

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Students have travelled abroad to study for many years (O'Donoghue, 1994). However, over the last decade in particular, the rise in the numbers of overseas students worldwide has been dramatic (Jolley, 1997). In particular, there has been an increase in the number of overseas students travelling from developing countries to more developed, usually industrialised, nations. They have done so in order to gain the knowledge and skills useful for building a successful career in their home countries and for contributing to national development (Barker, 1997: 109; Chandler, 1989). Until recent times, the largest group among these has comprised students sponsored under various bilateral and multilateral agreements with major receiving countries (Chandler, 1989: 91). Nowadays, there are also many private students going abroad to study. In a large number of countries this development has resulted in the establishment and expansion of what has become a major industry, namely the 'export' of educational services, from developed to developing nations, with a view to making a profit (Chandler, 1989). Australia, for example, is one country where, since 1987, providing educational services for overseas students has become a major aspect of trade and foreign policies (Illing, 1998: 2).

An increase in the provision by developed nations of educational services for overseas students has also led to writing and research in a range of areas related to the impact they have on the economy of the host nation (Smart, 1988; Williams, 1981; Woodhall, 1981), the teaching and learning of these students (Niles, 1995; Dunkin and Doenau, 1992; Elsey, 1990), and salient cultural influences perceived to affect the functioning of students in foreign settings (McNamara and Harris, 1997; Hubbard, 1994; Hughes, 1990; Kinnell, 1990; Sue and Okazaki, 1990). Much of this literature is descriptive in nature, or based on anecdotal evidence rather than on more systematic and rigorous attempts to explore the complex array of issues affecting the teaching and learning of students who undertake programs of study in cultural contexts that differ from those with which they are most familiar.

Some issues in particular demand further attention. First is the need to move away from the tendency to aggregate findings across nations. The current influx of 'Asian' students to Australian and other Western educational institutions requires closer examination of the differences that exist within subgroups of this broad mass of students (Ackers, 1997: 191). For instance, the factors that influence the educational experiences of Japanese students in Australia, such as prior experiences and motivation, are likely to be different from those of Singaporean, Vietnamese or Indonesian students (Chandler, 1989: xi).

From the viewpoint of a host organisation's long-term survival and success, modern marketing and management principles stress the need for all organisations, whether commercial or not-for-profit, to be 'client-centred' (Ackers, 1997: 188;

Blight, 1993: 7; Wilson, 1993). In the current heavily competitive commercial environment within which educational institutions must operate, this means that potential 'customers' should not necessarily be viewed as a homogeneous group. In this regard, Williams and Mills (1995: 44) are just two among many educators who have identified groups within their current student populations who they perceive could be better served by their institutions. They also argue that the weaknesses of trying to serve a culturally diverse student market as a single entity are already evident.

There is also a need to address the fact that the bulk of the literature about overseas students, as summarised in such recent collections of writings as that edited by McNamara and Harris (1997), or in earlier collections such as that edited by Kinnell (1990), is set in the context of university education, at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. In other words, the body of literature on overseas students is firmly centred on their experiences in connection with universities. However, just as the size of the cohort of overseas students has risen in universities, so also has it increased in schools and colleges, including those that are mainly concerned with technical and vocational education. Nevertheless, the existing body of research literature, even though it does relate mainly to universities, is still instructive for all sectors of education.

One aspect of the educational experiences of overseas university students that has been extensively discussed concerns 'problems of adjustment'. There is ample documentation of the difficulties encountered by students studying abroad (Antwi and Ziyati, 1993; Munn, 1992; Wimberley, McCloud and Flynn, 1992; Ballard,

1987; Samuelowicz, 1987; Adelman and Parks, 1985). The sorts of 'problems' discussed in the literature most commonly relate to differences in approaches to teaching and learning; personal and social problems such as feelings of homesickness and isolation; financial burdens; inadequate second language (usually English) competence; and the high levels of stress that such problems may produce. These matters, whether directly related to the course studied or to other issues, all affect the overall quality of the educational experience of the overseas student.

Mangubhai and Stewart (1993: 3) maintain that concern for the quality of education for overseas students ought to be of foremost importance to academic institutions. They believe (Mangubhai and Stewart, 1993: 3) that this concern must go beyond educational programs and their delivery, and that proper interest must also encompass the services that are provided to students. As they see it, if institutions are to offer a 'complete customer service', they need to develop those support services, structures and strategies that assist in the settling-in process and beyond. Thus, the argument goes, if institutions are to be effective in facilitating students to benefit from the opportunities that are available to them, then the academic welfare of overseas students must be matched by attention to their personal welfare. Indeed, as Fenwick and Moss (1985) stress, overall student welfare must embrace support for the learning process as well as assist with 'hygiene' issues. The latter refers to other factors not directly concerned with the learning process. It is, therefore, necessary to consider ways in which the academic welfare of overseas students can be improved during their sojourn in foreign countries.

The study reported in this dissertation sought to move beyond the documentation of the problems faced by overseas students in universities. Specifically, it aimed to develop an understanding of the background to overseas students studying at TAFE colleges in Western Australia (TAFE WA), the functions of TAFE WA in providing for overseas students who come to study at its colleges, and the concerns of TAFE WA personnel who have had responsibilities relating to the provision of technical and vocational education and training for this student cohort. In doing so, the study drew upon the developing literature, expertise and experiences that focus upon the delivery of courses for overseas students and offer a useful resource for those academic staff who have a measure of responsibility for teaching and sustaining the quality of overseas students' learning experiences. This chapter is a survey of this growing body of literature about overseas students. The survey is intended to be a representative rather than a comprehensive examination of the main propositions raised in the literature about the sojourn of overseas students in foreign countries.

Consistent with the broad thrust of Cortazzi and Jin's (1997) position, it is helpful to organise the main themes in the available literature under three main headings, namely, welfare, curriculum, and pedagogy. Each of these areas will now be considered in turn. Within each of them, while attention will be given to the general literature on the topics in question, particular reference, where possible, will be made to the Australian situation. Furthermore, particular cognisance will be taken of the experiences of overseas students studying in Australian TAFE colleges.

The Literature on the Welfare of Overseas Students

It has long been argued that social adjustments are required of students when they enter a university, particularly one in a foreign country. Studies highlighting the importance of adjustment originate with Keats (1972) and were developed further by Gassin (1982), and Bock and Gassin (1982). The works of Ballard (1989, 1987) and Ballard and Clanchy (1991, 1988, 1984) have had considerable impact on most Australian universities in this area of interest.

Keats (1972) introduced to the field a notion that overseas students need to make cultural and intellectual adjustments and not simply social adjustments on entering a new university. This was particularly the case, argued Clanchy (1982), when an overseas student enrolled in a university characterised by ‘a Western intellectual tradition’. Such a view emerged from the earlier works that portrayed universities in overseas countries as adopting styles of teaching and learning that were “based on attitudes which differ radically from those common in Australian society” (Keats, 1972). Such works portray teaching styles, attitudes towards learning and student-teacher interaction in ‘Asian countries’ in particular, as being driven by cultural values so far removed from those found in Australian universities that students could not help but feel uncomfortable in their new learning environment. However, because Keats had very little empirical evidence to substantiate such claims, the validity of the research may be questioned, as may the assumptions underpinning the findings that imply that a particular form of cultural learning is an inferior form of learning.

