

# Intercultural Interaction in a New Zealand University: Pakeha and Asian Perspectives

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## Preamble

- Purpose of the research:  
to identify *sociological* factors that influence the level of intercultural contact between international and host students
- Incorporate perspectives from *both* international and host students
- Research participants were
  - *Pakeha* (New Zealanders of European descent) representing domestic category
  - International students from 5 *Asian* nationalities - Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea and Peoples' Republic of China (PRC)
- *Qualitative* research using focus groups and one-on-one interviews

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## Limitations

- Research sample
  - *Small number of research participants (9 Pakeha and 12 Asians)*
  - *Excludes non-Pakeha domestic students and non-Asian international students*
  - *Participants age between 19-22 year old*
- Research context
  - *Auckland*
  - *a large urban campus situated within the inner city*
- Religious factor of research participants
  - *“...religious affiliation may have some influence on the individual’s motivation to interact with people whom they do not normally associate....it does not eliminate or challenge racial stereotypes held by the individual”*

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## Summary of Findings

- Interest and motivation
- Attitudes and expectations
- Benefits of intercultural interaction
- Perceptions and stereotypes
- Institutional interventions

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## Interest and Motivation

### Pakeha

- Reluctant to initiate contact with strangers
- Ambivalent because they do not need to rely on friendship with overseas students for social support and emotional wellbeing
- Perceive Asian students as being cliquish
- Campus environment is not conducive for interpersonal connection

### Asian

- Cultural differences  
*e.g. individual v collectivist approach to friendship building*
- Personality issues
- Lack of common interests
- Language barrier
- Study as priority

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## Attitudes and Expectations

### Pakeha

- See themselves as “relative strangers” in their own society (Pohl, 1999)
- Expect visitors to initiate contact with the hosts
- Never lived outside their culture – can’t empathise with sojourners’ struggles
- Wants to see int’l students integrate into host culture rather than stay in ethnic enclaves

### Asian

- Expect host students to initiate contact but also emphasise reciprocity
- Find interaction with Pakeha difficult and superficial
- Turn to co-ethnics/co-nationals for support as easier and more accessible (Ward & Masgoret, 2005)

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## Benefits of Intercultural Interaction

### Pakeha

- Increase cultural awareness
- Expand worldviews
- Experience solidarity with others – common human experience
- Reinforce one's own cultural identity
- Become less judgmental of people who are racially different from them
- Develop cultural sensitivity

### Asian

- Facilitate acculturation into host culture
- Improve English and academic success
- Feel accepted and welcomed – gives them a sense of self-validation in a foreign environment (Arthur, 2004)

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## Perceptions and Stereotypes

### Pakeha

- Media portrayal of “Asian invasion”
  - Negative stereotypes of Asian people
- e.g. Asian students drive flash cars, cause infrastructure problems, take over our jobs, hike prices of houses, deprive NZ students of opportunity in certain courses, etc.*

### Asian

- Pakeha students don't face parental or family pressure to excel academically because they pay their own way through university
- Pakeha student have lots of personal freedom and independence to pursue what they like to do outside of study
- Pakeha students like partying and drinking

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## Institutional Interventions

### Pakeha

- University policies tend to segregate domestic from international students  
*e.g. accommodation policy within the halls of residence*
- Like to see more university-sponsored events to promote cultural awareness and generate interests in inter-ethnic issues on campus

### Asian

- Cultural engagement is uni-directional (Smart et al, 2000)
- Atmosphere that foster intercultural exchange on campus
- Institutions to encourage deliberate mixing of host and overseas students through activities and programmes
- Students need to assume personal responsibility for cultivating intercultural friendships

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## Factors contributing to the low incidence of intercultural contact

### • Motivational issue

*where the students come from and how much they need the intercultural connections to enhance their wellbeing e.g. Auckland-born students have less motivation to pursue friendship with overseas students because it is not crucial to their "survival" at uni*

### • Exposure (or the lack of) to other cultures

*those who grew up in a mono-cultural environment had more difficulty establishing cross-cultural friendships*

### • Societal influence

*e.g. stereotypes, bias or prejudice, ignorance, past experience, etc.*

### • Cultural issues that impact on friendship building

*Individual v group-centred approach*

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## Factors contributing to the low incidence of intercultural contact

- **Academic demands** on students' energy and time  
*Especially int'l students who experience more time pressure*
- **Campus environment**  
*effects of the urban sprawl on interpersonal connection*
- **Institutional role in** fostering intercultural exchange is lacking  
*Int'l students are seen as an economic resource rather than learning resource*
- **Students need to take responsibility** to make cross-cultural connections happen

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# Questions?

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