I was so close to my bed, and it took me more time. For this term, everything is getting easier. I don't just read, read, but read, at the same time jot down notes. And you can also refer to lecture notes. The student guideline is absolutely very very helpful. If you can follow everything on student guide, and up to that, if you can read some articles some lecturers, some tutor will advise you to, but it's not necessary, but it's for students who are very interested in the subject. Then you can go further than what the tutorial guide asks you to follow. So you many find yourself very, very advantage way over the other students.

**CZ** That's very good. Any other advice?

**Colin** Oh, yes. I prepared something in my mind. I want to let other students know that we have to link everything to real world. Last semester, I did ask you real thing on macroeconomics for the relationship between interest rate and the price of currency. If students can feel interested in it and look into it, it'll be useful for the whole course, because it's not for the subject, many subjects link to each other, especially for business students. That's as far as I know because I don't know any other course.

**CZ** That's true.

**Colin** And also when you have to memorise, do not just memories, but understand it first, too. What the best way to do I find out is that you can study ahead of the lecture. Well, what I mean study is to read. Try to understand as much as you can, so when you go to the lecture, listen to what they said, how much you can understand from your own reading and what they said. And then if you do that, when you finish the lecture, you go back home and try to read once again or just glance it again, you find you can answer every question raised by the tutor in the next tute.

**CZ** You mean prepare before going to lecture.

**Colin** That means the other way, in other word, you don't have to study. You don't have to memorise, just passively stuck in your mind. First time you read once, then you go to the lecture, and the information is stuck in your mind one more time. then you go back home to review it one more time, and stuck to it one more time. And then you find yourself being able to answer tute question already. You don't have to memorise it hardly.

**CZ** That's really helpful. It's like base on your understanding.

**Colin** The one thing, I suggest student not to do is to... Well, they can use cassette tape to record what the lecturer said, what the tutor said, but I don't suggest them to use it for very long time, but just for the new students who arrived for a few months, for first semester, but after that, you have to listen to what the lecturer say and at the same time jot down notes. For example, some lecturers, many of the lecturers will put up on the overhead projector. And what you have to do is to copy what is on the projector, and don't worry what's on it, but just listen to what they are saying. And I find out that it's very useful and very superior in this area. Even I'll be... I think I'll be even better than some of the English speaking people because I find out them, not many of them are not paying attention to what the lecturer is saying. The notes you can read at home anyway, but what the lecturer said you can't read at home.

**CZ** That's true.

**Colin** So you can on the one way listen, and then remember it, then jot down straight after what they said.

**CZ** That's really useful. Thank you so much for all the information.

... ..

(additional)

**Colin** To do the assignment or understanding whatever subject, if you can answer to yourself why, you get there already.

**CZ** So the reasons.

**Colin** Yes, because I find it very useful when I do my assignment. This is the way of analysing things. I get very remarkable comments for my Business Law assignment. It says my assignment is very clear cut, very neat, good case referring, because I use this type of theory to organise my assignment to look at each of the topic, each of the issues of business law, what they are doing, why they are doing, why things happened, etc. It can look like a joke to some people because I've been teased by one of my friends: 'You always ask why'. He's not kidding. It's not joking, but it's very good.

**CZ** Thank you for that . It's very useful.

**Dinah**

**CZ** So, you did your study of high school in Malaysia as well as in Australia?

**Dinah** No. Just in Malaysia.

**CZ** How long ago was that?

**Dinah** I graduated in 1986. At that time I was in Senior Three. I was in a Chinese primary school, Chinese secondary and high school as well. Afterwards I did one year of diploma course in KL., which is capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpa. I did diploma lesson. It's a course that offered by Canadian Ontario Taylor College. I did six subjects, got six credits there. Afterwards I was considering to continue my study. I never give up my study. In 1992 I got chances to come over study, just by accident. I saw the advertisement in the newspaper about Australian education. Prior to that I applied to school after Taylor course, after I finished my diploma. But at that time it was so far away, I applied USA, I even got one third of school fees exempted. I only have to pay two thirds. Because it's so far away. I don't have any friends or relatives there. That's why my Mum asked me to stay back. I said Ok. In that case you are the one who pay my school fees. I stay at home, because my brother is studying overseas as well. And so I grabbed the chance. My Mum said to me this is the chance. If you did not go, you will never go. So I just packed. Apart from study here, I studied in Tafe for half a year because our university is not taking overseas students if you never study in Australia before. They can only take in January, instead of in June. So I do not have a choice. I studied in Tafe for half a year, then transferred to university.

**CZ** Which Tafe did you go?

**Dinah** Western Metropolitan Tafe. Then I started my course in here in 93.

**CZ** Did you do Year Twelve in Kuala Lumpa as well?

**Dinah** No, it was not sort of Year Twelve. It was equivalent to it, just repeating what we did in high school.. I am doing private school, the level of standard is very high. It is equivalent to pre-university standard. When I did the course at Taylor College it was called Diploma, it was repeating the thing we did at high school, just that the course was in English, it was the first time I came across the materials written in English, and I had to read and write everything in English. That's why I pick up three maximum, because I find easier for me to do it. You don't have to read a lot. I pick up Accounting 1, Economic 1 and another is Computing and Geography. Because I like it, no matter what language it is, I pick up three maths caculars, modern maths and algebra. That is what I did in Year Twelve if you want to say so.

**CZ** What course did you do in Western Metropolitan Tafe?

**Dinah** Hospitality. When I was a kid, I like to be working in a hotel. I do not know what stimulates me to want to do a thing like that. That's why I pick up Hospitality for half a year, I did quite well there though.

**CZ** That is really good, it's relevant to what you are doing.

**Dinah** Yes, that's the most important thing, then I came here. In that half year, I really learnt a lot, because it was the first time I came across Western cuisine, Western terminology, the thing they want to use, how they call the equipment. It was very professional. I learnt a lot really.

**CZ** How do you comparing your previous study experience to current study experience in Victoria University?

**Dinah** The differences I find is that in university, you have to do a lot of things by yourself. They give you the assignment, then that's it. You have to do all the work by yourself. You have to do the research, go and look for information, you have to read, sum up everything. You have to do it according to the standard they set out for you. But in high school, I did not have to do all these things. I did not have to do, you can say, assignment, I did not know what an assignment was. I just had to write essays, it was during the class as well. You have to do extra work, apart from reading from the book, and educated exactly the same from the book if you like, from Junior One to Junior Three, you do it like that. But from Senior One to Senior Three, the teachers expect you to use your own language to do it. But you tend to be... if someone writes it for you already, you would not think that I have to rephrase it again. You just remember it, and educated exactly the same from the book. Then that's it. You finish your task. Apart from that, you maybe attend some column work, you do other things apart from study. Then that's it. You do not have to do a lot of work by yourself, the teacher normally will prepare the thing for you. You just study. It's your responsibility to study whatever the teacher said. You just do whatever the teacher said, you will be all right.

**CZ** It's the same at schools in China.

**Dinah** You should understand. That is what they expect you to do.

**CZ** That's why you find it so different .

**Dinah** It's totally different. The way the teacher's name is addressed, you have to call the first name in here. I have to call you Christabel, at home it is impossible. You have to greet the people with respect because they are teachers. It takes time for us to adjust to the situation now. The first time when I was studying in Tafe, the teachers always asked me to call their first names, I was not used to it. I always say Sir or Madam, it put them off. They say it's OK, why do you have to do that. We are trained to be like that for so long, you can't ask us to change immediately to the situation in here. And the culture is different again, we always think you are the teachers, we are the students, we can't close the line, that's it. It's so funny, but it's a good experience. I can't deny it.

**CZ** How did you realise the differences?

**Dinah** The first day I went to school, the teacher just said your name, they just introduced themselves. They basically told you what they want you to do, you can argue with them if you like. When I look at it, it was so shocking when I saw my Australian classmate argue with the teacher on certain point of view which sometimes is ridiculous, but they do not care. They just give their point of view, they are entitled to do it like that. It was shocking to me during the class. Then I realise it is different, they want you to understand, they want you to learn. They tell you sincerely that I come here to give you the knowledge, in certain fields, I may be not as good as you, you still can tell me, you still can argue with me. There is nothing wrong about what you say or something like that. They encourage you to give your point of view, to explain from there. They are not expecting you to learn everything, whatever he says is right, whatever he does is right. This stimulates you to do things. If you are going to do this thing, what you will do, how you will do it?

**CZ** What aspects of study here are similar to your previous study experiences?

**Dinah** The similarity, not many. They are different. What I told you before, in high school, the teachers expect you a lot. They expect you to learn the material they give you, everything like that. The teachers here, they do not have to care about whether you learn it or not. As long as you attend the class, their duty is to give you things to do, there is no punishment. At home we do have punishment. If you do not hand in the assignment, they will give you disciplinary punishment or everyday you are asked to see your parent. It never happens in here. There is nothing similar, apart from learning from the book, the knowledge you learn from school. We run totally different systems. At home, at high school, we have to have test every week, we have big exam, small test, quiz, everything. You just running, running, handing in assignment, even the notes we copied, the teacher would have to check it, chop it and ask your parent to sign it. Basically you have to do everything they expect you to do. But in here, they are not forcing you to do it. They want you to be the initiator to do things. So that is different.

**CZ** So you find it different. I found it quite different when I was doing my study as well.

**Dinah** Yes, it's totally different.

**CZ** What did you do to adjust, because your previous experiences and current experience are different. How did you adjust?

**Dinah** I think it was a very good training that I got at home. They force you to do things. You basically learnt a lot. You have a solid foundation already, especially in calculation, in the knowledge that you know which is very broad. At least you touch on every aspect I'm doing now. I don't know other students. That is what I think. I have basic knowledge before I came. I know what Economics is, I know what Commerce is, I know what Accounting is. I can deal with what calculation you want me to do. I think it's a very solid education I had at home, giving me a basic training. When I came here, the thing I have to do is I have to translate everything to English. I learn it and understand it, instead of... I can not remember every word from the book. The only thing I can do is that I tried to read and understand it, and put in my own words. I have to try no matter how hard it is. I have to try. I can't just remember every word, word by word from the book. It's impossible. And try to think in English and speak English all the time. When I got the chance to speak with someone else, I will take the chance. You do not have to be ashamed of yourself. I will motivate myself in a way that English is not my mother tongue, in order to master it, I have to learn. I have to practise. Since I choose to come here, this is the life I choose, I have to do whatever I can to improve. And I just tried very hard for the first year, I can't deny it, it was extremely hard for me. I tried, I tried. The most important thing is that you have to do all the work by yourself. You have to be responsible for whatever action that you are taking. Which means if you do not choose to study and you fail, you deserve to fail because you did not do the study. But if you study, I believe everyone can do it, can pass the subjects. You just have to put more time in it comparing to Australian students. You can't compare with human being no matter who they are, whether they are from the same country or different country. You have to face it, different people have got different ability. Maybe I have to spend two hours, ten hours to do the thing. First you have to spend ten hours. You can't compare why I have to spend ten hours.

**CZ** That's a good point.

**Dinah** Yes. I mean you just can't compare. Then you force yourself into a difficult situation that you can't cope with study, you feel depressed. You just have to face the reality that this is different, this is totally new to you. You have to work really hard. As long as you get through the first year, I reckon in the second year, third year you will be Ok. The first year is the transition time. Really you have to tackle it the right way, or else you just can't continue to study. A lot of students just fail again, again and again. They did not consider it's their own problem. It is not because of the racism or everything. They come from different culture, but you have to be the initiator to overcome the problems that you have. That's what I reckon.

**CZ** That's really good, working hard and be self-reliant.

**Dinah** Yes, it's very important. And try to ask if you do not know. The teachers here do not mind you ask. That's the most important thing. You can question whatever you want to the teacher or tutor. They would definitely like to help you as long as you put the effort in. You show it to them that you've done the work, but you still do not understand. They will definitely give you help. They will never say no to you. I mean

that is what I experience until now. I do not know what other students think about it. You can say I'm too subjective or...