Similar themes about adjustment permeated the literature throughout the 1980s. Chan (1982) portrayed students from overseas countries generally as non-questioning and highly dependent on lecturer directions. In arguing that the cultural beliefs of such students determined the questioning of lecturers and other authority figures as disrespectful, Chan (1982) purported that the learning environment in Australian universities – one characterised as problem-centred and encouraging a critical style of learning – was problematic for these students. Similarly, Bradley and Bradley (1984) argued that culture-specific educational differences caused ‘adjustment problems’ for overseas students. In a report titled ‘Problems of Asian students in Australia: language, culture and education’ (Bradley and Bradley, 1984), attention was given to cultural problems, differences in educational systems and study skills’ issues. However, a major focus of the report was on language issues in regard to overseas students.

Bradley and Bradley (1984) provided a comprehensive analysis of the difficulties faced by students in reading, understanding, speaking and writing in a language that was not their first language but rather the dominant language of the university community, namely, English. This study complemented similar research completed earlier by Bochner and Wicks (1972) and Bock and Gassin (1982), who recognised university writing requirements as a ‘cultural battleground’. These studies argued that overseas students struggled with new patterns of thinking that determined particular writing styles and patterns that had their roots in culturally constructed learning.

The Australian academic literature on overseas students was developed in its earliest forms by those most closely connected to students facing problems, namely student counsellors and advisors (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991, 1988, 1984; Ballard, 1989, 1987, 1982; Bradley and Bradley, 1984; Rao, 1976; Keats, 1972). Generally, the literature focused on the attitudes held by, and the styles of, communication adopted by Australian university staff in communicating with overseas students. Hodgkin (1966), Rao (1976) and Burke (1986), for example, focused their early investigations on the adjustments that overseas students had to undergo on entering Australia, particularly in relation to student responses to a new culture and unfamiliar ways of living and learning.

These works, while conducted in different states and universities in Australia, were enlightening to many ethnocentric staff because they described the differing cultural traditions, religious beliefs, social customs, languages, values and practices of students from Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Mainland China and India. They were instrumental in bringing to the fore a recognition that such students were experiencing difficulties in adjusting to a culturally different way of life in Australia. Furthermore, they were instructive in raising the consciousness of university academics, acknowledging that overseas students came from rich and diverse cultural backgrounds that were different from but not inferior to their own. The motivation for conducting these studies was primarily to identify the nature and extent of such problems with a view to arguing for infrastructure support services to address them. Unfortunately, however, the reporting of these studies did little to enhance the situation. Rather, it reshaped the findings in ways such that what materialised was a collective view of the common ‘problems and

difficulties' of overseas students, rather than a view of how students from individual cultural backgrounds experienced these matters.

Nevertheless, there is a record of consistent performance by Australia in providing support for overseas students over the last decade. As part of her review of overseas student policies in six major receiving countries, including Australia, Chandler (1989: 93) noted:

There has thus been a dramatic improvement of supportive services for foreign students in the past half dozen years or so. These support services now increasingly start before arrival, and with better advising, better recruitment, better financial advice and screening, and better language training. They also include such elements as the preparatory programs provided by France and Germany to aid in language study and basic academic studies and a proliferation of foreign student advising offices on university campuses.

The result of the efforts can be seen partly in the form of universities' International Student Service committees, centres and guilds. Furthermore, the Australian Education Council (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1992: 18) endorsed minimum standards that, among other things, required institutions to ensure that overseas students had access to adequate orientation activities, accommodation services, counselling, remedial education (if required), and welfare facilities, including an effective grievance mechanism. Furthermore, these arrangements had to be sensitive to the cultural and special needs of overseas students. Other education industry codes of practice, such as those adopted by the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) Association and the Australian Council for Private Education and Training, also addressed student welfare and support services for overseas students.

These strategies appeared to bear fruit. In regard to the attitudes of prospective Singaporean students, Smart and Ang (1992: 22) reported as follows:

Australia is seen as a safe place to study in a mild climate. It also has the great advantage of geographic proximity to Singapore and a similar time zone.Australia is one of the most liberal countries in terms of work rights, allowing overseas students to work 20 hours a week. There is also a general impression that Australia is a more affordable destination in terms of fees and living expenses than the United States and the United Kingdom.

Accordingly, by the mid-1990s, Australia had in place a system for dealing with overseas students which it believed would be attractive to prospective overseas students, particularly those in neighbouring nations. Mangubhai and Stewart (1993) highlighted this in discussing the findings of a survey of 42 students representing 12 countries, in various stages of their course at the University of Southern Queensland. They (Mangubhai and Stewart, 1993: 3) concluded that it seemed Australia was poised to make an indirect impact on the countries in the region through offering higher education to the next generation of Asian and Pacific leaders.

In other countries also, it has been discovered that the ability to cope with life in a new country, and how students perceive their total experience, may be sources of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. In Britain, for example, there is evidence that student satisfaction with their quality of life in that country correlates positively with their evaluation of course quality. Satisfaction is enhanced when students are prepared in advance for living and studying in the overseas country. On this, Harris (1997: 37) argues that it is reasonable to assume that the extent to which that advanced preparation improves students' adaptation to the life and culture of

the host country, it may also increase academic satisfaction and help promote the institution as a concerned and well-organised establishment (Harris, 1997: 37).

Recent works show that many overseas students have to deal with a lot of issues before they can begin serious studies (Macrae, 1997: 127). According to Macrae (1997: 128), these typically will include: satisfying immigration and visa requirements; managing changes in diet and accommodation; understanding and arranging care under the national health system; adjusting to a new environment that includes not only a campus, a city and country, but also a new climate; overcoming homesickness and loneliness; and settling into a new community, many members of which will appear unapproachable and some of whom may be racist. All of these can interfere with the learning process to varying extents and at various times, and they must be dealt with.

There is also evidence that students' expectations of the care that their institution will provide are often unrealistic (Harris, 1997: 38). In this regard, Harris (1997: 38) maintains that institutions should develop a holistic approach to identifying and addressing the particular needs of their overseas students. In the absence of an empirically verified approach, effective dialogue and follow-up action is necessary if a 'goodness of fit' is to be secured between the needs of the students and the resources of the institution.

Harris (1997: 36) considers that the ecological concept of 'goodness of fit' is very important. The belief that problems seemingly presented by overseas students have their cause in the personality, experience or behaviour of the students

themselves has increasingly given way to a perspective in which they are seen as arising from a mismatch between the needs of the students and the responses of the universities. The basis of this perceptual shift is partly intellectual (Kinnell, 1990), partly economic (the combination of the full-cost fee system and the changing patterns of university funding making such students the objects of inter-university competition) and partly political, reflecting the contemporary ideology of consumer choice and quality assurance. Similarly, there has been a relatively recent shift from the idea that the student must assimilate into a pre-existing structure to the idea that the institution must accommodate to the needs of more diverse student cohorts (Harris, 1997: 36).

