

# **Adjustment to the academic life of St. Dominic College of Asia as a basis for developing Filipino language course for international students**

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**Abstract** – *International students have different needs when undertaking education in Philippine universities. It is in the interest of both international students and host institutions to ensure that these students achieve success in their studies. This study explores the academic adjustment and experiences of undergraduate international students in St. Dominic College of Asia. The objective of this study is to determine the academic adjustments of SDCA's international students, and the need to have a separate Filipino subject solely for international students in order to cater to their academic and cultural needs. The result shows that the students preferred SDCA because of the school's global perspectives and because it offered their preferred courses. Also, most respondents adjusted in studying at SDCA by setting up a timetable and studying with their peer groups. According to the respondents, the first two months of their first semester was regarded as the most difficult time to adjust academically. Student-teacher interactions, student-student interactions, and the development of independence while studying in the Philippines were seen as aggravating factors in their difficulty in adjusting.*

**Keywords** – *adjustment, academic experiences, international students, proposal, Filipino subject*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the number of international students at St. Dominic College of Asia (SDCA) have more than doubled. In a statistic released by the Registrar's Office there is an 80% increase of enrolment by international students in academic year 2015-2016 compared to the past years, with students from Nigeria making up most of the increase.

Despite the fact that the population of international students is significantly increasing in SDCA, very little is known about how they learn and adapt to the new culture and language of their host country and what contributes to their academic life. In recognition of this increase, SDCA should make it a point to address the academic needs of the international students as they seek good education in this country.

Language is the most frequently reported barrier to adjusting to college and university life, followed by financial difficulties and problems adapting to the culture (Jacob and Greggo, 2001; Ramburuth, 2001; Trice, 2003). Specifically, these studies report student difficulty with lectures (e.g. vocabulary and delivery speed of lectures, note-taking skills), writing academic essays and assignments, reading comprehension, and oral communication. It can be argued that this will affect the education of these international students.

The success of international education rests on a comprehensive understanding of how international students can improve their understanding of the English language and the language of the host country, plus academic preparedness and focus on personal factors that influence the academic success of international students (Andrade, 2010; Sawil, et al., 2012; Trent, 2012).

This research will center on two areas of concern: 1.) the adjustment experiences of the international students of SDCA during academic year 2015-2016, and 2.) the need of the international students of SDCA to learn and speak the local language.

To facilitate a deeper investigation of the two general research questions, six focus questions were formulated. These questions were designed to assist in developing a systematic approach to the survey.

1. What is the profile of the international students?
2. What do international students do in their academic adjustment to meet the demands of the new environment?
3. How long is the academic adjustment of the international students?
4. What are the problems that aggravate their adjustment difficulties?
5. What is the level of willingness of international students to have a separate Filipino subject in place of Filipino 111?
6. What lessons the international students would want to learn in the proposed Filipino subject?

Thus, the following are the main focuses of the study: 1.) determining the academic experiences of international students of SDCA, and 2.) proposing a separate Filipino subject solely for international students enrolled in SDCA.

## **Methodology**

The researcher used the descriptive design, specifically a survey tool. International students enrolled in undergraduate courses during the academic year 2015-2016 were chosen as the target group for this study. However, it should be noted that the term International Students is used to refer to students who live away from their home country. Therefore, a student will qualify as an international student as long as he/she resides in the Philippines to only study.

To collect data for the study, the researchers used the questionnaire constructed by Juntarciego, et al. (2013) for the first area of concern, and constructed their own questionnaire for the second concern.

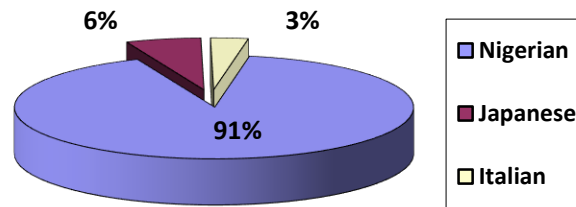
A survey was conducted from March 7 to March 18, 2016 involving the entire pool of SDCA's international students. However the researchers have only surveyed thirty-three (33) international students since the researchers could only do so by administering the questionnaire through the international students' coordinator, Ms. Sue Kalinawan. Adding to that was the limited amount of time given for the study.