**CZ** That's what this is all about, your experiences, I want to see what students' opinion is about their own experiences.

**Dinah** And friends are very important. It just depends on what kind of friends you go out with. I like to have a study group with my friends. I do not know what other students do. I tend to like study with Asian students than Australian students. It's not because I think they are stupid or anything like that, because we have different attitudes, because Asian students are more hard working than other students. We have the same background, and we have to put more effort in it, and we care more about our study than most of the Australian students. They can do it overnight, but it's not our case. We have to do it one or two weeks before hand. We have to do it intensively. We have to understand everything, then we can come together and write essay. I have to do it, I don't have a choice. I just do it. Before the exam, we, all my friends gather and we do all the questions we can gather in the library. I do part of the question, you do part of the question, then we talk with each other what you think. this is your field. I'm doing fire management, maybe someone else is doing food court. If we have any information, we just photocopy for each other, we are not selfish. we share information. I even did a copy for everyone. You just put effort in it, you do it, then you gather together, then you talk with each other. It makes it easier when you talk with someone else, instead of just by yourself, it's not obvious. You stick there for three hours, it's useless. But when you talk about it, that means you understand it, then you can talk about it. Then you can write down whatever you want. In the exam, even though you are nervous, you tend to be more stable. In a way that you have talked with someone already, it's from your own mind, instead of just reading from the book. You wouldn't have any problem in the exam.

**CZ** That's really good, studying in a group and talking about it, because only when you understand it, you can explain it.

**Dinah** Yes, if you don't understand it, you can't say anything. It's good that we respect everyone. We don't say you are stupid, you don't know the work or anything. We respect everyone. You put your own word and we respect you. If there is something you miss, then we put it in and suggest maybe you should put it in as well, so we are not hurting anyone because everyone are in the same level if they can get in the university. I find it's very helpful, especially studying law, you have to talk with someone else. We get very good results in law surprisingly. I think it's because we study in group. We talk about issues, we talk about this, we did really well. A lot of Australian students got just a Pass, but we got Distinction, we got Credit. I mean group study is really, really a good suggestion for no matter who, I reckon, for all the students, because you only have to concentrate on certain field, and you do it intensively, then you got all the information, then you give it to other students, and other students, you expect them to do the same to you as well. They will go and read the materials and they will tell you as well. But I want to choose Asian students, because only the Asian students want to do it, the Australian students don't want to do it. They do it overnight. They can because they have the advantage to do it like that. But for us we don't have the advantage, we have to put more effort in it.

**CZ** So you form study group voluntarily.

**Dinah** Yes, we form study group, three to five people. Like, I'm doing Law now, I will do everything which is in good order. I will do everything, then I pass my notes to my friends in the next group. Then they can just concentrate on listening in the lecture. They just concentrate on listening, they don't have to take notes and they learn from it. It's very good. I'm doing Law now, and my friend is doing Facility Planning and Design. I used to be doing Facility Planning and Design in first semester, and my friend was doing Law in previous semester. That's why they pass all the notes to me, and I give my notes to them. So we exchange notes. We have a basic idea what we are doing. Some of the notes they are not giving out in the tutorial or lecture. You have to find out yourself and photocopy. You save the money to photocopy as well because they will cover the same thing. You just have to learn and then observe it.

**CZ** Good idea. Now you are quite Ok in handling all the pressure of studying. How long do you think it took you to adjust?

**Dinah** One semester. For me, I reckon one semester. Because for the first semester, I was struggling a lot. I don't know many students, apart from Hilda. I don't know many overseas students, one semester. Once you know the way, what they expect from you, you should be Ok, I think. For me, it took me one semester.

**CZ** If you recall the stages you went through adjusting, is there any major stage you've been through in adjusting?

**Dinah** Yes. The most important thing is language. I think for study it will be the same everywhere. It's just the language itself makes it harder for me. Imagine if I'm studying in Taiwan, I should not have any problem adjusting to the new situation, apart from culture, only the environment. In here, it's totally different. First day I arrived in Australia, I can't even speak English. So you see, I not only have to cope with the pressure from study, from the expectations from the teachers, from my parents. I paid a lot of money, I don't want to fail. That kind of pressure is on your shoulder. It's invisible, but it's there all the time. You have to learn how to speak English. Presentation is the thing that put you into the situation that you can't sleep, you can't eat, because tomorrow you have the presentation. You are scared. The next day, your tongue is tight, you can't speak a word. Then it was my first year, first semester, I got presentation in Organisation Behaviour, so it was really scary. Presentation and speaking as well. You don't have confidence when you speak. You are scared that someone will laugh at you. You are scared that not everyone will understand what you say. You are scared that you would forget the thing, just accidentally you forget everything, your mind just went blank, you don't know anything, you don't know what to say. That tough thing, language is the most important thing I can think of that I got major problem in study.

**CZ** Ok, do you think the adjustment is easy or difficult?

**Dinah** It depends on which person. I think it's not that hard, because I used to like to read a lot. I force myself to read even I don't understand. Since I was in high school I did English, but it was only in Grammar. The teacher always tell you to listen, listen to whatever people say. Open your ear before you open your mouth. Ok, I just listen to the television, listen to the radio. See how they phrase the words. How they put the words together. And be conscious what you say, think before you say it and after you say it. Make sure that the sentence you make is correct grammatically and everything. I'm still learning now. I will pick it up when I realise something. I will say it again, especially she or he in English, but in Chinese we don't have the distinction. But in English there is a difference, so you have to adjust. And I listen, read more, check the dictionary, go to the dictionary, check and check. If you don't understand, then the only thing that will make you understand is that you have checked the dictionary. But don't tend to translate everything into your own language before you can digest it. Try to think in English. If you can not make it, it doesn't matter. Take one step, but gradually you will gain confidence. You have to start somewhere. If you try to translate everything from English into Mandarin, and do it again, it will be very funny the sentences that you construct. I reckon that you just have to read it, and understand what you are doing and look in the dictionary for anything that you don't understand. Try to guess the meaning of the sentences and paragraph before you check the dictionary. Then it will encourage you to read more, instead of every line you have to check two words, every line you have to check three words, then you will be frustrated. You don't want to read it. I like to read story books. I used to start with reading story books. I can skim read very fast now. Compare to the time when I first came here, I had to read Westerners. I had to spend a lot of time to read one chapter, but now, I not only can read but also can sum up what I understand. This is how you do it.

**CZ** Did you attend any of the reading classes to learn how to skim read?

**Dinah** No. Because it's my preference to read, so I can skim read really fast, then guess the meaning very fast. You just have to be trained to do it like that.

**CZ** That's really good. It's a great skill.

**Dinah** You just have to read, read and read. Digest what you read in short period of time. It's not necessary for you to understand every line, every word, but if you have broad idea of what they are doing, what they are talking about, that is enough. Then if you want detail, you go into detail to see the difference from this paragraph and that paragraph, from this concept to that, what is the difference, then you have to go into detail to read it again and again. The first time you read it, you just have to skim, just basically what they are talking about in this chapter. Afterwards, before the exam, discuss with someone else, what's your point of view in this section, in this concept, and talk about ideas. You talk about your idea, I talk about my idea. It will be Ok.

**CZ** That's really good. You mentioned studying hard and working in groups, what other advice do you have for new students so they can adjust more easily.

**Dinah** New students... Do not compare what you used to have and what you used to master. You are studying in new situation and accept it now. It's much easier for you to adapt to life here. Don't always compare what you have. At home you have servant, in here you have to do this and that by yourself. Don't compare. Once you decide to come here, accept it, you have to do everything by yourself. Before you come, you should know that already anyway.

**CZ** Before you came here, did you know that?

**Dinah** I did not know. I don't know there is difference or anything like that. Once you come here, the only thing you can make yourself happy is that you accept it and learn from the beginning. Just put everything aside, start from zero, setting up the block. If you have a solid block, if you step it out, for sure it wouldn't collapse anyway in anyway. Unless you did not do the work, because of luck, you get pass. You can get through first year, but you can't get through second year, third year definitely because the material is harder. The thing that you have to consider this and that, give recommendation is the thing you have learn from first year, the basic knowledge. Apply to what you are doing it now. The most important thing is you have to work harder, accept the situation, accept the reality.

**CZ** That's right. That's really a good point.

**Dinah** I don't know what other students think. That's my idea. The sooner you accept the situation, the better you are.

**CZ** Yes, it is really important. Otherwise you would always be worried.

**Dinah** A lot of students tell me now you are really good because you learnt it before. I said no way. I learnt in Chinese as well. If you want to be good at anything, you just have to put effort in it. Everything is the same. You can't take everything for granted. You just can't sit there and wait God to give you something, there is no such thing. If you want get anything, you have to put effort in it. That's it. This is the basic principle you have to have. That's it. I said to them a lot. They admire you a lot that you are going to graduate soon. I go through the stages you go through now as well. I just can't say from first year I jumped to third year, never go through second year. No, I said, compare to you guys, at least you can ask us what you want to do, you can get the notes from us. Imagine I'm the first one who arrived in this university, for the first semester apart from Christabel gave me extra class in Economics, I did not have any other resources to help me at all. I had to struggle myself. I think in a way that was good. If you don't know anyone in here, you have to know that everything you do you have to be responsible for it. You have to do all the study by yourself. I think it's a good training for me. I'm lucky in a way that I don't know anyone in here. If you have someone here, you will rely on him or her. You don't want to do the thing, you expect everyone to do it for you. Ok, maybe you have a boyfriend who can do everything for you. Once he's gone, you face the problem. You don't know what to do. You do have to do this and that, ABC. You just cry day and night for that. There is no point. You have to accept it. At home, my Mum... I'm the only daughter, I don't have to do anything. I cried on the phone and said to Mum: 'I'm so tired'. Mum said: 'You choose to study there, you don't have a choice. you just have to accept it. Or you just come home now. I don't mind to send you the ticket to come home, but you won't, everyone will laugh at you, you study, but only half a semester, you can't stay, you come home'. You can't just do that. You don't have the face to go home. You just have to accept it. That's the advice I can give to new students.



**CZ** That's very good advice.

**Dinah** I don't know.

**CZ** What other advice do you have for new students.

**Dinah** Try to mix with Australian students and learn... first I thought maybe they don't want to talk with us. After first year, they respect you, especially you do the work in the class. They expect you to participate in the class. Sometimes it just gives you something different, you are more confident when you express yourself in class. They understand you more as well. Don't expect they understand everything. They are not racist in a way. They are just scared that they will do something wrong that will make you upset. They don't know your culture, you don't know their culture. You have to respect each other. Some of my Australian friends, they really respect me as well. In the class I participate, I do the work whatever I'm doing. I put effort in it. If there is anything I don't understand, I just ask. The teacher ask me question, I can answer. They respect me, because normally I will do the work, they are not doing the work. Sometimes basically I'm the only one to answer all the questions. They will respect you in the way that if you put effort in the work, if you try hard, they will say she doesn't know the language, then she can do well, we will respect them. If you want someone to respect you, you have to show something that can let other people to respect you. It's not that you want to show off or anything like that. You have to participate in the class. You can start your point of view and open the discussion. This is the most important thing I think if you want other people to respect you, especially Australian students. They will think, Oh, this girl is not too bad. She know what she's doing as well, they will talk with you. A lot of Australian students ask me about their home work and ask me where I got the information, how I did it. They give me their notes as long as I ask. I ask in a polite way, I return it to them promptly. They give it to me. If I have any information, I tell them. I always believe that if you have any information, there is no confidential one because everyone can get in every book. It's just that I'm lucky that I come across it. I give it to them. Next time they will give it back to you in return.