In Australia, the TAFE system has recently acted on this notion in a recent study that, in regard to overseas students, addressed issues of curriculum relevance, language difficulties, cultural integration, appropriate food catering, religious sensitivities, accommodation needs and recreation provision. These issues were identified in the study as most prominent among those that have presented challenges and posed problems for the TAFE system (Australian TAFE International, 1996). This is an important study in that it has drawn on practices of TAFE colleges in each Australian State and Territory, with the objective of determining best practice for program delivery and student support services for overseas students in TAFE institutions Australia-wide. Furthermore, this is one of the few studies that is based mainly on information gathered from TAFE personnel who deal with overseas students.

According to Furnham (1997: 25), few people would disagree that people working in culturally different environments require some sort of orientation program. For overseas students, the most common type of cross-cultural orientation usually involves providing them with specific information about their new culture. Students are presented with facts and figures, either in written form or in lectures or films, about topics such as climate, food, sexual relations, religious customs and anything else academics and others may consider important. However, the effectiveness of such programs is limited, in Furnham's view (1997: 26). This is because, first, the facts are often too general to have any specific application in particular. Secondly, the programs emphasise the unusual but tend to ignore the mundane, such as how to hail or pay for a taxi. Thirdly, such programs give the false impression that a culture can be learned in a few easy lessons and tend also to gloss over a culture's hidden agendas. Finally, recommendations do not necessarily lead to action, or to the correct action. Furnham (1997: 28) further suggests that one of the requirements of a successful 'culture educator' is to be a mediating person, that is, one who is intimately familiar with both cultures and can act as a link between them, representing each to the other.

According to Williams and Mills (1995: 44), every foreign cultural group represented in the student population arrives with different experiences, skills and expectations. Students from each overseas cultural group face a unique adaptation process as they deal with the culture shock associated with people who have moved to a different socio-cultural setting. Some suffer, at one time or another, from extreme homesickness, loneliness and depression. This can be a particularly acute problem for students from Asia and the South Pacific because they have

come from societies where the extended family is the norm (Williams and Mills, 1995: 45). At home, individual problems become the problems of the family and many heads may be involved in finding a suitable solution. For a young person there is, therefore, what one might call a 'safety net' provided by the family. It is often a great shock to find oneself without this safety net in another country.

Pertinent to this issue of family support is research in which specific aspects of the education of Indonesian students in international contexts were investigated. Wimberley, McCloud and Flinn (1992) found that among 121 Indonesian graduate students attending 27 United States universities, success in graduate school (defined by grade point average and degree completion) was positively associated with Indonesian undergraduate grade point average, English language proficiency, and the presence of spouse and children in the United States. Of these three factors, the presence of one's family was the most important factor in promoting the academic success of the Indonesian students. The important role of family presence in fostering the success of Indonesian students studying overseas is also reported by Fleisher (1984).

In Australia, issues concerning the academic success of Indonesian and Malaysian students were also the focus of a study by Chappel, Gray, Head and O'Regan (1993). These researchers reported on the educational expectations and experiences of Indonesian and Malaysian students studying at South Australian tertiary institutions, including a TAFE institution. They recommended (Chappel, Gray, Head and O'Regan, 1993: 215) the need for, and changes to, preparatory

programs for overseas students, as well as development programs for staff who teach students from overseas.

Furnham (1997) claims that strong preoccupation with thoughts of home, a need to return to familiar people, places and things, and a concurrent feeling of unhappiness and disorientation in the new place that is clearly not home, are aspects of homesickness. In a number of studies (Fisher and Hood, 1987; Fisher, Murray and Frazer, 1985), Fisher investigated the causes and effects of homesickness, and identified a number of factors that were clearly characteristic of students who did not report homesickness and those who did. For those who reported homesickness the factors included: living further from their home country; the university they were attending was not their first choice; and, they were less satisfied with their current residence. Furthermore, Fisher's studies also identified an association between reporting of homesickness and a greater number of cognitive failures, poor concentration, late submission of academic work and reductions in work quality. These data suggest that homesickness is a potentially important phenomenon that may exercise a considerable influence on academic performance, at least over the short term. Volet and Pears (1994: xiii), who studied past students' reflections of their experience in TAFE WA, frequently mentioned the problem of homesickness as an important issue encountered by students in adjusting to life in Western Australia.

Homesickness may perhaps be ameliorated by social support and friendship networks (Furnham, 1997: 18). In an early study of overseas students in Hawaii, Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) noted that there were three principal types of

such networks. The first of these, close friendships between sojourning compatriots, provides a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed. Accordingly, Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977: 292) advised that these bonds should

.....not be administratively interfered with, regulated against, obstructed, or sneered at. On the contrary, such bonds should be encouraged and, if possible, shaped to become more open to bi- or multi-cultural influences.

The second network is bi-cultural, consisting of bonds between sojourners and significant host nationals such as academics, students, advisors and government officials. The main function of this network is to implement the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourners. The third network is a multi-cultural network of friends and acquaintances. The main function of this group is to provide companionship for recreational, 'non-cultural' and non-task oriented activities.

Volet and Ang (1998) surveyed recent developments in Australian universities aimed at enhancing social cohesion, looking both at the curriculum and at social, recreational and residential integration. The purpose of this research was to identify some best practice recommendations for enhancing social cohesion between Australian and overseas students. Volet and Ang (1998: 5) note that one of the major obstacles to achieving the educational, social and cultural aims of overseas education in Australia is the lack of interaction between Australian and overseas students from Asian backgrounds. They contend that both groups do not spontaneously mix on university or TAFE campuses, either in class for group work, or outside for social activities. Rather, the two groups tend to study 'in

parallel'. Thus, Volet and Ang (1998: 6) consider that unique opportunities for reciprocal inter-cultural learning and development are therefore not being used to full advantage. In the economic and political context that prevails at the end of the 1990s, they maintain that this is a critical issue that, if not addressed, may have a long-term impact on Australia's international relations in the region. This outcome would be adverse to the implicit and explicit aims of 'internationalising' education institutions, that is, to the process of enriching Australia's education and training systems and the wider Australian society in areas such as curriculum content, teaching and learning methods and research.

Opportunities to build up social networks, together with specialist advisory and support services and suitable accommodation secured in advance of arrival, also have an important part to play in the welfare of all overseas students (Wright, 1997: 93). However, in connection with their general welfare, Wright (1997: 93) was especially concerned that the issue of gender is noticeable by its absence from the scholarly work that attends to overseas students. Indeed, according to Wright (1997: 93), the overseas student literature has paid little attention to women students, treating overseas students as 'genderless', or rather, being typically single, young and male. Wright, for example, considers that a significant but rarely mentioned welfare issue is providing adequate childcare facilities for those students with children.

