Generating Malaysian-based knowledge through a dialogue with the West in the Fields of Psychology and Education

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Abstract
Generating Malaysian-Based Knowledge through a Dialogue with the West in the Fields of Psychology and Education: Knowledge is culturally-bound. The process of making sense of knowledge normally takes place among local people in a specific cultural context. However, most existing knowledge in various fields of studies originates from the West. In fact, most existing concepts and theories mostly used in educational research are Western-based, which emphasis more on Eurocentric values and bias. This poses some conceptual and methodological challenges for international scholars and researchers, especially those from the non-West contexts, to fully understand such knowledge and apply it to their specific cultural contexts. One possible explanation to account for the emergence of both challenges found in the literature is due to differences in cultural values, beliefs, norms, behaviours between the West and the non-West cultural context, among many others. These are experienced by most Malaysian researchers in the fields of behavioural sciences and education, in which most research studies adopt-and-adapt Western-based theories to generate meaningful knowledge in the specific cultural context of Malaysia. Drawing on examples or cases from three Malaysian-based studies (PhD research in progress) in the areas of psychology and teacher education, this paper discusses (a) the conceptual challenges, (b) the associated methodological and fieldwork challenges, and (c) the challenges to interpret and communicate the research findings encountered by three Malaysian researchers in understanding, designing and modifying Western theories to suit the cultural needs of the Malaysians. The participants of these studies were Malaysian school and university students, teachers and professional counsellors from various states in Malaysia. The methods used in the studies were based on both the positivist (quantitative) and constructivist (qualitative) paradigms. These comprised surveys (both mailed and online), semi-structured interviews and thinking aloud. It is envisioned that once these challenges are addressed, the generic and Malaysian-based knowledge emerging from the studies can be identified. This paper implies that there is a pressing need for: (1) conducting local research using a grounded-theory approach, rather than just relying on a dialogical process approach, to generate local wisdom which then becomes the foundational knowledge of Malaysian-based theories; and (2) globalising local wisdom in behavioural science and education. The emerging local wisdom will complement the existing knowledge, and hence widen the knowledge base of existing theories. Nonetheless, the integration of local wisdom and Western-based theories contributes to the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the knowledge. Suggested strategies for future research in generating culturally meaningful knowledge in the fields of psychology and teacher education in Malaysia are also discussed.

Key Words
Malaysia, Asia as method, multicultural counselling competency, personality, metacognition.
Introduction

Malaysia is one of the developing countries in the South-East Asia region. Malaysia is a complex nation with unique historical and socio-cultural dynamics within the population of 27 million (Saw, 2007). It is a multicultural society and one of its national missions is to become a fully developed country by the year 2020 (Malaysia Economic Planning Unit, 2009). One of the challenges is to develop a knowledge-based society. This implies that Malaysians have to be wise in recognizing the universal and culture-specific aspects of knowledge. However, as argued by Chen (2010) and Cheung (2000), most Asian researchers and practitioners are aware that the vast majority of existing knowledge in various fields of studies originated from the West. For example, knowledge in both psychology and teacher education fields has roots in the Euro-American culture; most theories and practices in psychology and teacher education were developed by the Euro-American scholars, which may or may not be culturally relevant to specific cultures and contexts. So, how to determine which knowledge is culturally relevant to the needs, values and norms of people from other ethnic groups or other cultural contexts? How to generate a culture-based (local) knowledge in the field of studies that are dominated by scholars, experts, and researchers from the West? How to globalize local wisdom to a wider and broader audience across cultures, contexts, and borders? These are among the major issues and challenges faced by most Malaysian researchers, especially in the fields of psychology and teacher education, in their ongoing efforts to preserve their culture and values and, at the same time, to embrace the waves of globalization, internationalization and diversification.