**CZ** That's true.

**Dinah** They are kind to you as well.

**CZ** Two way traffic.

**Dinah** Yes. They know the way to study as well. They just give you the tip to do this, to do that. You just don't have to go through the long way to finish the task by yourself. I know from that way you can learn a lot, but sometimes you've got so many things happening, so many subjects to cover, sometimes you have to know the way to study, just take the easier way.

**CZ** Over the time, you all learn the trick.

**Dinah** Yes. You have to learn though. The first year students never realise that they've got the tips. When we did the research paper, when we handed in the assignment, they said we should go to the RAAR (company name). 'Why didn't you say so from the beginning', we asked the teacher. The teacher said you have to learn. This is the process for you to learn how to get information. It's not that we tell you everything, then you go to it without realising it, for instance, where to get the information. Learn, basically put effort in it yourself. Learn, work hard. Put effort in it, get through first year. You will be Ok. Form group study. If you are not comfortable with Australian students, form with people you are familiar with. Being willing to put effort in it is the most important thing. And learn how to survive in a group environment. And try to talk with your friends, students, communicate with them, like you said two way traffic, talk with your lecturers. Let them understand what you want. If you don't understand, go and ask them. If you are polite, everyone will be willing to help you.

**CZ** That's really good. Apart from the guideline we have here, do you have anything else you want to add?

**Dinah** No. Just sometimes overseas students like to gossip a lot. They just like to stick with the Chinese friends or... I think it's not very healthy. You have to go out and socialise with someone else and meet a lot of people. You will learn a lot. Go to get some experience. I'm not forcing that everyone has to go. It's not because of the money, but you will learn a lot in workplace. I used to be not working. But because I need industrial training in my course, that's why I go for training. I applied the job by myself and I went through the procedures I know in here. If I want to apply the job, I have to send the resume, type the letter, get the reference letter. Then I just posted the application letter. Then they ask me to go for the interview. You then work on how you have to present yourself, how to answer the questions. Go through the interview procedures here. Then you learn. You talk with the Australian people. I work in The World Congress Centre, basically I have to communicate with Australians. All my colleagues speak very well English, I'm the only one there who speaks broken English, because they were born here.

**CZ** Did you realise that now your English is so much improved?

**Dinah** Yes, I realise it now. It's a big difference from the first day I came. It's a good thing that you work in an organisation. You will learn a lot. You can put into practice what you learnt. You communicate with them, you open up your life circle. You meet different type of people. In the World Congress Centre, it's a convention centre, I meet the people from around the world, so they respect you, you look forward to go to work. And you have something to do apart from study. You don't have to rush yourself to do it in the first year. You do it in the second year or do it during summer. Another point I definitely have to say is that do not go home every year. Home will be always waiting for you there. Try to get some experience once you are in Australia. It's easier for you to adjust to everything. You will have more confidence. You do this by yourself, you do that by yourself. You involve in this field, that field. It's very interesting. I never worked for other people before, I didn't know what I have to do when I went for an interview. I was so scared what question they would ask me, and because I did not have confidence at all in the first year. I thought I speak broken English, the worse English in the world that no one could understand me. I force myself not to work first. I took my time to learn something. Then I can present myself well, I know what I'm doing and know what I'm talking. Afterwards I have confidence. When I go to the interview, they ask me the question. You have the experience. Then when I graduate from university, when I go for interview, I know what they will ask you. I go to a lot of interviews. I went to Grand Hyatt twice, but because my timetable didn't fit theirs, I didn't work there. I went for World Congress Centre for interview, I asked what the procedure was, they said they would go through the application later and select from there. Then they call you for interview, after that they give you training. And they select from the training as well. If they select you, you feel great about yourself, you have more confidence, because you are not so bad comparing with other people. At least someone wants to accept you to work. That's why I think it just helps you to build up your confidence.

**CZ** That's really good.

**Dinah** I'm enjoying working there and looking forward to working there. Every week I have something to do in my life apart from studying, not that boring. Do some exercise. Do all the healthy things you can do, instead of just going to Karaoke all the time, going to movies all the time. Do all the things you think is good for you to invest the time.

**CZ** That's really good.

**Dinah** (Then the student continued to talk about her part-time job.) I learnt a lot. I learned how to carry plates, clean the table. I learnt how to communicate with the guest. I learnt how to respect the guest. I learnt what sort of wine we are using. I learnt what sauce go with what food. What desert they are serving, what sauce goes with it. That's really good. It's good experience for me.

**CZ** Obviously you are enjoying yourself.

**Dinah** Yes. It's good to learn things in the field. You learn it and put it into practice. You look at the supervisor how they supervise. You learn the conflict between the workers and yourself as well. I go there as an outsider to learn, not because I want to survive there for long time. My point of view would be very different from a lot of Australians. Some of them just want to be there for ages, to be a waitress or waiter,

but it's not mine. Mine objective is to be in the organisation to observe the people, how they behave. When someone do something like this, like that, you will know the conflict between them, whether the worker is hard working or a slacker. You will know their attitude. And I believe that if you want to be a good manager, you have to start from the bottom. Then you will know the work. When you give them any reward or punishment, you will consider different kind of factor that will contribute to their behaviour. I think it's good.

**CZ** Being more considerate in decision making.

**Dinah** Yes. You are more rational in a way to make a decision, you won't rush. It's better than working in a Chinese restaurant and earn five dollar an hour, you won't learn a lot. In that environment, all were speaking Chinese. I can listen and understand more. They may speak a lot, but come to terminology, I'm more confident. Things that you do are right, not wrong. You can experience what you learn at school. It helps you to build up your confidence.

**CZ** It's really good. Thank you so much for your information.

**Dinah** You are welcome. I hope it helps your study.

**CZ** I'm sure it will, because it's all your experiences. And some of the information I'm sure will be useful for new students.

**Dinah** It's a good study. It's really good.

**Edward**

**CZ** How long have you been in Australia?

**Edward** Nearly five years, it's four and a half years.

**CZ** Before you came to Australia to study in Tafe, did you do high school in Hong Kong?

**Edward** Yes, I finished high school in Hong Kong.

**CZ** When was that?

**Edward** I can't remember. Two years before I came here.

**CZ** Two years before you came here, so around 88.

**Edward** Yes, around that time.

**CZ** Where did you do your study first in Australia? Which Tafe?

**Edward** Box Hill.

**CZ** Box Hill. What course was that?

**Edward** Year Eleven.

**CZ** Oh, Year Eleven. How long did you study there?

**Edward** Two years, I studied for two years in Box Hill Tafe, then I studied for one year at Holmesglen.

**CZ** Which year was it when you finished study in Box Hill?

**Edward** 92.

**CZ** So you got enrolled here in 93?

**Edward** 94. First semester in 94.

**CZ** So, compare your previous study experiences to study at VUT, how do you compare?

**Edward** It's more difficult studying at VUT. I don't know why, because some times when I sat in the lecture, if there is something I don't understand, I can't ask. Sometimes even in tutorial, I would ask. But in Tafe it's different.

**CZ** What are the differences?

**Edward** The teachers in Tafe are more concerned about the students. But in here all the students are the same. But my English language is not as good as the Australian students. The language is difficult, it is the major reason for the difficulties. Sometimes if I think in my mind, if I look at the question, if I understand, I can write the answer straight away. Even the Australian students can't think what I think.

**CZ** Are there any other differences apart from the languages?

**Edward** What do you mean?

**CZ** Comparing your study experience in Hong Kong and the experience in here, you mentioned language, are there any other differences?

**Edward** If I study in Hong Kong, I got a lot of spare time. But studying in here, I have to do a lot of other things, cooking, laundry, shopping, everything.

**CZ** You look after yourself.

**Edward** Yes, that is different.

**CZ** Do you have any family here.

**Edward** Previously yes, but not now, about one month or two months, but not now.

**CZ** What about studying style, learning style.

**Edward** No idea for this one, because when I was in Hong Kong, I was not always studying, but in here some more study.

**CZ** How do you compare the teaching styles?

**Edward** It's quite different. The teachers here are more open than the teachers in Hong Kong.

**CZ** What are the areas studying at VUT similar to your previous study experience?

**Edward** In VUT every subject has a lecture, but not in Tafe. In Tafe only one or two subjects have lecture.

**CZ** Can you explain?

**Edward** In Tafe, I studied six or seven subjects one semester, one or two only has lecture, the others are in smaller classes. The materials are easier. For example, I studied Microeconomics, it was easier. I could not get exemption here.

**CZ** What if you compare your study experience here at VUT to your experience in Hong Kong.

**Edward** I don't know what happened in Hong Kong. I can't remember. It's totally different. That's it.

**CZ** Can you be a bit specific?

**Edward** Ok, in Hong Kong, I studied Economics. The book is the same. I opened the book, I don't understand, it's all in English, too, not Chinese. I can't understand what is there. In here, it's better. I've been here for a couple of years, time goes on, I learn more English.

**CZ** Did you learn English in Hong Kong?

**Edward** Yes.

**CZ** For how long?

**Edward** Since I was about thirteen or fourteen years old. But if I finish high school in Hong Kong, I couldn't understand English here.

**CZ** What are the areas similar?

**Edward** The books are all in English.

**CZ** What about the classmates.

**Edward** When I was studying in Tafe, all of the classmates are Asian.

**CZ** Have you made many friends here?

**Edward** Just a few.

**CZ** You mentioned that the previous study experience and studying at VUT are very different. What did you do to adjust to studying at VUT?

**Edward** Only just the concentration, listen. Listen to what the lecturer say.

**CZ** What did you do apart from that?

**Edward** All other things are similar, like studying in Tafe. When the test is coming, until the last week or the last few days study very hard. It's useless for me to study tomorrow if there is a test or exam next month. I can't remember. Unless you study everyday. It's better for me to study for the last few days, maybe a couple more weeks for the exam.

**CZ** Now we have to ask you to go back to your memory, what was it like for you the first few days at VUT? What was it like for you when you walk into the big lecture theatre?

**Edward** Like cinema. Yes, it's like a cinema. In the first semester, all my lectures were in G370, I think it's the largest in VUT.

**CZ** But when you go to the cinema, you just sit there and relax. When you are in the lecture, what was it like for you? What was the note-taking like for you in the first few lectures?

**Edward** I can't remember. But what happened in the first semester, it's still happening right now. The lecturer put the transparencies on overhead projector, and talking. Sometimes I can't do both things. I have to listen and write at the same time. It's a bit difficult for the students, even for students from the English speaking background. If I listen, I can't write. If I write, I can't hear. That is a major problem for university students, in my opinion. Some lecturers are good, let you finish writing first, then explain.

**CZ** Was that only at the beginning?

**Edward** No, it's still happening right now. If I'm the lecturer one day, I will show you something, you copy down, then I explain.

**CZ** That's a good point.

Do you recall what was it like for you when you first go to the tutorial?

**Edward** I didn't know anyone in the classroom.

**CZ** How did you feel?

**Edward** Just do nothing. It doesn't matter.

**CZ** Students are expected to participate in tutorials, how did you adjust to that?

**Edward** Not difficult. Sometimes it's difficult for me to speak, ask the question, answer the question. The language is hard for me. It's like doing a presentation.

**CZ** Do you sometimes have presentation?

**Edward** Yes, later this semester.

**CZ** Is it the first time?

**Edward** No, second.

**CZ** When did you do the first one?

**Edward** Last year.

**CZ** How was it for you?

**Edward** Just a bit strange.

**CZ** Were you nervous?

**Edward** Yes, in the beginning, then just talking, talking.

**CZ** Did you have presentation in your previous studies?

**Edward** Yes, in Box Hill College.

**CZ** What do you think of the adjustment, was it easy or difficult?

**Edward** Can you say it again, I'm not sure.

**CZ** Was the adjustment easy?

**Edward** No, it's not easy, not easy. Most of the questions I understand, I know the answer, but can I write the correct answer or not.