While acknowledging that many of the welfare needs of overseas students identified in the literature apply to both men and women, Wright (1997: 99) concedes that much that is known about this phenomenon originates from samples

with 70% or more male respondents (Hughes, 1990:44; Blaug and Woodhall, 1981: 241). Although this may have reflected the national proportion of male overseas students at the time of the surveys, there is still very limited disaggregation of the data by gender. Wright (1997) considers that overseas students are a highly diverse group, making it difficult to generalise about their welfare needs and the gender dimension thereof. He believes that meeting the welfare needs of overseas students involves an awareness of both gender and culture, and sensitivity to the ways in which they interact. Those working in institutions need to take responsibility for informing themselves about issues of cultural diversity and “see the development of cultural sensitivity to be personally rewarding as well as professionally essential” (Wright, 1997: 101).

In support of this position, other researchers such as Meggit, Tourkey and Singh (1995), maintain that a more ‘micro’ investigation of the experiences of students from separate cultures and different genders are the future areas for needed research. For example, Meggit, Tourkey and Singh (1995: 70) claim that the pronounced gender differences in success rates and course satisfaction among overseas students need further research. Their Australian-based study involved overseas university students from South Korea, Japan and Singapore. Among other findings, more than twice as many females as males had fallen behind in their studies, and six times as many females as males described their results as ‘disappointing’ (Meggit, Tourkey and Singh, 1995: 70).

Whatever the gender, poorer than expected outcomes among overseas students, particularly those from Asian countries, could lead to ‘loss of face’ in the home

country (Else, 1990: 52). In addition, the maintenance of 'face' and the virtues of harmony, mean that confrontations and conflicts must be avoided, or at least formulated so as not to hurt anyone. In this regard, Volet and Pears (1994: xii) found that the issue of 'losing face' was a factor in TAFE overseas students being worried about giving the wrong answer in front of the class and feeling reluctant to ask for help when something was not understood.

The issue of 'losing face' was raised as an important factor by Else (1990) in his comprehensive analysis aimed at improving teaching and learning for overseas students. Barker (1997) also investigated the extent to which the need to save face is a motivating factor in the academic lives of overseas students. He concluded that overseas students are driven, at least partially, by fear of failure and losing face, as well as by other family, social and financial pressures and obligations (Barker, 1997: 115).

There is, therefore, potential for welfare issues in general to adversely affect the educational experience of overseas students. However, as Else (1990) noted some years ago, several overseas students, when looking back on their learning experiences, both academic and general, pointed out that they had overcome their problems and difficulties, which were mostly experienced at the beginning of their time at university. There was little evidence of an abiding anger or bitterness, of being cheated or treated badly by people or the 'system' (Else, 1990: 49). Reporting research particularly about South-East Asian students, Mohamed (1997: 171) agrees that, over time, symptoms of anxiety, irritability, feelings of helplessness, and longing for a predictable environment, are likely to lessen in

view of students' increasing conformity to many day-to-day practices and experiences. This stage is likely to be characterised by efforts to conform and adapt to what are perceived as the positive attitudes and practices of the host country (Mohamed, 1997: 171). Nevertheless, as Elsey (1990: 49) has commented, "this is no cause for complacency", for the problems and issues are very real for the students at the time they experience them.

In spite of the potential for welfare issues to cause some problems for overseas students, it seems that most overseas students believe the advantages of an overseas education are more important than the disadvantages. Changes in intellectual abilities, attitudes and cultural perspectives may be counted among the broader benefits, while increased opportunities for employment and high salaries are among the narrower but usually very important gains. In this regard, there is some evidence that Indonesian overseas students, for example, have a marked vocational orientation towards their studies. It seems that these students want to study a course built around a curriculum that will be useful to them in obtaining employment, or furthering their careers, back in Indonesia (Cannon, 1999: 18). This leads now to a consideration of the evidence available in the literature about how curriculum issues have been treated in regard to their relevance and transfer to overseas students.

The Literature on Overseas Students and the Curriculum they Experience

Curriculum concerns in regard to overseas students fall into two categories. The first of these is the relevance of the content of the vocational education and training

curriculum to the needs of the foreign workplace. The second is the effectiveness and efficiency of the process of cross-cultural transfer of curriculum content.

In regard to the content of the vocational education and training curriculum presented to overseas students, O'Donoghue (1994: 74) has observed as follows:

Developing world students at overseas universities are often slotted into courses designed to meet the needs of the developed world without much consideration being given to the appropriateness of such courses for educational practice in the developing world.

Volet and Pears (1994) investigated this factor in the TAFE environment in Western Australia. Two issues on which the respondents in their study commented were the overall standard of TAFE WA courses and perceived relevance of TAFE WA courses to respondents' intended career paths. On these matters, participants appreciated the balance of theoretical and practical components in the courses, and made positive comments when equating the relevance of their course content to the vocational requirements in their home countries. Nevertheless, a gradual internationalisation of some course curricula and the strengthening of links with employment agencies and educational institutions in students' home countries would be perceived as extremely valuable to the students themselves. These developments could also have a beneficial impact on local Australian students, especially those who want to work overseas or in employment based on a solid knowledge of international issues.

In regard to curriculum relevance, Ware (1994: 2) reported on the effectiveness of Australian Government assistance in English language training provided to Vietnamese nationals in Australia. This assistance was in response to the Vietnam

government's view that an efficient English training program in schools and teachers' colleges would serve to raise the English proficiency of tertiary students and thus provide a skilled labour force. 'Training of the trainers' was to be carried out in part by sending Vietnamese to study in tertiary courses abroad, including some to Australia.

In addition, in view of the skills that were identified as needed in the Vietnamese economy as its structure changed and the labour market became more competitive, the practical relevance of the curriculum became a matter of increasing concern (Ware, 1994: 2). Furthermore, according to Ware (1994: 2), most educationalists and language specialists interested in Vietnam's development agreed there was a need to revise the social and political content of the curriculum to address contemporary issues and reflect the changes that students were experiencing in the world outside the classroom. Acquisition of knowledge and academic achievement were seen as means to an end; they were desirable in order to update a speciality, improve professional performance or enhance career prospects. As Elsey (1990: 52) has put it, albeit in relation to another context, the students' expectations were "firmly fastened to the vocational relevance of their studies for work roles back in their own country." More recently, Cannon (1999), an Australian academic, reported on an extensive study he conducted of the perceptions of Indonesians employed in Jakarta who had returned there after studying overseas. He found that his data strongly suggested "that an overseas education that is disconnected from the work place, will be diminished in its impact on individuals, their employers and ultimately on Indonesian society." Cannon maintains that, in working to achieve this, the practices of some overseas

organisations are more supportive of this idea than others. One recommendation he makes to improve practice is that overseas educational institutions review curriculum for overseas students to assist them to make adaptations to local conditions and processes (Cannon, 1999: 33).