The percentage formula was used in this research and Microsoft Excel was the software used in tabulating the results.

## **Results and Discussion**

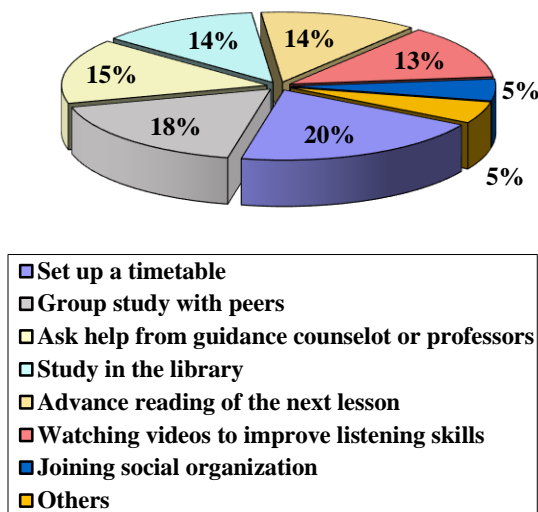
On this part, the result of the six focus questions are shown.

**Graph 1. Nationality of the International Students in St. Dominic College of Asia**



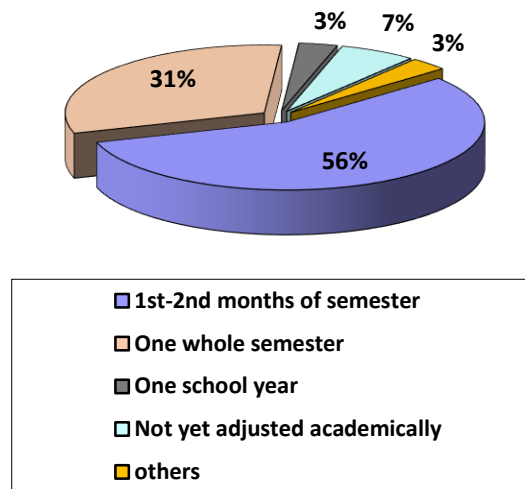
As seen on the above figure, a majority of international students are Nigerian. Next to them are students of Japanese nationality, while students of Italian nationality follows closely in third.

**Graph 2. Activities Done to Cope with Academic Difficulty**



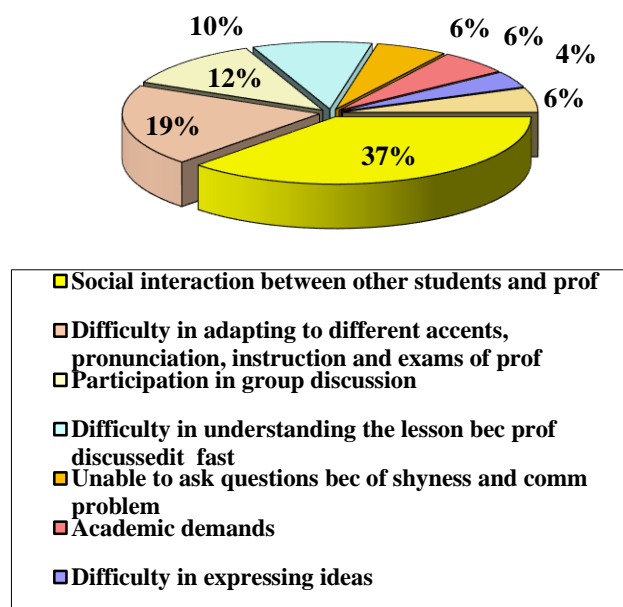
Most of the students would set up a timetable in order to cope with their academic difficulties in SDCA. A fair part of the graph also shows that the international students would join group study sessions with their peers. Asking help from guidance counselors or professors also take a fair part of the graph. Studying in the library and doing advance reading regarding the next lesson share an equal part on the graph, while watching videos to improve listening skills also shows a notable share. Joining social organizations share a portion of the graph as well.