**CZ** Did you ever ask someone?

**Edward** No need. In the exam I did not have time to finish all the questions. For Economics, it's easy for me.

**CZ** You mentioned the adjustment is not easy. What is the reason.

**Edward** The only reason is language. I use the dictionary, when I get the meaning for the word, I understand.

**CZ** Apart from language, are there any other reasons?

**Edward** No, only language.

**CZ** What advice do you have for new students for them to adjust more easily?

**Edward** Learn more English before studying here. When I read, if there is a word I do not understand, when I check it up in the dictionary, then I understand.

**CZ** What other advice will you give to students?

**Edward** No more. I think that is the major problem for students. If you don't understand the question, how can you answer? If you understand, sometimes you use your common sense, you still get marks.

**CZ** Thank you for the information.

**Frank** (Interview Number Six was transcribed from notes as student preferred not to be taped)

**CZ** Tell me about your previous study before enrolling in the business course in VUT.

**Frank** I studied junior high school for three years, Year Seven to Year Nine. Then I studied diploma for five years at Tafe. I studied electrical engineering.

**CZ** I'm not very familiar with the educational system in Taiwan? Can you explain the junior high school and diploma please?

**Frank** In Taiwan, after junior high school of three years, students have three options: senior high school of three years, from Year Ten to Year Twelve; or diploma of five years at technical college or general high school of three years. After that, students need to take a national exam to go to university. The exam is nation wide. About thirty percent of the students can pass the exam and go on to university study.

**CZ** How long ago was your study?

**Frank** I studied from 1984 to 1989. I graduated in 1989.

**CZ** Where did you do the study?

**Frank** In Dan-shui, north of Taiwan. I worked for about two years in a computing company, installing hardware, software for banks.

**CZ** Did you do any other study before you enrolled in VUT?

**Frank** I studied English course for thirty weeks in Hawthorn Institute of Education. That was from February 1992 to October 1992.

**CZ** How do you compare your previous study experience to your current experience at VUT?

**Frank** The teaching styles are different. In Taiwan, the teachers use blackboard, we copy down the information which is relevant to future, how you can do business. In here the lecturers use overhead projector. In here lecturers teach you how to study. In Taiwan, teachers teach you how to behave. In Taiwan, teachers have a chat with you if you misbehave. In Taiwan, some teachers just do the reading, and ask students to read. They don't have a schedule. Here, in the first week, lecturers will give you a schedule which outlines tests, assignments and the percentage in total assessment. In Taiwan, we have assignments. Students don't care. Everybody can pass.

**CZ** Did anybody fail?

**Frank** Four or five.

**CZ** What percentage was that?

**Frank** Four or five out of fifty fail, about ten percent.

**CZ** What sort of assignments did you have in Taiwan?

**Frank** In Taiwan we do experiment in lab, we have to write down the conclusion. We do it the first week. In the following week, we hand in, but we don't get the results. We don't care. But for assignments, we hand in, we get feedback in two week's time. That's good, next time you can do better. After we graduate, we have to go to society, teachers give us advice on how to behave. We don't have choice about the subjects we study. The whole class have the same subjects. So the class have the same students for five years. Students have no incentive to do some subjects, they skip lectures. And you could not choose the subjects you want?

**CZ** What about tutorials?

**Frank** In Taiwan, we don't have tutorials, I only had lectures and lab sessions. I didn't understand what a tutorial was. I got confused the first time. How come, one subject has lecture and tutorial. In here, lecturers don't ask questions. In tutorials, students ask questions, tutors ask students questions. In Taiwan, teachers talk, they teach. Students listen.

**CZ** What else?

**Frank** There is presentation in here, we never had presentation in Taiwan. I had only five minutes presentation for a computer project. I just drew on the blackboard. In here, I got nervous.

How did you adjust for tutorial and presentation?

**Frank** I just listen. That is Chinese behaviour. For presentation, I have to do it. I have to learn it. Australians talk. Chinese don't talk. From primary school, junior high school, we were taught: children don't talk, just listen. Our parents say 'You say it again. I tell you to do it. just do it.' In Taiwan, we sit in class with hands at the back.

**CZ** How do you compare the student and student relationship?

**Frank** In Taiwan, student and student relationship is friendly. If you ask, they will give you a hand. We make good friends. Here I feel uncomfortable because our behaviour is different. Only overseas students, Vietnamese friends have similar backgrounds. I gain experience from study. I felt comfortable in Taiwan when I took a subject. I knew I could pass. In here, you are not sure whether you pass the subject or not.

**CZ** What about student and teacher relationship?

**Frank** Teachers were flexible, they can adjust for students in Taiwan. Not all students pass in diploma program. Two students gave up. Our college is the third best diploma college in Taiwan out of thirty colleges. Taiwanese Government gave permission for overseas students to get in. Five to six students fail and repeat subjects. Now Taiwanese have more money. The government tries to improve education. Some colleges can transfer to university. Previous students can study for two years to get a university degree.

**CZ** What aspects of studying at VUT are very similar to studying in Taiwan?

**Frank** In Taiwan, we study textbook. We study more, use dictionary, spend more time. For exam, The textbook has ten chapters, the teacher told us to study three chapters. We just study three. We have a lot



of handouts, notes which are different from textbook. Exam questions are different. When we go to exam, the questions are new. In Taiwan, we were supposed to know what happens in the exam. For example, we would be given seventeen questions. In the exam, we would have fifteen questions. We were supposed to study more for exam, use more reference. In Taiwan, I never took notes. In here, I have to take notes. The first time, I was nervous for the first week. In the first year, extra tutes for Accounting, Economics and Statistics helped the adjustment. It was hard taking notes the first time from the overhead projector.

**CZ** What did you do to adjust?

**Frank** Parents want the children to go to university to get degree. My parents want me to finish in time. I know how to do it. I study hard. I take notes, go home to study. In first year, I seldom go out. I studied on Saturday and Sunday. In first year, I got better results. Now, I get used to it, I do not study as hard. I read before lectures. I got better results since I got through diploma. I'm happy to study at university here. It is my decision to come here. Many Taiwanese students go to America, seventy to eighty percent stay in America. Recently Taiwan's economy is good, many come back. I come to Australia, when I finish, I will go back. I'm not used to people here.

**CZ** What are the main stages you have gone through in making the adjustment?

**Frank** For the first time, when I was doing the assignment, I didn't know what to write down for a report. After I did it, I knew how to do it. We have friends, we do it together. I get better ideas now. Like OB (Organisation Behaviour), case study, I remember the first year, the landlord came to my flat, stayed for three hours, studying and helping me. I'm lucky he helped me. I didn't catch what the lecturer taught. I got help from my landlord. Because in extra tutorials, there are many overseas students, we can ask how to do it. I feel more comfortable.

**CZ** What are the reasons for the adjustment you need to make?

**Frank** Presentation is difficult. Research assignment, I don't like it. It was hard. I never did it before. I like case study, it is still hard. We have schedule, assignment, test, I feel constrained. In Taiwan, every week, we were relaxed. We only had two tests each year, the middle and final one. If you study, and the teacher knows you study, you can pass. Here you could get a Fail. Another reason is personality. For presentation, we learn from children to be quiet. It is hard. I was nervous and forgot everything. For research, you find so much information. Some students have the information, they don't give it to you. In Taiwan, if someone has it, the whole class will have it.

**CZ** What advice would you give to new students so they can adjust more easily?

**Frank** Take extra tutes. They are useful. You will feel more comfortable. Take notes. Do assignments before due date. Overseas students help each other better and get ideas to do assignments. I don't have Australian friends, just Chinese and Vietnamese friends. We are in the same situation, we help each other better. Do research and use the reference books. When you have questions, you can always ask the lecturers. They will be concerned about you. When I was studying in Taiwan, I never asked.

**Gordon**

**CZ** Tell me about your previous study experiences before you enrol in the business course here.

**Gordon** Before I came here, I studied in university, I had studied for four years. I studied math. I studied one year accounting course at Tafe in Australia. Before that I studied English for ten weeks.

**CZ** When you were studying math in China, where about did you do the study?

**Gordon** Nanjing Normal University.

**CZ** Which year did you finish that?

**Gordon** I finished. My course is very different. First I studied for two years, I finished in 1980, and later I studied for another three years part-time. I was both working and studying and got a Bachelor degree, so part time study.

**CZ** When did you finish?

I finished in 1986. I studied in 1983. I started in 1978 and finished in 1980, this is for Diploma. and later I started in 1983, and got a degree.

**CZ** It was all done in Nanjing Normal University. Where did you do your English course?

**Gordon** Before I came here, I studied English for one year. I studied English at the university in China. I studied English full time for one year in China. I work in the university, I was teaching math. The university wants to send people to study abroad. There was a group of nine people, we got a Dutch teacher, two teachers from my university. It was full time study.

**CZ** Was that a particular course or intensive training?

**Gordon** It was normally focused on test.

**CZ** Was that TOEFL?

**Gordon** Yes, it was focused on TOEFL, but basically just Chinese test, English Proficiency Test (EPT). If you pass the test, you can get the money from the Government, then you go abroad to study.

**CZ** Was the course organised by the university or by some other organisation?

**Gordon** That was organised by the university. But it was just concentrated on passing exams. But I didn't wait. I applied to come as a private student to study. Before I came up here I showed my certificate of my English, they suggested me to take ten weeks English course before taking university study. When I came here, they found my English is better than what they thought, so they asked me to take only four weeks English, so I had holidays, got nothing to do. I took another four weeks English course. After the English course, I took Tafe study. Actually I wanted to study at Deakin University, then I transferred to study at Tafe for one year.

**CZ** Did you also do the English course at the Tafe?

**Gordon** Yes.

**CZ** Deakin University suggested you do the English course.

**Gordon** Yes. It's Lincoln. After I studied for ten weeks English. My teacher suggested me 'if you don't want to go to Geelong, you just study here for one year'. They suggested me to take Graduate Diploma. I said I'm more interested in math and law, I want to change my course. If I study math, go back to China, I have to teach math. I must change my job. I want to do new subjects. I choose accounting, banking and finance. He said maybe it's hard for you because you haven't got basic knowledge about these subjects. You must study from the beginning, not like local students. I said Ok, I will take one year course at Tafe. They said you can take one year course at Tafe, then for the second year, you can directly transfer to university study if you pass all the subjects. So I just studied for one year. The first year I find it's very different studying at Tafe, except English course, English course was very easy, no pressure. But this accounting course is much different from that of my country, China. I find the main thing in China, this course takes a long time. The teacher talks very slowly. But here it was very fast.

**CZ** Comparing your previous study experience in China and the study experience here at VUT, how do you compare?

**Gordon** I just find maybe there are two major differences. First thing, the teachers here at VUT just give you rough idea, just give you some main points and show you. Maybe the teacher expect you if you go to the lecture, you must know something, and later you can follow the lecture. You must know something before you attend the lecture. But in China, it's different, you don't know anything, they just teach you from the beginning. Here it's like leader leading you how to go, but in China, maybe it's like carrying you how to go. It's different.

**CZ** That's a very good way of looking at it.

**Gordon** The second thing is in China, if you finish the lecture questions, just at school if you understand what the lecture talked about, you feel easy and relaxed. But in here, it's different, if you finish the lecture, you've got a lot of paper work that needs you to do by yourself. You must prepare everything and do a lot of work, a lot of readings, otherwise you can't follow the lecture. You feel lost. The two different things, one is teaching method is different, just give main point. The second point need more time to review, do your own work.

**CZ** What areas are similar.

**Gordon** I think tutor work is similar. Tutorial class is similar. But in China, tutorial work include two parts, one part is to summarise concepts of lecture, the second part is to work out solutions to the questions. Here is much similar. but not much time for students to discuss questions. If we want to discuss questions with other students to get other students' opinion, we must use other time to do that, not in the tutorial, this is similar.