Returning to Ware (1994), her argument was that a strong socio-cultural component should be built into any English language teaching program, and that it should be developed systematically at every stage of implementation. The socio-cultural emphasis of the language-teaching program should also apply in the use of teaching methods. In other words, it cannot be assumed that what may work in British, American and Australian classrooms will necessarily work in an Asian classroom. Workshop materials, manuals and textbooks written for teacher training, providing linguistic theory and methodology, would be more beneficial to the Asian teachers if written in their local language. To this end, Ware (1994) undertook a project of preparing learning materials that involved a Cambodian national seconded from Cambodia to Australia to advise about including culturally specific content. While this might be an unrealistic strategy on a large scale across all curriculum areas, it is an example of an innovative attempt to try to address curriculum content problems for overseas students.

Also significant is the observation of Lewis (1984: 103-104) as far back as 1984 that there are likely to be mismatches in some of the basic assumptions that underpin certain study areas. Students from less-developed nations studying abroad may not attach the same meaning to concrete concepts as students from Western countries. Lewis (1984) gave examples from education and economics to

support his view. However, he also stated that the situation was not so marked for science students because, as Elsey (1990: 52) notes, there is a universality to the concepts and content of science.

One disturbing conclusion that emerged from Lewis' (1984) research was that academic staff interviewed seemed wholly unaware of any ethnocentrism in their curricula. They considered students' problems to be at the surface level of the language, namely, concerned with vocabulary, spelling, grammar and syntax. There was no mention of the cultural assumptions built into the structure of knowledge imparted in their courses (Lewis, 1984: 105). Lewis' findings were supported by Elsey (1990) who reported that many overseas students acutely felt "the almost complete absence of anything other than an ethnocentric British view in some areas of study" (Elsey, 1990: 51).

Hofstede (1994: 217), in his discussion of intercultural encounters in schools, commented that "information is more than words: it is words which fit into a cultural framework". He went on to conclude that "much of what students from poor countries learn at universities in rich countries is hardly relevant in their home country situation" (Hofstede, 1994: 217). Hofstede's argument applies to the appropriateness not only of the technology taught, but also of the organisational systems that control the technology.

In an earlier work, Hofstede (1980: 50) had also posed the following question: "To what extent do theories developed in one country and reflecting the cultural boundaries of that country apply to other countries?" To that question, could also

be added another: “How are the theories and concepts accepted in the host country to be transferred to overseas students?” In this regard, Leach (1994: 219) has noted that the academic nature of the Western-style curriculum and the values contained therein can alienate people from their traditional ways of life and thought, generate unrealistic expectations for white-collar urban jobs and a high standard of living, and develop unnecessary consumer and leisure tastes. They can also instil a dislike for manual labour and increase social stratification. Indeed, local elites who have been educated in the Western tradition and who occupy powerful positions in politics, in the civil service and in business and commerce, can play a crucial role in perpetuating social and economic inequalities in their society as well as in maintaining the dependent relationship between the urban centre and the periphery, from which they draw personal benefit.

So far, the emphasis in this section of the chapter has been on a range of curriculum topics that have been mentioned in the literature about overseas students. However, the cross-cultural transfer of knowledge is another area of interest that affects the experience of overseas students. In respect of the cross-cultural transfer of knowledge, a basic assumption is that one of the prime functions of technical and vocational teachers, particularly in a technical and vocationally oriented system like TAFE in Australia, is to pass on new knowledge and skills in their specialisation. TAFE teachers are considered to be ‘experts’ in their fields and students come to study in TAFE institutions in developed countries in order to improve their job prospects in areas lacking expertise in their home country. The nature and effectiveness of this prospective transfer of knowledge and skills may be considered as a form of ‘technology transfer’, a concept

generally associated with the role of expatriates working with local counterparts on funded development projects in developing countries.

The work of Scott-Stevens (1987) on technology transfer provides interesting case study material of counterpart relationships on two large-scale irrigation projects in Indonesia and the ways in which cross-cultural relationships can inhibit the transfer process. She found that most transfer took place through day-to-day informal communication over a prolonged period of time rather than through the traditional format of seminars and lectures. However, this process was impeded by, amongst other things, poor communication and understanding, and time pressures. Scott-Stevens (1987) claims that technology transfer is context-dependent and culture-bound, with individuals giving different meaning and value to what is often presumed to be 'shared' technical knowledge. Because knowledge is not much use in a theoretical vacuum, it needs to be applied to situations and problems in meaningful ways. Successful cross-cultural knowledge transfer is, therefore, dependent on individuals relating effectively to, and sustaining positive social interaction with, those from the other culture.

In spite of the potential pitfalls in the curriculum studied by overseas students, curriculum issues appear largely not to be problematic for most overseas students, while concerns about pedagogy continue to emerge from the literature in a sustained way. From the teaching side, Ballard (1994: 1), a pioneer in this work, states that:

There are always particular tensions when teaching programs for international students between the concerns of the lecturer, the demands of the curriculum, and the professional and personal needs

of the students in the light of their own educational backgrounds. Whereas language difficulties may seem to be the most important barrier to progress in the classroom, there can be more deep-seated issues deriving from the students' different cultural approaches to knowledge and their different expectations about the roles of university teachers and students.

It is appropriate then to turn attention to some of the specific pedagogical issues and concerns surrounding overseas students that have been revealed in the literature.

The Literature on Pedagogical Issues Associated with Overseas Students

Barker (1997: 108) claims that there are three issues that are central to the learning experience of overseas students. In the first place, we must ask, why are they studying? Is there any degree of commonality in the objectives they are aiming to achieve through studying? If there is, this may have implications for educational institutions in terms of subjects and courses offered. Secondly, are there any significant features of the attitudes, values and motivation that overseas students bring to the classroom, an awareness of which might cause academic staff to modify their approach? Finally, in terms of relationships, what do they expect of their teachers and what do teachers expect of them? How far apart are these expectations and what can be done about this?

In terms of pedagogical issues, there has been considerable investigation into the relationships between staff and overseas students. Lewis (1984: 103) wrote of the problems that overseas students faced in adjusting to a different type of student-lecturer relationship than was expected, or had previously been experienced. He

stresses the effect that previous educational experiences had on overseas students' perceptions of the student-lecturer phenomena in the foreign country before they began classes. One aspect of the student-lecturer relationship is students' access to, and rapport with, teachers. An important point made by Lewis (1984) is that language difficulties can wrongly be seen as the cause of problems in relationships, whereas the real cause may lie in the expectations produced by previous experiences. The real cause, therefore, arises from cultural differences. This theme will be examined in a later part of this chapter.

Channell (1990) also examined the issue of the interaction between overseas students and their teachers. She found that most students saw the student-teacher relationship as a key one and that both parties needed and desired a higher level of contact than they received. In this matter, students tended to see the onus of initiating contact to be with the tutor, on the first and subsequent occasions.

The effect of teachers on students' responses to working with them was the subject of a study that attempted to isolate the professional and personal qualities of Australian expatriate 'experts' in Indonesia and Thailand (Cannon, 1991). The qualities considered as most important by the Indonesians concerned the ways in which teachers relate to their students. These included their friendliness, tolerance, sincerity and willingness to help, and their professional expertise and understanding of cultural issues. Of less importance were characteristics that had to do with the organisation and presentation of course content. This result was reinforced by Shanks and Woods (1993: 7) who reported that all overseas students

interviewed as part of a research study at one Australian university regarded their interactions with staff as a key 'quality' issue.