**Graph 3. International Students Length of Time in Adjusting in the Academic Changes**



As seen above, the largest portion of the graph shows that international students have adjusted to the academic changes they had experienced in the first and second months of the semester. The second largest portion of the graph shows that some international students took one whole semester to adjust to the academic changes, while others took one school year to adjust or are not yet academically adjusted by the time the study was administered.

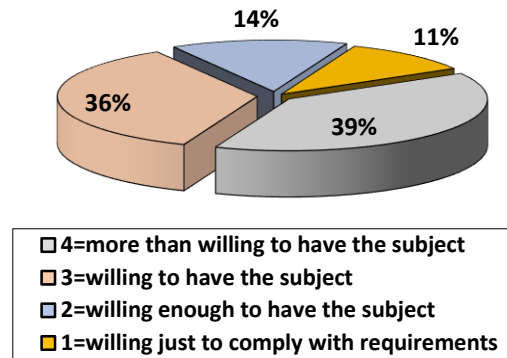
**Graph 4. Situations that the International Students Find the Hardest to Adjust to Academically**



Interacting socially between other students and the professors is the situation international students find the hardest to adjust to. Next is the difficulty in adapting the different accents, pronunciation, instruction, and examinations of professors. Furthermore, the inability to participate in group discussions and difficulty in understanding the lesson because the professors discussed

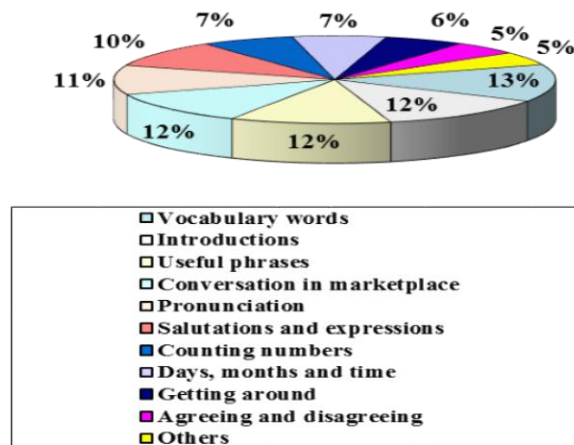
the lessons too fast share an almost equal part in the graph. Others show an equal portion of the number of respondents, such as being unable to ask questions due to shyness, communication problems, and the pressure of high academic demands.

**Graph 5. International Students Level of Willingness to Have a Separate Filipino subject**



As seen above, an almost equal portion of the graph reveals that most of the international students are more than willing and willing to have a separate Filipino subject. Also, a fair part of the graph reveals that international students are willing enough to have the subject, or are willing to just to comply with the requirements of the course.

**Graph 6. The Lessons International Students Want to Learn in the Proposed Filipino subject**



As seen above, an almost equal portion of the graph reveals that international students want to learn Filipino vocabulary words, introductory and useful phrases, conversational phrases for use in the marketplace, and pronunciation of Filipino words, salutations, and expressions. The graph also shows an almost equal portion of lessons relating to counting numbers, the names of days and months, and how to tell time.

## Discussions & Interpretation

In this interpretation of data, the six research questions will be answered:

*What is the profile of the international students?*

A majority of the respondents are Nigerian. Next to them are the Japanese, and Italians share the almost same number of respondents. Most of the students chose SDCA because the college offered their desired courses, and the students preferred to study in the Philippines because of the educational programs the country offered.

*What do international students do in their academic adjustment to meet the demands of the new environment?*

Primarily, most students rank social interaction with other students and professors as the number one difficulty in their academic adjustment at SDCA. Difficulty in adapting to different accents and pronunciation of the natives comes close to second, while participation in group discussions and difficulty in understanding the lesson because the professor discussed it too fast ranked third and fourth, respectively.

In SDCA, most respondents academically adjusted by setting up a timetable and studying with their peers. Some would ask help from the guidance counselors or their professors. Others preferred to study in the library doing an advance reading of their next lesson while a few of them preferred to join social organizations.

The respondents suggested that their communication skills could be developed through learning the local language (re: Filipino). They also advised the incoming freshmen to study very hard, acquire knowledge, and not merely learn English. This is consistent with the literature that language proficiency plays a significant factor in a student's academic adjustment (Burke 1986; Ballard & Clancy, 1991).