**CZ** Who will do the summary?

**Gordon** In China, summary of the tutorial work, the teacher normally do that, the teacher will summarise for students. Following summary, give them particular question and show students how to do that.

**CZ** What about students, do students participate and discuss in China?

**Gordon** Normally students just do some questions, similar as here. If you find some questions you can't get the solution, you just present the question and ask the teacher to give you the solution.

**CZ** So you find that similar.

**Gordon** Yes, this one is similar. Another one I find different is that in China, if students are preparing for exam, not like here. Here students prepare for exam, they normally just find past exam paper. Then they just focus on specific questions, prepare some answers, then they got confidence. But in China, it's different, you must review the whole book, doing summary by yourself. And later you can try to find some particular questions in past exam paper and try to get it. This makes yourself familiar with the question, which type of question the teacher will give to you. It's very different.

**CZ** You mentioned the teaching style, learning style, preparing for exams. Is there any other area?

**Gordon** Here study is easier, more relaxed, free. Easy does not mean the normal way, no people push you to study. Some subjects are easy to pass, if you want to get a good mark, it's not easy. But in China, if you are given some question, you must finish that, otherwise you fail badly for tutorial. But here, if you say, 'Sorry, I haven't got time to finish that, can I pass that'. Normally here it is very friendly.

**CZ** Will the teacher push you in China?

**Gordon** Yes, the teacher in China push you, 'You must do that, If you don't do that, I give you a special mark.' But the rule is the same. Here there is attendance mark, but in China, there is also attendance and tutorial question mark. If you don't do very well, I maybe just give you seven, six or five out of ten.

**CZ** What about learning styles?

**Gordon** Here is different. I just compare reference and text book. In China, students only need one text book. If you can understand this text book, you can get good mark normally. But here is different, no particular text book, maybe some chapters from this book, some chapters from that book. The text book also got a lot of reference books, you must read that. A lot of work you must do by yourself, get summary, get main points through reading by yourself, not just following the lecturer. The lecturer just show you what reference you need to do yourself at your own time, you must do that. If you don't do that, maybe your opinion is very narrow. If you are given some questions, you can't answer properly, you can't get good mark here. It's different. Here it's much broader, in China it's much narrower.

**CZ** Some students may not realise that.

**Gordon** Some students haven't realised that. This is a problem for overseas students I think. Sometimes maybe because of the language problem, overseas students haven't got enough time to read, especially for some subjects like law and core subjects like accounting. I study accounting and banking. It's basic knowledge how to set accounting standard. You must read a lot of references and know some organisations and know some procedures.

**CZ** How do you compare students and students relationship?

**Gordon** The relationship I think is loose, not close. There are normally no other people want to spend a lot of time on other students. If you have a problem, you want to wait for other students to come and ask you: 'Have you got a problem?' Not this way. If in China, you want to ask other students for help, other students may be more caring for you. But here is different. I think maybe because people here are very busy, haven't got spare time for other people. The other thing maybe they expect you to know. So here if you have a problem here, in my opinion, you must actively ask somebody. Don't feel shy and discuss. If you couldn't understand, just say: 'I couldn't understand, can you explain it again?' But here you can't get too much from the lecturer. The relationship between students and lectures just lies at very high position, it's not very low. They don't want to talk to you too much. Some lecturers I find very hard, if you have a particular question and if you bring that question to ask a lecturer, actually you expect the lecturer to explain it to you. The lecturer will say: 'You should know, you can read by yourself. It's very clear in the book, you can read that and understand that'. So it makes the student not feeling good, next time maybe the students don't want to go there and ask again. But some lecturers are very good, it depends on different person and personality.

**CZ** Have you come across any situation that you went to ask and was told to go home and read?

**Gordon** Yes, I got this experience, especially I got some very difficult subjects. It's not just me got the feeling, a lot of students got the same feeling. If one teacher is good or not good, easy to talk to or not, students always got the same opinion. From last year, students told me this lecturer is hard to talk to, don't go there and ask him, don't ask something. Maybe it's just other people's opinion, you want to go there and try, you got the same feeling.

**CZ** What did you do then?

**Gordon** If I got that problem, I just go back home and try to read again. If I can't find that, I try to ask other teacher, and also ask my friend and discuss it.

**CZ** How did you feel?

**Gordon** You just waste money to come sometimes. It's not good to come here. You got responsibility to students. It's quite different. Not a lot of local students went there to ask the lecturer and discuss some questions.

**CZ** Well we compared some of the similarities and differences. Obviously the previous and current study experiences are different. What did you do to make the changes?

**Gordon** I just find it different. I got friends coming from Indonesia and Malaysia. We study the same subjects. Theirs is very difficult. People are different, their abilities are different, maybe the ability to read a book. They couldn't understand, and they also failed to ask the lecturer. They just kept quiet. So they got problem in the exam. If I study with my friends, I always suggest you should ask why. If you study some questions, you don't just feel satisfied you can get the solution. You must ask yourself why this is the way to get the solution, why it's different. If you can ask why, maybe it makes the concept more clearly. So one week before the exam, we discuss about particular topic. You can ask why, it not just helps with the exam preparation. It helps each other. If you can answer why, it makes more clearly for you as well. If you want to explain anything, you must know everything about it. If you can't explain it, you go back to the book again, check on something and discuss it again. This is more useful for study.

**CZ** This is very useful.

**Gordon** It's especially so for some hard subjects. Discussion is very important. Don't study by yourself. Team study. Team work is very important. Team study and group study has another benefit, you can get a lot of reference for different way and save time too.

**CZ** Many heads work better than one.

**Gordon** Of course.

**CZ** That's adjusting to learning style, how do you adjust to teaching style?

**Gordon** How do I got used to study here?

**CZ** Yes.

**Gordon** I got experience which is maybe different from other students. I studied in Tafe first, Tafe is different from university. It's like in the middle. In Tafe maybe the teachers are more friendly than in university. They care more about students. If you got some questions, they always give you some explanations. And you just try to read by yourself. At the beginning maybe you can't get used to it. Maybe it's because of language problem. You can't understand. If you study your subject, every particular subject words are similar. Maybe the first subject you will feel very hard. If you can study, take more time reading. Make sure you understand everything, later you will feel easy. You can get pass. First you must study. Keep reading and follow lecture guide. If they ask you to do something, make sure you do it. Later you will feel easier. I think the best way for students is to read before the lecture. Read the chapter for next lecture, follow the lecture guide. You will know what the next lecture is about. Then it will be easier for you to follow and understand, especially for difficult ones. Otherwise you just sit there, you can't follow the lecture. You can't understand a hundred percent. You feel lost and bored. You don't want to attend the lecture again. Just sit at home and study. If you don't attend the lecture, the situation becomes worse and worse. And next time you feel I could not understand at all. Lecture is very useful if you can understand it. It gives you a very good idea of which way you go.

**CZ** That's really good. If you recall what it was like the first few days for you studying at VUT and what it is like for you now. Is there any major stage you have to go through?

**Gordon** Yes, it's very different. The first year it was very hard to get used to. You don't know what you could do. Just like that one, everybody got the feeling. If you just take a subject, actually you don't know anything before. Maybe the first three weeks, you don't know what you are doing. Just you can't handle it. After three weeks, maybe you know some ideas about the subject. Then you feel better. First you don't know how I can go, where I'm going, how to study. You don't know the environment. You don't know your teacher, you don't know your classmates. You study by yourself. You feel lonely. After the first semester, the second semester, I get used to the study very easily.

**CZ** So now it's all on the way, under control.

**Gordon** Yes, because I remember it was very hard the first semester, I got a lot of the hard subjects, like accounting and law. So first semester, I always tell overseas students `You must study very hard, get

pass, then it gives you confidence. You can do everything. Then you feel good.' I always tell my friends first don't do anything, just concentrate on your study. Just try to do your best, and you get more confidence. And second year you feel easy.

**CZ** That's really good. Was the adjustment easy or difficult for you?

**Gordon** Studying here? I think it's easy, maybe because of my age. It's not hard. I worked before. I did study. Before I came here, I used to study by myself. And the problem is I'm studying and working. I always feel it's hard to handle. How can I get work done and study, not enough time for yourself, so no time for social life. At the moment I cut the time to work, more time to study and some time for socialising.

**CZ** You need to relax a bit.

**Gordon** Yes, sure. Sometimes for students from China, it's different. Maybe students from other countries haven't got this problem. They have very strong economic support.

**CZ** Family support.

**Gordon** Yes, family support. But if you are working, you can get involved in Australian life. And you can meet a lot of friends and know how to talk with other people. You can learn the culture quickly.

**CZ** So it makes life easier.

**Gordon** Yes, it's easier.

**CZ** That's good.

**Gordon** I enjoyed working and studying. I find you can't sit down there whole day just reading the book. Sometimes it's not efficient.

**CZ** It's true. Your mind gets tired.

**Gordon** Yes.

**CZ** Well, you have gone through the first year and got used to it. What advice do you give to new students?

**Gordon** From my point view, first year when the students come here, the university can have a lot of activities to meet the students and help them to get used to living here. Then just make some special group to help them to study. If they come here, try to know everything, know some lecturers and tutors. I just think I do my way. If I take a new subject, the first thing I want to do is see the lecturer and speak to the lecturer. I will say: 'Maybe my English is not good enough, I will have questions, and come and see you very often'. Just make the lecturer know you. Have good relationship with the lecturer. It makes it easy to go and ask them questions.

The second thing is make the time table you want. See your tutor. If you have questions, don't be shy and keep quiet. Maybe it's easy to discuss it with your classmates. If you can't do that, just bring the question to see your tutor, not just at the tutorial time. You can see the tutor's own time and learn to make an appointment. Don't just go and waste your time.

Try to follow lecture guide. Do everything, don't leave any question. Don't worry whether it's right answer or not. Just try to answer every question. Then you can correct your answer. You can see your lecturer and ask why this answer is this way.

**CZ** You mentioned the guide. When you were studying in China, did you have a guide for the subject you are studying.

**Gordon** Yes, normally students don't care about the guide. The guide is just for teacher to use. Here it's more active.

**CZ** That's very important. Maybe students get it, they just don't realise that everything in it is important.

**Gordon** Some of my friends use the guide and past exam paper. They can work out some main problems that always appear in the exam and prepare that. Normally they get very good mark. That's exam skills.

**CZ** You also mentioned learning to make an appointment.

**Gordon** Yes, this is different. You must learn to make an appointment. First you follow the instruction of doing things. Second you learn to make an appointment.

**CZ** Was it a new experience for you making an appointment?

**Gordon** In China, you don't need to make an appointment. Just bring the question to see the lecturer. The lecturer is always in the office. But here it's different. The lecturer is very busy and sometimes not at school. Maybe sometimes they got other things to do and don't like you to go in. They can make the time for you.

**CZ** What other advice do you have?

**Gordon** Prepare the questions. Prepare every tutorial question before you go to the lecture or tutorial. Then it's easier for you to follow.

**CZ** Preparation.

**Gordon** I do that way. Just take fifteen minutes. Do a quick reading, just to know what the lecture is about. This I think is just for your language. Notes, another problem is note taking at lecture. Don't try to write down everything. At first I tried to write down everything. If you want to write everything, you can't hear anything. You can't get anything from the lecture. This is my opinion. First year I always tried to write everything. If I write everything, I am just like a copy machine. I can't get anything from the lecture. Listening is very important. And writing down some key words. It's enough. Don't worry about making good notes.

**CZ** Did you take notes while you were studying in university in China?

**Gordon** No. I don't like taking notes. I always take some words and put in the book. Before the lecture, I always read the chapter in the reference or text book. In the lecture, I open the book when the lecturer is talking, I just put beside the article or book key words, especially for law. If you take notes, there are lots of notes, you can't hear anything. You can't do that. But now things are changing. Some lecturers are very good. They give you very good work book which gives you everything. You don't need to do anything, just listen. If you want to write something, the lecturer will show you what words to write down. Just write in the margin. There is always half a page of notes, half a page of blank paper. You can write down a few words, not a lot.