This paper attempts to address the above-mentioned issues faced by many international researchers around the world, in particular, those from Malaysia, which is part of Asia. The paper draws heavily on the work of Chen (2010), who proposed the notion of Asia as method as a framework for Asian scholars. He encouraged scholars to take up the challenge to contribute to the growing fields of cultural studies or Asian studies in Asia and to address and incorporate local cultures and values into the process of meaning making. The paper begins with a brief discussion of “Asia as method” as a concept. Then, it introduces three Malaysian-based doctoral studies as cases for reference and to provide the basis for examples throughout the discussion. Four areas of challenge have been identified by three Malaysian university lecturers during their PhD journey as international student-researchers in an Australian university. These challenges are manifested in the conceptual and methodological aspects of research, fieldwork and communicating findings to global audience. The implications for theory, practice and research are also discussed.
The Concept of Asia as Method: A Dialogue with the West

Generally speaking, Asia as method refers to a dialogical process of integrating the influence of Asia cultures and contexts to widen the knowledge base by complementing existing theories (Chen, 2010). The meaning of Asia as method is a concept, idea, thinking or theory which originated, was modified, or localized in Asia. The task involves decolonizing and deimperializing culture and mind, desire and body, and the production of knowledge (Chen, 2010). Asia as method is not Asian scholars' studies. It is Asian-oriented studies. It is not studies which are produced in the Asian geographical location. Asia as method is not an anti-West research. The significance of Asia as method is to create a platform for the dialogue between Asian and the world; to draw attention to existing valuable Asia knowledge. Thus, the following studies exemplify the Asia as method approach by drawing on some challenges encountered by three Malaysian researchers in their PhD journey to help clarify what is meant by the concept about Asia as method.

The Three Malaysian-Based Studies

The three Malaysian-based studies used as cases in this article are summarized individually as the following (Case 1: Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2011, in progress; Case 3: Ali, 2011 in progress; Case 2: Muhamad, 2011, in progress):

(a) Case 1: Professional counsellors’ understanding and practice of multicultural counselling in Malaysia.

This research is a multicultural counselling study using a mixed methods inquiry approach. The aim of the study is to explore the understanding and practice of multicultural counselling among a sample of the Malaysian counsellor community by using surveys and semi-structured interviews. A total of 508 registered and practicing counsellors participated in the national survey (response rate 38%) and 12 licensed and practising counsellors participated in the interviews. The main survey instrument was the 32-item Multicultural Counselling Competency Survey-Malaysian Counsellor Edition (MCCS-MCE), a self-assessment measure exploring counsellors’ multicultural counselling competence (MCC). It was developed based on the reviews and critiques from literature. The theoretical framework of the study was an adapted version of the tripartite models of MCC (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue, et al., 1982). The interviews involved counsellors’ self-reflections on the practice of multicultural counselling in Malaysia. The interviewees were chosen based on their gender, ethnicity, religion, work setting, and experience in multicultural counselling. Results on the nature and extent of MCC revealed a 6-factor structure (beliefs/attitudes, awareness, knowledge, understanding, experience, and skills) rather than the three (awareness, knowledge and skills) proposed in the literature. The Malaysian counsellors generally perceived

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themselves as multiculturally competent. They perceived themselves as most competent in the awareness and understanding dimensions and the least competent in multicultural beliefs/attitudes and skills dimensions, which is inconsistent with the way American counsellors’ perceptions on their MCCs. Among the potential correlates of MCC, ethnicity (being ethnic minority), highest education (Masters and PhD) and participation in the last five years training in multicultural counselling are the best predictors of MCC. Results on counsellors’ practice reflections revealed a Malaysian-based process of multicultural counselling, which has both the generic and culture-specific elements of counselling. The overall findings suggest that Malaysian counsellors’ understanding of multicultural counselling seemed adequate but their practices are limited to a certain group of clients: ethnically different, religiously different, women, etc. This raises the need to practise more with clients from specialized groups such as gays, lesbians, disabled, elderly, poor, victims of domestic violence, and single mothers.

(b) Case 2: Predispositions to problem behavior in Malaysian young adults
This is personality research conducted in Malaysian context. The aim of the study is to validate the scales used to measure the construct of interests such as personality, spiritual beliefs and problem behaviour, followed by the development of an integrative model of personality and spiritual beliefs associated with Malaysian young adults’ problematic behaviours. A total of 481 students, currently studying in one of the universities in Malaysia participated in this study. Among the instruments used in this study were the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), purported to measure five major domains of human personality: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A) and Conscientiousness (C).