One key element required by students in order to operate effectively in their studies was feedback about academic performance and expectations of lecturers and supervisors (Macrae, 1997: 139; Shanks and Woods, 1993: 8). In Channell's (1990) view, feedback was a key element in a successful student-tutor relationship. Constructive feedback on work standards was considered essential, while slow or inadequate feedback caused stress (Channell, 1990: 77). Students expected staff to be interested in their work, to criticise it, and to make suggestions for improvement and for further study (Channell, 1990: 77). However, these expectations were not necessarily always matched by those of staff.

Channell (1990: 63) found that there were two different sets of expectations operating that were conditioned by the previous cultural experiences of the two groups. The basis of this mismatch in expectations, as both Elsey (1990) and Channell (1990) point out, concerns, on the one hand, the emphasis in most western higher education on self-reliance and self-directed study with minimal control by staff, and on the other, the needs and expectations of many overseas students for substantial teaching and tutorial support. The mismatch arises from different understandings of the purposes of university education, the roles of lecturers and tutors, and the responsibilities of the students themselves.

In this regard, Channell (1990: 79) found that tutors generally perceive overseas students as voraciously demanding of their time, even when it is given willingly.

Overseas students were also seen as over-dependent. A study of Channell's (1990) findings suggests that some staff either did not have the inclination or believed they did not have the time to establish personal relationships and then provide guidance and feedback necessary to bring about independence. Eley (1990: 57) also found that, some university academic staff felt pressurised by overseas students' needs for time and attention and considered them as something of a burden in the teaching and learning environment.

One element of teaching and learning that has received attention in the past is the appropriateness of teaching styles adopted for the promotion of learning among overseas students (Bilbow, 1989: 85). For example, Bilbow (1989) has drawn attention to the fact that, particularly at undergraduate level, lectures may pose severe problems for those from non-English speaking backgrounds. This may be due to a language problem or to a mismatch of expected teaching modes between overseas students and lecturers.

According to Macrae (1997: 139), overseas students frequently find difficulty in adjusting to new academic modes. For example, the following appear to present particular problems: developing academic self-discipline; being able to participate fully in seminars; coping with the variety of assignments that are expected; understanding examination methods and developing appropriate techniques to deal with assessments (Macrae, 1997: 139). The reasons for these problems, among students from Asia in particular, have been studied by a number of researchers, including Biggs (1992), Meyer and Kiley (1998), O'Donoghue (1996) and Stevenson and Stigler (1992). These writers find that Western education systems,

such as Australia's, can be regarded as cultural microcosms in their own right. They go on to contend that there is little doubt that the assumptions and patterns of interaction of teachers and students in, for example, South East Asian classrooms, though superficially similar to classrooms in most schools and tertiary institutions in Western nations, are actually quite different. It is important that this issue be attended to in order to enhance, for both teachers and students, the experience of having overseas students in local classes.

Harris (1997: 43) considers that overseas students should be brought to a point of greater learning versatility by the use of educational techniques designed to do just this. He raises the issue of how far research into adult learning principles is applied in teaching overseas students (Harris, 1997: 43). Adult learning principles and other practical interactive, experiential learning methods have been reported as useful in education and training of overseas students by Craig, Hills, Taylor and Wahab (1994) and Sheehy (1994).

Harris (1997: 43) notes that studies of adult learning acknowledge the existence of a range of different learning styles and strategies, and that the majority of these are individually rather than culturally based. For example, in regard to Chinese students, Harris (1997: 43) states that it could be expected that differences in learning style and strategy among western students would also apply in the case of Chinese students. Nevertheless, there have been some studies that have focused on specific cultural groups, most notably Chinese students, who form part of the group termed 'Confucian-heritage students' (Biggs, 1992).

Biggs (1992) argues that Confucian-heritage students adopt complex learning styles which, although strongly influenced by cultural beliefs that value expository and authoritarian teaching styles, foster in their learners not simplistic forms of rote learning, but complex processes of memorisation matched with understanding and strategies based on cues that enhance higher level thinking processes. Similarly, Marton, Dall’Alba and Beatty (1993) have completed extensive empirical studies that suggest students from China and Japan actively combine memorisation processes with a complex search for understanding in attempting to engage in meaningful learning.

In another study of Chinese students, Volet and Kee (1993: 48) affirm that students from Singapore already know on arrival in Australia that the skills that characterise a successful student at college in Singapore are not necessarily the skills that characterise a successful student in Australia. They are prepared for change and adaptation, and their expectations on arrival about study in Australia are generally accurate. Volet and Kee (1993) considered that, in general, academic staff should be aware of the adjustments new overseas students have to make regarding various aspects of study, and should provide clear and explicit information of what was required in their particular courses. Explicit information could consist of demonstrations of and coaching in basic learning strategies that are appropriate for effective study in the particular disciplines or courses that they are studying.

Macrae (1997) maintains that some of these fundamental aspects of academic life can be attended to by teachers or educational support staff. For example, an integral part of the academic induction process is learning how to use and benefit

from laboratories, libraries and computers. According to Macrae (1997: 136), it is necessary that those responsible for laboratories ensure that overseas students understand and appreciate the laboratory ethos. Macrae (1997: 137) suggests that in the use of libraries, tutors can assist by setting an early assignment that obliges their students to visit and use the library. He goes on to urge that with computers, again, tutors could consider setting small but appropriate academic tasks that will require students to use computers. In the TAFE WA context, Volet and Kee (1993: xi) found that among overseas students surveyed, the large majority of comments about libraries and computers in TAFE colleges were negative.

While there appears to be an emphasis on the need for teachers to take the lead in supporting overseas students, in Barker's (1997: 123) opinion, the relationship between overseas students and institutions is one of mutual responsibility. There is a need for all concerned to make some move towards accepting that there are cultures and values other than their own and to understand the implications for the processes of teaching and learning. Barker (1997: 123) believes that in view of the pressures on time and the complexity of the cultural issues, creating awareness of these issues is probably as far as participants can reasonably aim to go. This awareness, he considers, has to be built into the formal structure of student teaching and staff development; otherwise it runs the risk of not being taken seriously. He goes on to say that it should be at the core of any student orientation program. It could, he argues, be built into study skills and departmental induction programs. He also contends that it should be included in induction programs for probationary academic staff (Barker, 1997: 124).