**CZ** That will be very helpful.

**Gordon** Yes, very helpful for overseas students. You know if you write something, you must think in the language, it takes a long time. This one is very good. From another view, this is called non-add value activity, it is no use.

**CZ** Good point. Ok, thank you very much for the information. I'm sure it will be very useful.

**Gordon** Thank you.

(More information came up in the chat afterwards.)

**Gordon** I just say presentation is very important. You prepare. You must practise before you give presentation. You can practise with your friends. Sit down and speak to them. Ask them 'Can you understand? Can you follow me?' And ask them which one is better. The best way is to look for someone local. They can tell you which word you should use. If you can prepare like that. You will get more confidence. You can do very well. You can get good mark. I learnt this at Tafe. They taught us how to prepare.

**CZ** So you learnt how to do presentation at Tafe.

**Gordon** Yes, I learnt at Tafe. I also learnt how to write essay and report in Tafe. This is a different way, because in China, if you prepare some article, you always use Chinese method. But here is different. For example, here if you write an essay, the first sentence you must say something broadly, and second you must get to your main point. After that in each paragraph, the first sentence tells the main point or the last sentence is the main point. And the last paragraph gives conclusion. Here the lecturers always look for this, and try to look for your support points. Then you can get good mark. Otherwise they think you are not very logical, they can't follow you. Just try to write English, short sentence, easy to understand. Don't try to write very complex sentence. People can't follow you. This is very important. But in China, it's different, very beautiful sentence, very long. It's not good. Here is different. Try to write what you want to say. And make it easy for other people to understand. This is writing skills.

**CZ** Writing and presentation, these are the areas which are different. Thank you for that.

**Gordon** That's all right.

**Hattie**

**CZ** Can you please tell me your previous study experiences?

**Hattie** You mean the last one before I came here?

**CZ** Yes.

**Hattie** I graduated from the Commercial College, majoring in Business Administration. It's about ten years ago in my country, Taiwan.

**CZ** Was that after high school?

**Hattie** After junior high school.

**CZ** How many years was that at Commercial College?

**Hattie** Five years.

**CZ** When did you finish it?

**Hattie** 1986, ten years ago.

**CZ** That was business study as well. Did you do any study in Australia before you enrolled in VUT?

**Hattie** No.

**CZ** Just straight into the course here?

**Hattie** Yes.



**CZ** If we compare the study you did in junior high school, the Commercial College in Taiwan and now university study at VUT in Australia, how do you compare?

**Hattie** It's very different my experience in my country and here. In my country the students are more pleasant. The teacher says everything, we take everything from the teacher. The teacher tells you the question, the teacher tells you answer as well. But in Australia, I feel the teacher just gives you the concept or question. You have to find the answer. If you don't have any question or problem, maybe the question just pass. So if you don't ask the teacher what kind of problem you have, maybe you still can't understand. That's how I feel.

**CZ** That's the difference about the students and teachers. What other areas are also different.

**Hattie** In Australia, I think the library is very important. You have to use the books in the library, but in Taiwan it's not necessary. You just read the teacher's notes. That's it.

**CZ** Did you have a library in the College?

**Hattie** Yes, we did.

**CZ** But you didn't use it.

**Hattie** No. We just read the newspaper or magazine in the library.

**CZ** We did probably the same.

**Hattie** That's different. We didn't have any presentation. We had a lot of tests, but not many assignments or presentation. In my country the students don't like to talk in the class. Even they have questions, they prefer to ask the teacher after the class. I think maybe they are shy or...

**CZ** We do probably the same. You mentioned the students. What about the teaching style?

**Hattie** The teachers in my country tell you in more details, and step by step. You just follow the teacher, you can easily pass. But I think something is different. In my country it's very difficult to enter university, but very easy to pass. But here I feel difficult. Maybe because I'm an overseas student, I have a language problem. I feel difficult.

**CZ** What about students and students relationship?

**Hattie** In my country, because I studied at the college, I have the same classmates everyday. We were doing the same subjects. But here if you are doing different subjects, you have different classmates. I remember when I was doing the first semester at VUT, it was very difficult because I didn't have friends. And also I didn't have the western educational background. I didn't know how to do the assignment, so it was very difficult. I found I have to know many friends. I feel it's useful. It helps me. If you have friends, you can discuss, exchange information.

**CZ** What was it like the first semester or the first few weeks when you first went to the lecture?

**Hattie** I didn't understand. I thought even I didn't attend the lecture, it would be the same, because I attended the lecture, I still couldn't understand. I was scared to attend the tutorial because sometimes the lecturer speaks slowly, more clearly, I could understand. I could not understand what the local students were talking. Because in the tutorial, you have to discuss for some subjects, I could not contribute. I was scared.

**CZ** What is it like for you now?

**Hattie** Now it's better.

**CZ** How do you compare the student and teacher relationship?

**Hattie** In Taiwan we respect teachers. And we can't leave the classroom before the class finishes. Even when we have to go to the toilet, we have to tell the teacher. It's different.

**CZ** What about in here?

**Hattie** So surprise. I was surprised to see sometimes students eat food, they drink. But now it's Ok.

**CZ** Ok, we had a look at a lot of areas that are different. What areas are similar?

**Hattie** We have to pass the test. It is the same.

**CZ** Since a lot of areas your previous study experience and your study experience in Australia are different, what did you have to do to get used to study in here?

**Hattie** Can you say it again?

**CZ** Since things are different. What you are used to probably won't work here. What did you do to adjust, in another word, what did you do to get used to study here? What sort of changes did you have to make?

**Hattie** The first year, if I have a break or I finish the class during the day, I will go home immediately because I don't want to stay here. I think I have English problem, so I don't like to meet people. Because if you meet people, you have to talk. I was scared. So I better stay home. But the second year I prefer to stay at school, because if you stay home, you will waste time. You will find food to eat, or watch TV. So now if I have a break, I would stay in the library.

**CZ** What about the areas of study style, what sort of changes do you have to make?

**Hattie** If I have time, I'd like to read the chapter before I attend the lecture. Even if I don't have sufficient time, I will just read the topic or title, and pick up some vocabulary I don't understand. I feel if I read before I attend the lecture, it will be easy to catch up.

**CZ** What sort of things did you do to do the assignment?

**Hattie** I will ask my friends. Some of my friends did the subject before, so I will ask them to give me some information on how to pass the assignment. If I still have problem, I will ask the tutor. But sometimes I feel I can't get the help because I feel the tutor and lecturer don't communicate. I ask the tutor, the tutor say, 'You'd better ask the lecturer'.

**CZ** Did you get the chance to talk to the lecturer to find out?

**Hattie** Yes, not often, because every time after the class, many students go to ask the lecturer. I don't think they have time. I prefer to ask the tutor questions.

**CZ** If you recall what it was like for you the first few weeks and what it is like for you now, what sort of stages of adjustment have you gone through.

**Hattie** I will find the problem I have before, I have English problem, I will read grammar book. I have some listening comprehension problem. I have a part-time job. I have many local friends. I can learn from them. I don't think I learn at school, because I don't have many local friends. We always go with the Asian students. We use Chinese. It's not useful to learn English.

**CZ** You mentioned going to tutorial. The first few times when you went to the tutorial, what was it like for you?

**Hattie** I just sat there. Sometimes they don't want to talk with you, so I just sat at the corner. I felt sad in the first year.

**CZ** Did you ever speak in the tutorial?

**Hattie** No.

**CZ** What is it like for you now?

**Hattie** It's better. I will find my friend. We will take the same tutorial time. I have a company, and I feel more confident.

**CZ** Ok. it is hard, isn't it when you don't know many people? You feel a bit strange.

**Hattie** Yes.

**CZ** Is there any other thing you want to talk about the changes apart from doing reading, asking tutor questions?

**Hattie** I have an idea. I just heard from a friend. She said she reads newspaper everyday. I think I want to try. I don't like to read the Australian newspaper because every time when I want to read the newspaper, I think why I don't set the time to read the text book. I read Chinese newspaper. I think the news is the same, so I read the Chinese paper. I set the time to read the text book. Now I want to try, every day I spend half an hour or one hour just to have a quick read of the newspaper.

**CZ** Do you watch TV? You mentioned using library, how do you find using the library?

**Hattie** Normally we just study in the library. If we have assignment, we borrow the books. I don't like doing the assignment, because we, I can say the majority of students just copy someone's idea. I do the assignment, but I don't think I get much from it.

**CZ** I don't quite understand. Can you explain?

**Hattie** Because we have to finish the assignment in a short time. We just borrow a lot of books. We just take some from this book, and some from another book. And I don't think we get a lot from this. Sometimes I think it's a waste of time. It's my opinion.

**CZ** How do you find the exam?

**Hattie** In my country you have a second chance if you fail, like the N1 here. If you still fail, then you have to repeat. But in here, if you get N1 or N2, it's still the same situation.

**CZ** Did you realise that in the first semester before the exam or after the exam?

**Hattie** I'm not clear.

**CZ** You mentioned that in Taiwan you get a second chance for exams, but in here you don't. Did you know that before the exam or learnt about it after the exam?

**Hattie** I only learnt after the exam.

**CZ** Sometimes you don't realise these things. Is the adjustment to studying at VUT easy or difficult?

**Hattie** I think it's easy. My problem is the language problem. But I feel if I'm a local student, it's easy.

**CZ** Well, you have gone through the major stages of making changes and feeling a bit strange in the first semester. Each year we have new students coming in. What sort of advice will you give to new students.

**Hattie** First, you need friends. Sometimes I meet the first year students, I would advise them to spend more time in the library. If you spend more time at school, sometimes you can get unexpected information. Because you meet people, you discuss something, you will get unexpected information.

**CZ** So meet friends, spend more time at school in the library.

**Hattie** Yes, and pre-read the text book before you attend the lecture.

**CZ** What other advice do you give to new students so they can adjust to study more easily.

**Hattie** No.

**CZ** Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

**Hattie** Nothing.

**CZ** Thank you for the information.

**Irene**

**CZ** Can you tell me about your previous study before you enrolled in VUT?

**Irene** Before I enrolled in this course in VUT, I did my A Level, GCE which is the Cambridge paper from London. That was a three year course, I did that in Singapore.

**CZ** What is the equivalent to the high school here?

**Irene** I guess it's VCE, Year Twelve.

**CZ** Year Twelve. What was the name of the course again?

**Irene** GCE, A Level. We have GCE, O Level, I did that after Set Four, which is six years of primary school, four years of secondary school and three years of high school.

**CZ** So altogether thirteen years of education. What does GCE stand for?

**Irene** General Certificate of Education.

**CZ** Ok, which year was that?

**Irene** 1988. After that I worked for three and a half years in a bank, then I continued study.

**CZ** So you enrolled in the course in 85 and finished in 88.

**Irene** Yes.

**CZ** Did you do any other study in Australia before you enrolled in VUT.

**Irene** No.

**CZ** Just directly here.

**Irene** Yes.

**CZ** How long have you been here?

**Irene** I was here last February. So when I was here, I was quite lost.

**CZ** So just about a year and a half.

**Irene** Yes, one and a half years.

**CZ** How do you feel now?

**Irene** Quite settled down.

**CZ** It takes some time. Now I'd like you to compare your previous study experience and current study experience at VUT. How do you compare?

I feel there was more pressure in Singapore, it's more relaxed here. While I was doing my A Levels, we have to know the whole syllabus. That means we take the three year course, we sit for one exam which is at the end of the three years. The things include in the exam are for the whole of three years. Here is just one semester, thirteen weeks, you take the exam, then another thirteen weeks, you take another exam. So I can more or less forget some of the things. While in Singapore, it's different, you have to do everything. You have to study for Year One, it will be tested in Year Two, then it will be tested again in Year Three. So it is continuous.