*How long is the academic adjustment of international students?*

As adjustment experiences are quite individual, it was expected that the responses to this focus question would vary. Of the responses received, the first two months of the first semester was commonly regarded as the most difficult time to adjust. Some of the respondents said they took one whole semester to adjust in SDCA, while two of the respondents claimed that they have not adjusted academically yet.

According to the respondents, the most difficult time to adjust within the adjustment period was the first week of the semester.

*What are the problems that aggravate the adjustment difficulties?*

1. Student - teacher interactions

Besides the lectures, professors and lecturers at SDCA require students to do additional readings and researching for their learning. Thus, teachers expect their students to be more independent. The degree and scope of assistance students get from teachers is sometimes very different from what students expect. What they may expect is a detailed discussion, but they may in fact get some general guidance that refers to a book and a set of page numbers. This is where international students get quite confused in their initial study experiences. In an effort to

understand such unexpected behavior, a student might mistakenly think that the lecturer does not want to help.

## 2. Student - student interactions

The experiences of student - student relationships vary considerably. Some find it easy to make and gain friends, especially with fellow international students. Others say that they have to make friends with their Filipino classmates, while others have difficulty in making such friends. In case of difficulty, friends often offered help.

In contrast, some international students found it hard to meet other students. In SDCA, students attend different lectures, so there are less formal contact hours and fewer opportunities to meet and find study partners. The respondents indicated that in their home countries they could make friends easily, but in the Philippines people mostly spoke a different language and they found it hard to interact well. Student-student relationships vary. International students get along with each other even though the nationality or language of the other person is different, but when it comes to Filipino students they have to find time in building relationships with them.

### *Expectations of living in The Philippines*

Some international students mentioned that the new experiences of living in the Philippines required them to develop new skills. Apart from studying, students have to spend time to do housekeeping duties such as cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry by themselves. Some students found that the responsibilities from this independence competed with their studies for time.

### *What is the level of willingness of international students to have a separate Filipino subject in place of Filipino 111?*

A majority of the international students are more than willing to have the subject while a large number of them say that they are willing to have the subject. These answers indicate the willingness of international students not only to learn the local language but to understand Filipino culture as well. By doing so, it may result in an international student reaching his or her potential in higher education.

### *What lessons the international students would want to learn in the proposed Filipino subject?*

Knowing vocabulary words ranks first as the most preferred lesson respondents want to learn, followed closely by introductions, useful phrases, and conversations in the marketplace. Pronunciation, salutations and expression also follow very close, while counting numbers, knowing the name of days and months, and telling time are tied to one another. Getting around the places they lived at and how to agree and disagree rank among the last things they want to learn in the proposed Filipino subject.

Learning the local language, coupled with personal encouragement from peers and colleagues and teachers, is needed to help international students build their confidence so they can participate in class discussions and other activities.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

### *Conclusions*

1. Majority of the students are Nigerians. Most of the international students prefer to study in the Philippines because of the educational program the country offers, and others choose SDCA because the college offers their desired course.
2. Most informants adjusted to studying at SDCA by setting up a timetable and doing group study sessions with their peers. Using the library and reading in advance in ensured their successful adjustment.
3. Most international students experienced academic adjustment in the first to second month of their first semester.
4. The factors that aggravate the difficulty in the adjustment of international students are student-teacher interaction, student-student interaction, and the development of independence while studying in the Philippines.
5. A majority of the respondents are more than willing to have a separate Filipino subject solely for international students, and they want to learn useful Filipino words and phrases that they can use in everyday conversation and communication.

### *Recommendations*

1. Create an office for international students under the supervision of the Vice President for Academics and Research that will supervise the academic wellness of the international students.
2. Set up an organization for international students and/or (if one is already existing) get their involvement/participation in different curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities.
3. Set up linkages with other schools and organize a monthly forum for international students.
4. Create a separate Filipino subject in place of Filipino 111 solely for international students (Suggestion: Filipino 101 - Filipino for International Students).
5. Develop a module for the proposed Filipino subject that will cater to the needs of the international students.



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