Since the BFI originates from the West, it is imperative to ascertain the validity and reliability of this questionnaire before any conclusion on the relationship between these variables can be drawn. As such, one-factor congeneric measurement modelling using a structural equation modelling (SEM) approach was performed on the data. Basically, in a single factor congeneric model, the homogeneity of the indicator variables making up each single factor is tested. In doing so, several steps need to be undertaken. First, any indicator variables that appear to be unsatisfactory are usually removed from the scale. Second, the model (without the unsatisfactory item) is run again to observe the impact of item removal to that particular single factor. The process is repeated until satisfactory model is gained or until “a set of valid items together with accurate weightings that can be applied to the items to form very accurate composite scores” (FaHCSIA, 2010, p. 2) is established. However, for the purpose of this paper, only the validity and reliability result of openness to experience scale is reported. The findings showed that the original model which includes ten items did not fit the Malaysian sample well. The chi-square was significant (χ² =
128.032, d.f=20, p<0.00). Absolute fit indices such as RMR and RMSEA were greater than 0.05, suggesting the data did not fit the model. GFI, AGFI and CFI were less than the acceptable value of 0.95, also indicating a poor fit. Adjustment had to be made to gain a good model that fits the Malaysian data.

In order to identify which item reflects the factor well, it is essential to examine the item reliabilities. In one-factor congeneric models, item reliabilities are assessed by the squared multiple correlation (SMC) of the item (Holmes-Smith, 2010). An examination of the squared multiple correlations indicated that three items had very weak loadings (less than 0.2) and may have little in common with the construct it is reflecting. These items were removed one by one, until satisfactory goodness-of-fit indices were obtained. Removal of these three items resulted in an improvement in model fit each time. Overall, the indices showed that the modified model fit the data well. In the final model, the item with the largest weighting and that which best reflected the openness construct in the Malaysian sample was “original, comes up with new ideas”. The composite scale reliability for this construct was .81 which showed that the retained items are thought to be reliable measure. In summary, the findings indicated that not all openness items found to be valid in Western population are valid in Malaysian population.

(c) Case 3: Physics problem solving process between “more successful;” and “less successful” from metacognitive perspectives

This study was conducted to determine the differences between "more successful" and "less successful" problem solvers in physics problem solving and from metacognitive perspective as well. Comparison between "more successful" and "less successful" problem solving process in physics has been extensively studied since 1979. Most studies have focused on information processing framework (human/computer) and expert-novices differences in problem solving (knowledge structure, internal/external representation/heuristics (strategies). However, studies that compare, using a metacognitive lens, are somewhat new in physics area. This study investigates the problem solving process between “more successful” and “less successful” problem solvers among ten (10) Physics undergraduate students from one public university located in Southern tip of Malaysia. Students that had good score in the Physics Problem Solving Achievement Test (PPSAT) or physics task were selected as “more successful” problem solvers and those that had poor score in the PPSAT were selected as “less successful” problem solvers. Thinking aloud is a major tool to collect data in this study. In addition, students also were interviewed right after the thinking aloud session. Thinking aloud sessions and interviews were videotaped. Protocols from the thinking aloud sessions were transcribed, segmented and translated. Transcripts of five “more successful” and five “less successful” problem solvers were then analysed per physics problem (4
physics problems; 2 mechanics and 2 electrics). Findings showed that there were many differences between “more successful” and less successful” in solving physics problems at the beginning, middle and at the end of problem solving phase. The most important findings revealed that metacognitive skills such as planning, monitoring and evaluating had been used frequently by “more successful” problem solvers as compared to “less successful”.

Conceptual challenges in adapting Western-based models
Through a dialogical process with the West, the generation of Malaysian-based knowledge by the researchers in the studies described above faced many conceptual issues and challenges, especially in adopting and adapting the Western-based theories or models, in the specific cultural context of Malaysia. These issues and challenges are discussed as follows. Some strategies adopted to address these challenges are also included.