**CZ** But each year do you have any exams?

**Irene** Yes, we have mid-year exam, we have final exam. Every year we have two exams, but in the second year, Year One's work is still to be tested.

**CZ** Then at the end of the three years, you have an exam to test everything, so more pressure.

**Irene** Then as to teaching style, it's different. In Singapore, it's like more of classroom work. Unless you want to see the teacher, you approach her. If not, then most of the time is one way.

**CZ** You mean one way from the teacher. What about in here?

**Irene** In here for lecture, it's still one way. But in tutorials, we do have chance to ask questions.

**CZ** What other areas are different?

**Irene** That is for the teaching. For living, I'm free to do everything I want. For lectures I can attend, I can choose not to attend. It's like everything is up to you. While in Singapore it's different. Everything is planned. You have to follow. So you have a time table. In here the time table is just for twelve hours. Three hours for each of the four subjects. Just the twelve hours are planned, the rest you have to plan for yourself.

**CZ** In Singapore, did you have classes in all hours?

**Irene** Yes, it's all planned. That's another difference.

**CZ** What other areas studying at VUT is different from your previous study.

**Irene** That's about it.

**CZ** Ok, what areas are similar?

**Irene** We still have to sit for the test, we still have assignments, we still have exams. That is similar. It's just that the work load is lighter.

**CZ** How do you compare the student and student relationship?

**Irene** I guess it's closer in Singapore. Your classmates are for a few years, while in here I know my classmates if we are doing the same subject. Sometimes we happen to see each other for one semester, then that's it. In Singapore, we will be seeing the same people for three years.

**CZ** What about the student and teacher relationship?

**Irene** In Singapore, one teacher will lead you all the way until the final exam. The teacher will know what your strength and weakness is. While here you just have the teacher for one semester. That's it.

**CZ** Ok. Did you have any lectures while you were studying in Singapore?

**Irene** No. It's not a lecture. It's just that the teacher will teach the lesson, we will work through the exercises. It's just like a lecture followed by a tutorial.

**CZ** It's in a small class, not big ones.

**Irene** Yes, not in the theatre.

**CZ** So going to the big theatre is a new experience for you.

**Irene** Yes.

**CZ** What was it like for you the first few times?

**Irene** The first few times I was quite lost, because I was not used to the Australian accent when they speak, especially if they speak too fast. Actually we don't understand, maybe there is a language problem. In Singapore we use English, here is English as well. But it's different. When it comes to listening, it's harder.

**CZ** When you study GCE in Singapore, was it in English?

**Irene** Yes, it was all in English, except Chinese. I took Chinese as the second language. For other subjects, like math, it was all in English.

**CZ** That will prepared you to study here. What language is used in primary and secondary schools?

**Irene** Both, English and Chinese. For the main subjects, like English, math, science, they are all in English.

**CZ** What about other subjects, like history, geography?

**Irene** English, because I come from English school. We have two streams, English stream and Chinese stream. I happen to come from English.

**CZ** If you compare the proportion of language you use, English and Chinese, which would be bigger?

**Irene** In school, when it comes to teaching, English. When it comes to classmate conversation, if you see a Chinese classmate, you speak Chinese; if you meet a Malay or Indian, we speak English. As for family, we use Cantonese.

**CZ** So when you learn Chinese, is that Mandarin?

**Irene** Yes, at school, it's Mandarin.

**CZ** You speak many languages. That's an advantage. We had a look at the differences while you were studying in Singapore and studying here. Actually language would be the area that is the same, isn't it? What did you do to adjust to study here?

**Irene** To watch more TV. Actually TV helps a lot with my listening. Both countries use English. Written English for me is no problem, but when it comes to listening, I have problem listening in lectures.

**CZ** So that is one way to get improvement in listening. What other things did you do to adjust.

**Irene** Maybe the newspaper may help.

**CZ** You also read English newspaper?

**Irene** Not as often as watching TV.

**CZ** You mentioned the arranged time table before, now you have a lot of free time. How do you adjust to that?

**Irene** We have to set time table for ourself. You spend so much time for your assignment, make sure you finish it by that time and get started to the next one. Also do the set tutorial work. Sometimes Monday to Friday, I may have one lecture on Monday. I will spend one hour travelling time to school, one hour travelling time home. Sometimes I don't feel like come for the one hour, I just force myself to come. If you skip once, you will skip the other. So that is the time you just have to force yourself to act according to your time table.

**CZ** You are very disciplined. Did you have tutorials while you were studying in Singapore?

**Irene** Actually studying in Singapore is like more tutorials than lectures. It's just like you have to work as well as listen.

**CZ** What was it like for you when you attended the tutorials the first few times here?

**Irene** Different tutors have different ways of having tutorials. Sometimes the tutor will just go in and will say whatever he wants to say. Some will see whether there are any questions and explain according to the questions. Some will just put the transparencies on, just like another lecture. I prefer those with questions and answers. So we know what we want to know.

**CZ** So which means two way. While you were studying in Singapore, did you have a lot of chances to speak in classes?

**Irene** Not very often. Just chance to ask questions, not presentation, very seldom.

**CZ** What about in here in tutorials?

**Irene** We speak more often, by asking questions and by answering questions, sometimes by presentations.

**CZ** Was that easy to adjust to?

**Irene** Yes.

**CZ** If you recall what was it like for you the first semester and what is it like for you now. Is there any major stages you have gone through?

I think the first semester, I was quite lost, because when we first came, we had to look for accommodation, we had to get used to the weather, we had to get used to the transport system. We were not used to taking trains, and changing, all those things. We had to get used to the culture. When people meet, they greet, then sometimes they talk about the football. The culture is different. We have to get used all these things. So when I first came, I was not used to the transport system, I was always late. We didn't know our way around, actually quite lost this building to that building. That is the start. Just quite lost, the test, assignment. We didn't know what would be tested. Actually everything is quite different. It takes some time to sort out. You just don't know. So second semester was all right, because you got the

accommodation, everything, you have more time to study. I think it takes about one semester. I took three months to look for the present accommodation.

**CZ** Did you ask the help here?

**Irene** No, we didn't know.

**CZ** You mentioned the test or assignment, you were not sure what is going to be tested or whatever. In the first semester, when you were given the subject guide or course guide, did you use that very often?

**Irene** Not so often, actually everything is given, we just didn't know it was there.

**CZ** Sometimes it takes time to realise that.

**Irene** Even for the exam, sometimes the teachers already give something, it's just that we didn't know. Till the second and third semester, we know.

**CZ** Everything takes time. Is there any major stage you have gone through, what about after that?

**Irene** I feel more settled down. It depends on the subject, you have to adapt to the style here. I think one year should be all right.

**CZ** Now you will be very confident. If you recall the adjustment you have made. First you were a bit lost, then in the second semester, you felt more settled. Now you are even more settled. If you recall the adjustment, How was it for you, was it difficult or was it easy for you?

**Irene** At the time, I was feeling very difficult, especially for the first month, I just felt like giving up and go home. After the first month, it gets easier. Now it's easy. If you weigh that, I will say it's not too hard. But at the time, I felt very hard. Now it's actually not too hard.

**CZ** When I first came here, the first three months was Ok, because everything was new. But after that I just felt like packing my bag and go home. It's probably the stage everyone will have to go through. What do you think are the reasons for the difficulty of the adjustment?

**Irene** It takes time to iron out things, just takes time to get used to the way here. Maybe language is one of the problem.

**CZ** It's true. You did quite well.

**Irene** Actually it's easier because last time in Singapore, we had to answer fifty questions in one hour, now in here one hour, you need to do thirty. There is no time pressure, most of the time in Singapore, I couldn't finish the paper.

**CZ** Your previous training helped you, that's probably the reason you find it easy. Is there anything else behind the adjustment?

**Irene** Just manage your time properly. Just go according to the time.

**CZ** Ok. If you recall the things you have gone through as a new student, we have many new students coming every semester, what sort of advice will you give to new students so that they can adjust more easily?

**Irene** Time management. There's nobody here to control you whether you go to the lecture or not. No attendance to be taken. Then tutorial, just this year they start to allocate marks for tutorial. Last year, there wasn't any. So just manage your time, because all planned for you is just twelve hours. If you attend all the extra classes, it's just fifteen hours. You still have twenty hours doing nothing if you don't plan it properly.



**CZ** Apart from time management, what other advice?

**Irene** Maybe get help from senior students. Before the start of the semester, just have a feel what the subjects are like, what is expected for each subject.

**CZ** Quite a few students study in groups.

**Irene** Before the semester start, just ask about what is expected from each subject. We need more advice on choosing the subjects after the first year, after the core subjects. Maybe you need some advice on choosing the subjects.

**CZ** Where did you get your advice?

**Irene** From other students. They advised me: 'Don't put these two subjects together, because they are both time consuming. You need to do a lot of reading.' So you never put them together. You have to do one subject in order to do another one. You need advice maybe from course co-ordinator so you can finish them in time.

**CZ** That's really good. Anything else, time management, getting help from previous students?

**Irene** That all.

**CZ** Apart from the questions set out in this guide line, what other things you would like to talk about from your own experience?

**Irene** I think apart from study, just get involved in something else. If not, you will be quite bored. Just like learning to drive here. Then you will get to visit other places. Just give yourself a break during semester break after the exam. That's all.

**CZ** Thank you very much for the information. I'm sure this will be useful.

**Irene** You are welcome.

**Jassie**

**CZ** How long have you been here?

**Jassie** Ok, I've been studying here for two years, this is the second year. Before that I did high school, so I've been here for four years.

**CZ** Where did you do your high school?

**Jassie** In Taylor College. Kingswood before that while I learnt my English with other students.

**CZ** Did you learn any English while you were in Malaysia?

**Jassie** Yes, I did, but very little. I had difficulty to understand when I first came. Actually if you ask me about the similarity, I can't think any similarities, because it's quite different. I can think about the differences.

**CZ** Did you do high school in Malaysia?

**Jassie** Yes, I completed my high school in Malaysia, Form Five, which is Year Eleven, Year Twelve here.

**CZ** I'm not very familiar with the educational system in Malaysia, can you explain it to me how many years do you have to study in high school?

**Jassie** Yes, we have to study for six years.

**CZ** How many years in primary school?

**Jassie** Six years. We have to do one year preparation, we have to study Chinese or Malay for one year, then five year for all Malay books. The style in school is normal. We start at seven, and finish at one. Then we have period to do the normal duties, like the normal high school. So I can't compare with the university. I don't know about the university life.

**CZ** In the high school you attended, what language was used at school?

**Jassie** We used Malay when we spoke to the teacher. But we spoke Chinese with classmates, we use Malay with Malay friends. We never used English. Even if we have English class, we did not speak much.

**CZ** When did you finish your high school in Malaysia?

**Jassie** I think 1990.

**CZ** 1990. Ok, which city was that?

**Jassie** Sava.

**CZ** Compare your previous study in Malaysia and current study in Australia, what aspects are different?

**Jassie** Here it's much, much more free.

**CZ** Are you saying in high school or university? You did your study in Malaysia in high school, while in Australia your study experience is at university.

**Jassie** Yes, we have much, much more freedom. We can make our own time table ourselves. We can arrange things more independently. We can think about what we are going to do. Friendship, like the teacher is nicer. They are not too strong. In Malaysia, whatever they say you have to listen, you have to follow. You can't say no. You can't discuss, you have to listen. Here if you have a problem, you can talk, you can discuss it in the class. Then with the students, it's difficult for us. One thing is the English problem, another thing is, this is normal question, like racism. I found here is Ok. But compare with the rest of my high school, they are much more... more...