Concerning the implications for both staff and students in the education of overseas students, Volet and Kee (1993: 46) declare that it seems likely that one cannot avoid viewing and judging the structures, ways of life and ways of knowing of other cultures from the perspective of one's own background. This may present a general difficulty for most staff unless they have had significant experience of living and working overseas. For students, lack of local knowledge and experience have the potential to inhibit their learning. Difficulties may be manifest, particularly in the practical part of certain courses (Harris, 1997: 43). To uncertainties for students about how 'the system' works are added major quandaries about social behaviour and conventions surrounding the subject discipline. In the academic fields of professions such as teaching, general medical practice, nursing and social work, a substantial part of background knowledge is the students' experience of how schools and hospitals work. Harris (1997: 43) maintains that it is challenging and stressful to practice where a student is unfamiliar with these kinds of things and also lacks a sufficiently similar cultural background to be able to make an informed guess. Accordingly, identifying and implementing effective means of supplementary foundation information is an important task for institutions.

Issues about overseas students' learning that revolve around inter-cultural communication have also been highlighted and have been studied by Cortazzi and Jin (1997). These researchers show that cultural influences can be thought of in terms of academic cultures, cultures of communication and cultures of learning. Academic culture refers to the cultural norms and expectations involved in academic activity. A culture of communication refers to 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.

Academic cultures are the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997: 77). For skilled practitioners such as academic staff, many aspects of academic culture seem obvious but are rarely made explicit. One reason for this is that culture 'works' because participants do not have to think about making it work; each one simply does what is expected. However, with some overseas students it is necessary to give attention to academic culture in order to assist them to clarify in context the basic tenets and requirements of the particular discipline they are studying.

In British higher education, academic culture has been explored by Becher (1989). He proposed that different disciplines have different academic cultures, and that each discipline may have its own professional culture. Evans (1993; 1988) has illustrated this in studies of foreign language and English departments. These analyses draw attention to some key features that are likely to be new or different for overseas students. There may be cultural gaps between what is valued and expected in an Australian academic culture and the expectations students bring with them based on their educational experience elsewhere (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997: 78). It is likely that actual cultural gaps commence with but are not restricted to the overseas student's competence in the local language.

Concerning this, Cortazzi and Jin (1997: 78) point out that whereas grammar and vocabulary are obvious areas of differences in communication competence between overseas students and local staff, body language and gestures are also other aspects of misunderstood communication that often lead to wrong assessments of students. Even the words 'yes' and 'no' are used in different ways and for different purposes in other cultures, especially in Asian societies. These differences emphasise the diverse 'cultures of communication' referred to by Cortazzi and Jin (1997: 79).

The preference for deductive or inductive discourse patterns is another area where there is potential for misunderstanding in teaching and learning concerning overseas students. This reflects Cortazzi and Jin's (1997: 81) contention about the distinct 'cultures of learning' that exist among overseas students. In particular, they point to research indicating that Chinese students and others from East and South Asia will more naturally use inductive discourse patterns, whereas British, and probably therefore Australian, tutors will prefer deductive discourse patterns. Both patterns are valid, but, depending on preference in their use, either can be wrongly perceived. In academic writing or seminar presentations in Britain and Australia, students are assumed to be communicating what they have learnt. Accordingly, their discourse patterns are interpreted by teachers as products of learning, not as products of culture (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997: 82).

Cortazzi and Jin (1997) argue that academic cultures and cultures of communication come together in cultures of learning. Whereas an academic culture depends on the norms, values and expectations of academics, a culture of

learning depends on the norms, values and expectations of teachers and learners relative to classroom activity. It is impossible to give serious consideration to inter-cultural issues involving overseas students without some notion that fundamental presuppositions about how to learn, how to teach, what constitutes 'good' work, and how to participate in learning contexts, can vary from culture to culture. It is not simply that overseas students encounter different ways of teaching and different expectations about learning; rather such encounters are set alongside the cultures of learning they bring with them. All too often, both tutors and students themselves are not aware of what is involved.

The basic need in teaching and learning is for participants to be aware of the kinds of cultural variation in communication and learning that can lead to different understandings (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997). This means that both teachers and students need awareness of how to interpret others' words and to be sensitive to ways in which their own words might be interpreted. In this pursuit, according to Cortazzi and Jin (1997: 88), both parties gain.

In their work, Cortazzi and Jin (1997) presented their summary of aspects of a Chinese culture of learning based on a long-term investigation using a range of data. They considered that while not every Chinese student will follow this culture, they would probably recognise its influence, which can be seen in contemporary China, and in East and South Asia in general (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997: 85). They also claimed that there were different perceptions of teacher and student roles in higher education from both Chinese students and British teachers.

The learning styles and support needs of Chinese-heritage learners in Australia were the subject of a study by Meggitt, Tourkey and Singh (1995). These researchers investigated two key questions. These were: whether the prevailing stereotypes of 'Asian' students in Australia affected their 'adjustment' and the quality of their learning in the courses conducted by a variety of providers? and, what could these providers do to ensure the success and satisfaction of these learners by taking account of similarities and differences among members of these neighbouring countries and the kinds of support services they identified as helpful? This study closed with a series of conclusions and recommendations, primarily for TAFE colleges and universities, which reinforced the need for lecturers, administrators and other support staff in institutions to recognise the diversity that exists among overseas students. The standards of teaching and assessment must be maintained, while adequate support services needed to be established to assist overseas students to maximise their learning experiences.

Overseas students in TAFE were the subject of three earlier Australian studies, namely, that of Navaratnam and Mountney (1992) in Queensland, of Chappel, Gray, Head and O'Regan (1993) in South Australia, and of Volet and Pears (1994) in Western Australia. The objectives of all three studies were very similar, namely, to identify the expectations of overseas students in TAFE and the extent to which their needs were being met.

The work of Chappel, Gray, Head and O'Regan (1993), and Volet and Pears (1994), is also very pertinent to the study reported in this dissertation. Chappel and her fellow researchers examined the expectations and experiences of

Indonesian and Malaysian students studying in South Australian universities and TAFE colleges. This research found that there was not a great deal of dissatisfaction among these overseas students with their Australian education experiences, and that difficulties experienced by them in their first year were very similar to those experienced by Australian first-year students. These problems centred on pedagogical issues rather than welfare concerns, which, as long as satisfaction with accommodation was sufficient, were seen by the students as trivial. Interestingly, the researchers noted that the matters of concern evident in this 1993 study were largely the same matters of concern established as long ago as 1980, in a conference in Canberra, under the auspices of the Australian Development Assistance Bureau, that focussed on the educational difficulties of overseas students in Australia. This raised the question of whether any formal initiatives to improve corporate learning were taken by institutions involved in overseas students in this period.

Volet and Pears (1994) provided insight into overseas students' reflective accounts of their experiences in TAFE institutions in Western Australia, the setting for the study reported in this dissertation. Overseas student respondents to a survey were asked to provide answers to a broad range of questions, ranging from their initial source of information about TAFE to their experiences of studying at TAFE and living in Western Australia. The 71 participants were from 16 countries, the majority being from Indonesia, followed by Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand. An important feature of this research for the present study was the breakdown of issues by country. This revealed important differences across countries. For instance, whereas the Hong Kong students appeared particularly interested in

studying at TAFE to get into an Australian university later, Indonesian respondents displayed a predominantly vocational orientation (Volet and Pears, 1994: x). This may reflect Barker's (1997: 110) inclusion of Indonesia as an example of a 'collectivist' society, in his analysis of the reasons why students go overseas to study. For individuals in such a society, the purpose of education tends to be about 'learning how to do'. According to Barker (1997: 110), for those for whom the purpose of study is 'learning how to do', the content of their course is of the greatest importance.