Theoretical Lens for Designing Malaysian-Based Studies
The first issue involves choosing the appropriate lens to understand culture: via cultural universalism or cultural relativism (culture-specific) perspectives (Draguns, 2008). Cultural universalism operates from an etic perspective, which emphasises the generic elements of knowledge across cultures, contexts and borders (Pedersen, Draguns, Lonner, & Trimble, 2008). In contrast, cultural relativism operates from an emic perspective, which emphasises culture-specific elements of knowledge, such the indigenous or traditional values, norms and practices (Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996; Sue & Sue, 2008). In both psychology and science education, most theoretical models are Western-based and, hence, the process of making sense of such models poses some challenges to Malaysian researchers. For example, in the study of multicultural counselling competency (MCC), there are numerous models proposed in the literature which attempt to explain and predict the nature of the MCC construct (Collins & Arthur, 2007; Glockshuber, 2005; Mollen, Ridley, & Hill, 2003; J. G. Ponterotto, Fuertes, & Chen, 2000). However, these models were mostly developed by American scholars and most research which used and validated these models was conducted in the American context using samples from the ethnic majority or minority groups such as American Asians, American Hispanics, American native, and American African, among many others.

Similarly, in the study of personality and individual differences among local youths in Malaysia, the most popular and robust personality model is the five-factor model of personality, which has been developed by McCrae, an American leading scholar. Impressive research findings have been reported on the universality of five major domains of personality in various cultures (Allik & McCrae, 2004; De Fruyt, et al., 2009; Eap, et al., 2008; Piedmont & Chae, 1997; Schmitt, Allik, McCrae, &
Benet-Martinez, 2007). However, some inconsistencies were found on the factor structure of the Big Five. For instance, Cheung and colleagues (2003) found an additional factor in their Chinese samples and seven underlying personality factors were uncovered in Spanish samples (Benet & Waller, 1995). A study by McCrae, Terracciano and 78 Members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project (2005) suggests that the factor structure of the Big Five was replicated in most of the 50 cultures such as Germany, Spain and Australia. On the other hand, in several developing countries such as Malaysia, Lebanon, Botswana, Nigeria and Morocco, the factor structures were not perfect replications of the American normative structure.

McCrae and colleagues suggest that the imperfect replications in these cultures may be due to poor data quality obtained. There are few reasons why the data quality was poor. Firstly, there is a possibility that a Western questionnaire may not be appropriate to be used in non-Western cultures. The English personality terms that are consequential in Western context may not hold the same meaning and might reveal a different underlying personality structure in another cultural context (Heine, 2008). In other words, it is possible that personality concepts that are meaningful in one culture do not carry the same meaning in another culture (Nintachan & Moon, 2007; Sperber, 2004). Secondly, the poor data quality obtained in the non-western cultures may be due to the fact that non-Western people do not really understand the questions and may not be familiar with answering questions in a pre-determined format (McCrae, et al., 2005). An alternative explanation suggests that the poor understandability of the items may be due to inadequate translations of the items from English into another languages (Hilton, 2002; Nintachan & Moon, 2007).

Designing the Studies

In order to design a culturally appropriate study, several issues are emerging based on a dialogical process with the West. Which models are culturally relevant to the Malaysian context? Which one is the most appropriate to be used in the Malaysian-based studies? How to operationally define the key terms used in the study to take into consideration the role of culture and context? Although Malaysian-based models exist in the literature, such models raise concerns regarding their validity and reliability because replication studies are lacking. For example, in Case 2, there is a Malaysian-based model of personality, known as Sidek Personality Inventory. However, the reliability and validity of this instrument is questionable because there is little reputable literature available which discusses the psychometric properties of this instrument. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why this inventory is not a popular choice among Malaysian personality psychologists. However, when using the scales from the West, the results from this analysis seem to suggest that it is not entirely appropriate to simply adopt the personality measures which have been developed
and validated in the West. Total adoption of Western-based instruments in other cultural contexts may have serious effects for research interpretation and conclusions.