**CZ** So did you mean the student and student relationship?

**Jassie** Yes, I didn't really like it in high school, I'm a Chinese, I found it hard to make friends. They all stay in their own groups. They don't want to receive us. This is our group, you can't come. Here in university, they are nicer because they are all adults and they have the knowledge. We can be friends and ask them questions. We can discuss. It's very good here. The lecturers, the tutors are good, we can discuss any problem with them. I'm quite happy here.

**CZ** What other aspects are different?

**Jassie** The only thing I find hard is sometimes the homework. What I'm thinking is it's up to you whatever you want to do that or not. It's only our problem. If you ask them, you get it. If you don't ask, you can't do it. That's all.

**CZ** How do you compare the lectures?

**Jassie** The lectures are useful, but boring. I prefer sitting there and listen. But most of my friends, they don't like it.

**CZ** Did you have any lectures while you were studying in Malaysia?

**Jassie** No, we just listen. We start at nine, finish at ten, then start again.

**CZ** What was it like for you when you went to the lecturer the first few times?

**Jassie** I found so strange. I had no idea. I think I had no idea, I find it so difficult to catch up, the life in university. I found it difficult to catch up, because of the freedom. You have to do it by yourself. We have to do everything. They are not going to say you have to do this, you have to do that.

**CZ** What about tutorials, did you attend tutorials while you were in Malaysia?

**Jassie** No. We discuss the problems or homework in class, or maybe we do our homework. We handed it in, then got it back.

**CZ** When you attended the tutorials here at VUT, what was it like for you the first few times?

**Jassie** I found a bit nervous, scared, because they ask questions. This is the only thing I found so hard, they never asked questions in Malaysia. It's a bit scary. I found a bit strange that we have to discuss, and we can talk in the class, before in Malaysia, we could not. We could not talk. We had to be quiet.

**CZ** If you as a student have to be quiet in the class in Malaysia, so what is happening in the class?

**Jassie** You just be quiet. The teacher will call your name to answer questions. That's it. No discussions. But in here we have to discuss. We are given questions, then we discuss with friends and exchange knowledge. This is very good.

**CZ** How do you compare the learning style?

**Jassie** I think here is a lot better, because we learn from lecturers, tutors as well as friends. And we have to push ourselves to do research.

**CZ** How do you compare the teaching style?

**Jassie** Here it is much freer. In Malaysia, it's stricter. They copy things on the blackboard, after that you have to read it very carefully. They will ask question next time, if you can't answer, you will be punished.

**CZ** Punished, what sort of punishment?

**Jassie** Smack in your hand.

**CZ** What did they use?

**Jassie** Ruler. You have to remember.

**CZ** Even at the time when you were at school in the late 80s?

**Jassie** Yes. It's true.

**CZ** While in China, in schools, in the old days, they used to do that. But in the 70s, teachers were not allowed to do that.

**Jassie** We still do that, sometimes.

**CZ** That is strict.

**Jassie** Here, even you don't do your homework, it's all right, just discuss.

**CZ** We had a look at the differences. Any similarities?

**Jassie** I can't find any similarities. I've been thinking whole night, I can't find any.

**CZ** You can't find any. That's all right. Since your previous study experiences are different from your current study experiences at VUT, what sort of changes did you have to make to get used to study here?

**Jassie** I think overseas students like us should be more active because they have to spend more time on homework. I recommend overseas students have to be more active, play some sports to fresh your mind. Join some parties, not during exam time, but during holiday. Join together for friendships. School may provide some facilities, but it's not enough. I always try to go there, but timing is the problem. Sometimes I find it so hard, so I have to go to the city and join another club. So students can relax, not to work too hard. Also workshop is a good idea. We had workshops in first year, much more improvement for the homework.

**CZ** What other changes or adjustment did you have to make in order to get used to study here at VUT?

**Jassie** Planning. It's important. I think attendance is quite important. If you stop attending class, you will find it so difficult to catch up. As overseas students, I recommend they attend classes, plan their time, remind them assignment, test coming. Ask questions. Whatever you have to ask, just ask. Plan some activities to refresh your brain.

**CZ** When we talked about the differences, you mentioned attending tutorials, what did you have to do to get used to attending the tutorial?

**Jassie** The mark, the percentage, every time you come, you get one mark. I think it's a good idea to force students to go to tutorials. Sometimes we have difficulty to catch up what is going on, tutors need to take care of us overseas students. Sometimes it's easy for us to get lost in the class. They may be talking further on, but we are still at an early stage.

**CZ** If you recall what it was like for you the first few days or first few weeks at VUT, what is it like for you now after two years? Is there any major stage you have gone through in adjusting to study here?

**Jassie** What do you mean major stage?

**CZ** At the beginning when you first came here, things were all new to you, now you may find different. What sort of stage do you think you have gone through in adjusting to study at VUT?

**Jassie** I think I have been talking about it. I can't think of anything else.

**CZ** Is the adjusting easy for you or difficult.

**Jassie** Not difficult. It's fine for me. I find it Ok.

**CZ** What do you think are the reasons that you find the adjustment Ok for you?

**Jassie** Maybe it's easy for me to catch up. I'm not sure.

**CZ** So you've done English, Year Eleven and Twelve here. Which year was that?

**Jassie** 1991 and 1992.

**CZ** Do you find that helping you to adjust?

**Jassie** Yes. Much helpful. I did ELICOS, during that time, we had to start new life, from Malaysia life to life here. I started Year Eleven, I found it so difficult. I really could not catch up. Year Twelve was Ok. Here I

found hard the first semester, the second semester was much better. The second year is totally Ok. I know what is happening.

**CZ** That's good. Maybe that previous study at Year Eleven and Twelve helped.

**Jassie** Yes. I'm not sure about the students who first came here. Some students finished the study in Malaysia, and come here to start university course. I think they will find it so hard.

**CZ** First semester is always the hardest. You mentioned advising students to be more active and join in activities. What other advice do you give to students?

**Jassie** One thing I have to say is when the lecturer gives you the piece of paper for the whole year planning.

**CZ** You mean the subject outline?

**Jassie** Yes. Overseas students receive the paper, but do not read it. Actually they give you a lot of information for the whole semester. From there, you can plan your time. It's very helpful. New students have to read everything they receive, and ask questions. Talk with friends and find out what is happening.

**CZ** How long did it take you to realise that course outline is important?

**Jassie** Sometimes the lecturer or tutor mention something, we were surprised and asked why you knew it. They say from the outline. Then we knew. I think it's very important.

**CZ** That's a good advice. Not many students realise that.

**Jassie** That is important. That is very good. Students can plan their time table. Plan time for research. This is all I can recommend to new students.

**CZ** What other advice?

**Jassie** Don't live too far. Students live far away. Then it takes time to wake up and travel. I suggest them not to live too far. I know it's hard, but try because I lived too far away before, I found it hard to wake up. Sometimes you say, 'It's too early, I'm not going to school'. This is not good. You have to push yourself and sleep early.

**CZ** This is important. Apart from the things we mentioned here, is there anything else you would want to add?

**Jassie** I think another thing is library, doing research. Sometimes it's very difficult. We have to go to other library.

**CZ** Talking about using library, did you use library a lot while you were studying in Malaysia?

**Jassie** No, never.

**CZ** Was there a library at school?

**Jassie** Yes, there was. I did use library, but not in the school library, but in local suburbs. I used to read books and do my homework there. The local library was much bigger, I could find books, but in school library, it was very hard. Here there aren't enough books, when the assignment is due, you couldn't find the books.

**CZ** Do you use the library often?

**Jassie** Yes, I use it quite often, sitting there, doing my own work and reading books. That's all I can say.

**CZ** Thank you very much for the information.

## **Appendix D**

Appendix D contains a questionnaire and a covering letter. The questionnaire was used to obtain demographic information on the informants. The covering letter was sent to introduce the study to informants. This approach of having an initial questionnaire followed by the in-depth interview was adopted from a study done by Teschendorff in 1993. The advantage of this methodology is that attention can be placed on the focus questions during the in-depth interviews, and the interviewer has already learnt some information about the informant to establish rapport at the beginning of the interviews (Teschendorff, 1993).

Dear Student,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study exploring the academic experiences of international students. The aim of the project is to find out how international students from a Chinese cultural background adjust to study in undergraduate business courses at Victoria University of Technology (VUT), and what cultural factors influence students' academic adjustment experiences.

The information you give will be useful. It will first, help the University to better understand the academic adjustment process that international students generally go through. Second, with this understanding, the University community will be better able to assist students to adjust successfully to study at VUT.

The information you provide will be confidential. No individual student's name will be identified. The experiences of students will be described and analysed to form general conclusions about the process of students' academic adjustment. The involvement in the study is voluntary.

This letter is sent to you by Student Administration, so that your contact details remain confidential to me unless you volunteer to participate and inform me of your contact number. Every effort has been made to follow the required ethical procedures, and your privacy is safeguarded.

I intend to contact all undergraduate international students from an ethnic Chinese cultural background in the Faculty of Business (excluding first students as they have just had only a brief period of adjusting). Your co-operation will be very much appreciated.

You can help by completing the enclosed brief questionnaire and returning it to me by Monday, 14 August, 1995. If you would like to be involved further in the project, please contact me on 9688 4037 to have a chat about the study and arrange a time for us to meet, or you can leave your number in the brief questionnaire for me to contact you.

I look forward to meeting you and discussing your experiences in adjusting to study at VUT.

All the best for your study.

Yours sincerely

Christabel Zhang

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Please send the questionnaire in the envelope provided to the following address:

Christabel Zhang  
Department of Applied Economics  
Victoria University of Technology - Footscray Campus  
PO Box 14428  
MMC  
Melbourne 3000

Telephone 9688 4037

D1



Questionnaire

Code

Interview No

-----  
Your family name \_\_\_\_\_

Your given name \_\_\_\_\_

Your telephone number if you would like me to contact you \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill in the questionnaire by putting a tick in the appropriate box [ ].

1. Sex

female [ ]  
male [ ]

2. Age group

18 - 20 [ ]  
21 - 25 [ ]  
25 - 30 [ ]  
30 - 35 [ ]  
35 and above [ ]

3.1 Country of usual residence

Hong Kong [ ]  
Indonesia [ ]  
Malaysia [ ]  
People's Republic of China [ ]  
Singapore [ ]  
Taiwan [ ]  
Thailand [ ]  
Other [ ] Please specify the country \_\_\_\_\_

3. 2 City/County/Province in the country where you are from

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Language spoken besides English

Cantonese [ ]  
Mandarin [ ]  
Malay [ ]  
Indonesian [ ]  
Hokien [ ]  
Other [ ] Please specify which language \_\_\_\_\_

5. The length of study in Australia since you first arrived in Australia

- less than a year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- more than 5 years  Please specify the number of years \_\_\_\_\_

6. Previous education (you may choose more than one option that is relevant to you).

- high school in your home country
- year 12 in Australia
- TAFE in Australia
- incompleted higher education in your home country
- completed higher education in your home country
- incompleted higher education in Australia (transferred)
- completed higher education in Australia

7. The course are you studying now

- Bachelor of Business in Accounting (BBAA)
- Bachelor of Business in Banking and Finance (BBAB)
- Bachelor of Business in Catering and Hotel Management (BBAC)
- Bachelor of Business in Computing (BBBC)
- Bachelor of Business in International Trade (BBAN)
- Bachelor of Business in Retail Management (BBAR)
- Bachelor of Business in Travel and Tourism Management (BBAT)
- Other  Please specify the course \_\_\_\_\_

8. The reason for you to choose the current course you are studying

- future job opportunity
- family influence
- recommendation by friends
- interest in the course
- other  Please specify the reason for the choice \_\_\_\_\_

9. Current year in which you are enrolled in your course of study in Victoria University of Technology

- year 1
- year 2
- year 3 (co-operative education)
- final year
- other  Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your time and co-operation!**