Earlier, Bligh, Jacques and Piper (1981: 95-96), in discussing Western courses when transplanted to developing countries, pointed out that "what is learned will vary according to language and culture". Consequently, they argued, the courses are not only often inappropriate, but are perceived quite differently by both overseas teachers and students from those in the country of origin. Furthermore, Bligh and his colleagues (1981: 96) observed that:

There is a danger that a course which is based upon content and standards drawn from another culture with vastly different needs and priorities, will only serve to divorce the thinking of the educated elite from the rest of the country's inhabitants.

From this, they conclude that there is no reason to suppose that the potential results should be any different when the students are transplanted to the courses.

Summary and Conclusion

Because of increasing recruitment and retention of overseas students, there is already research and writing on the nature of the overseas student experience.

Much of this research is in areas related to the teaching and learning of these students, the impact they have on the economy of the host nation and salient cultural influences perceived to affect the functioning of students in foreign settings. Two issues with respect to such research on overseas students demand further attention. First, there is a need to move away from the tendency to aggregate findings across nations. The current influx of 'Asian' students to Australia and to other Western educational institutions requires us to examine more closely the differences that exist within subgroups of this broad mass of overseas students. Second, in documenting the experiences of overseas students, there has been little attempt to examine these experiences in light of their attendance at institutions other than universities, such as schools and TAFE colleges. There is, therefore, limited knowledge as to whether the insights gained and judgements made about one group of overseas students can be applied equally to all students from all Asian nations, and then whether equally to all students from individual countries in Asia. The bulk of the research does indicate that these insights and judgements are applied on a 'macro' basis. In some instances this leads to judgements about students that are inaccurate, or at the very least, lacking in true insight.

In order to contribute to a closer understanding of the needs of overseas students, a number of studies could be undertaken. For example, an investigation could be conducted into the experiences of overseas students in adjusting to life in boarding schools, particularly when they are from countries where a close family environment is a characteristic. Also, in documenting the experiences of overseas students, there has been little attempt to examine these experiences in the light of

established Western theories of learning. It is not really known whether Australian models of learning processes can be appropriately applied to students from Asian nations, but they are applied nevertheless. Nevertheless, Australian models are applied equally to students from all national groups, seemingly without special regard to differences that might exist between them in their reaction to the models. Research into these matters that focused on each national group, rather than the overseas student body as a single entity, would also be valuable. Furthermore, research that considered these matters in relation to individual sectors of the Australian education system would constitute another useful study.

The lack of empirically based research about overseas students in TAFE and the need for intensive examination of many aspects about them in the different sectors of education in Australia has led to the study reported in this dissertation. The aims of the study, it will be recalled, are to develop an understanding of the background to overseas students studying at TAFE colleges in Western Australia (TAFE WA), the functions of TAFE WA in providing for overseas students who come to study at its colleges, and the concerns of TAFE WA personnel who have had responsibilities relating to the provision of technical and vocational education and training for this student cohort. Propositions arising from research about each of these three questions will be reported in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Before doing so, however, the methodology underpinning this research will now be considered.

*****In TAFE in Australia, a recent study has addressed issues of curriculum relevance, language difficulties, cultural integration, appropriate food catering, religious sensitivities, accommodation needs and recreation provision that have presented challenges and have posed problems for the TAFE system (Australian TAFE International, 1996). This is an important study in that it has drawn on practices of TAFE colleges in each Australian State and Territory with the objective of determining best practice for program delivery and student support services for overseas students in TAFE institutions Australia-wide. Furthermore, this is one of the few studies that is based mainly on information gathered from TAFE personnel who deal with overseas students.

would focus on the background to overseas students coming to TAFE WA and the functions and concerns of TAFE personnel who are involved with their sojourn in Western Australia. a valuable study could examine the educational background and learning characteristics of nationals from a particular country, for example, Indonesia.

A lot of this literature is descriptive in nature or based on anecdotal evidence rather than on more systematic and rigorous attempts to explore the complex array of issues affecting these students who undertake programs of study in contexts that differ from those with which they are most familiar. While there is ample documentation of the problems faced by overseas students, less explored is how the increase in their number is affecting academic faculty in terms of the background to the presence of these students and the functions and concerns created by their presence.

The study reported in this dissertation is a qualitative study that seeks to contribute to provide information about the background to overseas students studying at TAFE institutions in Western Australia, and the functions and concerns of TAFE personnel in dealing with overseas students.

The study reported in this dissertation moves beyond documentation of the problems that overseas students face, to examine more closely how a group of students with a common ethnic background dealt with these problems.

By far the greater part of the relevant literature has considered overseas students as a conglomerate. Some studies, however, have focused on particular ethnic groups

and it is in this work, seeking first to understand the component parts of the larger group, that it is believed a more coherent understanding of the issues involved can be achieved. Pertinent to the study was research involving Indonesian students studying abroad. This was hard to find, although several studies were located in which specific aspects of the education of Indonesian students in international contexts had been investigated.

CONCLUSION

Three themes emerge from this review of the literature regarding overseas students. These are.....

An increase in the provision by Western nations of educational services for overseas students has spawned writing and research in a range of

Conclusion

From: Purdie, N, O'Donoghue, T and Rosa, Catherine "Goals and Coping Behaviours: The Development of a Model for International Students", Queensland Journal of Educational Research, 1999, Vol. 14, No. 2

Of the 71 alumni who participated in the survey, the majority was from Indonesia, followed by Hong Kong, Malaysia and Thailand.

In the mid-1980s, these and other salient issues of the time about overseas students studying at Australian universities were reported in "Problems of Asian students in Australia: language, culture and education" (Bradley and Bradley, 1984). A major

focus of the report was language, but attention was also given to cultural problems, differences in educational systems and study skills' issues. These writers provided a comprehensive analysis of the difficulties faced by students in reading, understanding, speaking and writing in a language that was not their first language but rather the dominant language of the university community, namely, English. This study complemented similar research completed earlier by Bochner and Wicks (1972) and Bock and Gassin (1982), who recognised university writing requirements as a 'cultural battleground'. These studies argued that overseas students struggled with new patterns of thinking that determined particular writing styles and patterns that had their roots in culturally constructed learning.

Specialist advisory and support services, suitable accommodation secured in advance of arrival, and opportunities to build up social networks have an important part to play in the welfare of all overseas students. Nevertheless, in connection with their general welfare, Wright (1997:93) was especially concerned that the issue of gender is noticeable by its absence from the scholarly work that attends to overseas students. Indeed, according to Wright (1997:93), the overseas student literature has paid little attention to women students, treating overseas students as 'genderless', or rather, being typically single, young and male. Wright, for example, considers that a significant but rarely mentioned welfare issue is providing adequate childcare facilities for those students with children.