It is commonly known among the Malaysian researcher community that to develop a truly “Malaysian” model would not be easy due to the ethnic-religious diversity of the Malaysian population. This becomes one of the major challenges faced by counselling researchers (e.g., Case 1) in the Malaysian context because the development of a Malaysian model of counselling would not be possible without properly addressing the multiethnic, multireligious, and multilingual diversity of the Malaysian population (Salim & Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2005).

**Methodological challenges in designing Malaysian-based studies**

In designing Malaysian-based studies, there are several important issues that need to be considered. For example, the foremost issues involve selecting the proper methodology between cultural adaptation (complementary perspectives) and cultural anthropology (grounded approach to generate local wisdom) approaches to research (Cokley & Awad, 2008). This raise concerns regarding the ways to adopt a Western model from a wide range of choices because it is not easy to choose one that is culturally relevant to the Malaysian culture and context. Another concern rests on the ways to properly modify/adapt/localize the selected model from the West because there are emerging issues regarding:

a. How to culturally adapt the Western-based model to suit the needs and norms of local Malaysians?

b. To what extent cultural modification is needed to localize such models in the Malaysian context?

**Adopting Western-Based Models**

Some Western-based models can be simply adopted without needing to be modified. This is because some models are culturally universal and skill based concepts. In case 3 for example, problem solving and metacognition can be used without need to modify. Problem solving strategies (i.e: Polya (1945), Reif (1976), Heller et al. (1992a; 1992b)) as well as metacognition (i.e: Flavell (1976), Schoenfeld (1987), Veenman et. al (2005a, 2005b) mostly were develops by western scholars.

**Adapting Western-Based Models**
Specific examples regarding the methodological challenges encountered by Malaysian researchers can also be drawn from Case 1 and Case 2 because both cases involve numerous existing models of MCC and personality which originated in the West. Case 1 reviewed existing models of MCC (Cartwright, Daniels, & Zhang, 2008; Madonna G. Constantine, 2001; Mollen, et al., 2003; J. G. Ponterotto, et al., 2000; Sue, et al., 1992; Sue, et al., 1982) and each of these models has a different focus (e.g., self-report, observer-rater, etc). So, one of the methodological challenges faced by the researcher was: which one is the best model to be used in the Malaysian context? To address this challenge, several strategies were adopted and these include reviewing the historical development of MCC models and providing critiques on the strengths and weaknesses of each model based on literature and research. As a result, two models of MCC were selected because these models are not only pioneer models in the literature but they have undergone substantial validation through research.

In addition, there are also various models of personality in the literature. However, research on the Five Factor Model has produced impressively consistent findings and an unusually high level of agreement among personality researchers (McCrae, Terracciano, & Project, 2005). Having stated that, there is still some disagreement about the model’s claim to covering the entire universe of personality traits (McAdams, 1992). The studies of Ashton, Lee and Goldberg (2004) have found a sixth factor, which they label Honesty-Humility. An Attractiveness factor was found in Lanning and Gough (1991) analysis of items from the California Adult Q-Set. Almagor, Tellegan and Waller (1995) presented evidence for the emergence of two additional factors known as Positive Evaluation and Negative Evaluation. As these studies have pointed out, it frequently happens that analyses of specific personality instruments show evidence of more than five factors. On the other hand, Zuckerman, Kuhlman, and Camac (1988) and Tellegen (1982) argue that three factors namely, Extraversion, Neuroticism and Psychoticism can account for the personality differences in humans. Of particular interest was a study by Yang and Bond (1990) on a Chinese sample where they found a one-to-one correspondence between indigenous and imported (English) factors for only two of the standard Big Five. This brings us to the question of how many personality dimensions can be found in the Malaysian culture and which model is the best for the local context?

In order to overcome this confusion, one strategy was adopted, that is, to adopt the model that has received the most attention and has been well validated in various countries, be it the West or the East. Quite recently, McCrae et al (2005) conducted one large-scale personality study involving people from 50 different cultures. Their findings suggest that the factor structure of the Big Five was replicated in most of the 50 cultures such as Germany, Spain and Australia. This finding serves as
one of the reasons why the Five Factor Model was deemed to be appropriate to be used as the framework for the current research.

**Translating Research Instruments**

Another methodological challenge faced by Malaysian researchers involves translation issues. In particular, translation has to incorporate culture and context in developing the survey instruments and transcribing data to suit both target and source languages (especially for international research students). For example, case 2 found that linguistic and cultural variations between English and Malay make instrument translation rather challenging. Nevertheless, it is a crucial step that has to be undertaken by any researchers who wish to conduct a study using instruments that have been developed in another culture. A number of translation procedures can be used such as simple direct translation, modified direct translation, translation/back-translation, parallel blind technique, random probe and “ultimate” test (Behling & Law, 2000). A well-known method that is commonly used by many researchers is “translation/back-translation” (Behling & Law, 2000). This method is known to produce substantial match for the original English statement. Although the back-translation technique is preferable as it scores well on informativeness, source language transparency, and security, it is also known to be time consuming and can be expensive. Other challenges encountered during the translation process include:

1. **Semantic equivalence** (Behling & Law, 2000) - To adapt in a culturally relevant and comprehensible form while maintaining the meaning and intent of original items; and

2. **Translator's qualifications** (Behling & Law, 2000) – It is difficult to find translators who are:
   a. Fluent in both languages
   b. Extremely knowledgeable about both cultures
   c. Expert in both characteristics and content measured

With this challenge in mind, many recent studies have begun the task of investigating the issues encountered in modification and translation of various psychological instruments before they can be applied in a specific culture other than the Western cultures (Cha, 2007; Hilton & Skrutkowski, 2002; Lim, 2003; Nintachan & Moon, 2007; Swami, 2008). Banville, Desrosiers and Genet-Volet (2000) hold the view that in any study which utilizes questionnaires developed for a particular culture, it is important to establish the significance of the instrument in the new culture before any study conclusions can be drawn.

**Transcribing Interviews**
In Malaysian-based studies, most participants tend to respond in Malay. Being international PhD student-researchers in a Western country, Jaladin and Ali needed not only to transcribe, but to translate all Malay responses from interviews (Case 1) and thinking aloud sessions (Case 3) to English. This was an essential step for supervision purposes and thesis writing. One of the emerging challenges involves retaining the meaning (semantic equivalence) and preserving the context of each responses. For example, the word Eh! Oh! are, generally, exclamation expressions or technically a form of paralinguistics. However, they have different meanings in the Malaysian context. Consider the following specific examples from Case 3:

Premise: Eh! To express a sense of surprise or wonder.
Examples:
[Malay] eh betul la!: [English-translated] Indeed, it is correct!: a sense of surprise.

To address this semantic equivalence issue, the researcher had to refer to two web sites: Pusat Rujukan Persuratan Melayu [Centre for Malay Letters and References], Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka1 and Sukatan Pelajaran Bahasa Melayu STPM2. These sites provide valuable resources for Malaysian researchers (and students) to explore the possibilities of informal language such as slang terms, colloquial language and ‘pasar’ language.

Fieldwork issues and challenges
Research culture in Malaysia is still in its infancy even among professionals. This poses some challenges in conducting studies which require responses from a large sample size, such as survey research. These challenges lie in the types of research approach used and the characteristics of study populations.

Low Response Rate
As surveys normally require a large number of responses to be appropriate for certain statistical analyses (e.g., Case 1 and 2: factor analysis and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) require a minimum of 200 responses, respectively), researchers encountered difficulties obtaining the required number of respondents. Therefore, survey research in Malaysia often results in a low response rate. For example, in Case 1, a national study was conducted as the major part of the mixed-methods research. The study invited 1500 professional counsellors (adult participants),

1 http://prpm.dbp.gov.my/
2 http://www.tutor.com.my/stpm/variiasi_bahasa.htm
registered with the Malaysian Board of Counsellors. The response rate was quite low (i.e., return rate for collected surveys was 36% and for valid surveys was 34%) even though multiple strategies were used for getting sufficient responses. These strategies involved using:

1. Two different types of survey modality: mailed/postal survey (paper-pen version) and online survey (electronic version); and
2. Multiple mailing as follow-up: e.g., two reminder letters/emails.

To avoid low response rate in survey research, most Malaysian researchers are moving towards recognising mixed-methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Haverkamp, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2005; Plano Clark, Creswell, Green, & Shope, 2008) or purely qualitative studies (Berrios & Lucca, 2006; Joseph G. Ponterotto, 2005; Wang, 2008) as their inquiry approaches.

Participants’ Discomfort
Malaysians are still in the process of embracing research. In most organisations, practitioners are not required to conduct research as part of their work specification. For example, Malaysian practising counsellors’ primary duties are to provide counselling services and develop developmental programs for their prospective clients. In view of the shortage of qualified counsellors in Malaysia, most counsellors are overworked and hence they are unable to conduct or participate in research.

Sometimes, the use of certain methods for data collection also poses some challenges for Malaysian researchers. For example, in Case 3, video-taping was used to record the thinking aloud sessions and interviews. As video-recording method is an emerging method for research data collection in Malaysia, this caused some difficulties and discomforts to participants during the initial stage of the sessions. This also limited participants’ honest responses because of self-consciousness. Similarly, when the thinking aloud strategies were used, participants were somewhat reluctant to speak aloud and think aloud. This could be due to the cultural values of local Malays (e.g., shyness is encouraged among the Malay-Muslim community) and the stigma and taboos attached to speaking out aloud and thinking out aloud (e.g., those who tend to speak out or think out aloud are normally labelled as “Orang Gila” [crazy people]).

Issues and challenges in communicating research
When there are cultural issues and conflicts between theories from the West and local understanding and practices, Malaysian researchers face difficulties interpreting their findings and communicating their research to locals and the global audience. This is because they have to be
sensitive to the role of culture and context and, at the same time, they have to embrace globalisation.

**Issues in Interpretation**
Interpreting findings is a crucial stage in any research. However, it becomes a challenge when the research involves a dialogue with the West. This happens to Case 2 which used the Big Five Inventory (John, et al., 1991) to assess the Malaysians' personality. Some of the items used to measure personality were found not to be valid and reliable in the Malaysian context. Therefore, these items had to be removed from the scale. This item removal poses challenges in the interpretation of the results as affects the internal reliability of the subscales.

So, how to successfully interpret such results? Would the interpretation make sense to a global audience? Would the findings be comparable to those from previous studies conducted in the West? These are among the unresolved issues and challenges facing the Malaysian researchers, particularly, in Case 2.

**Issues in Communicating Research Findings**
The main issue in communicating research is to have a sense of balance between culture-specific values and knowledge (local wisdom) and universal knowledge (mostly from the West). For example, in Case 1, comparing findings from similar studies from the West and those from Malaysia poses some difficulties in interpretation and cross-cultural comparisons. A similar study by Holcomb-McCoy and Myers (1999), which was conducted to assess MCCs among 500 professional counsellors who were members of the ACA, found five factors – awareness, knowledge, definitions, racial identity development, and skills – as constituents of MCCs. According to them, “this finding suggests that the Multicultural Competencies comprise more than the three dimensions proposed in the literature” (Halcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999, p. 299). Other studies have also found more than three dimensions of MCC (Constantine & Ladany, 2001; Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise, 1994). Further examination of professional counsellors’ perceptions of their multicultural competence by which researchers found that the respondents perceived themselves to be most competent on the multicultural definitions and awareness factors (Halcomb-McCoy & Myers, 1999). In contrast, the respondents perceived themselves to be the least competent on the racial identity and knowledge dimensions. This pattern of results is similar to results from subsequent studies, which used 76 elementary school counsellors and 510 professional school counsellors as study participants (Holcomb-McCoy, 2001, 2005).

To compare the findings from Case 1 and those from the USA context would not be possible in
view of the culture and context of such countries. In particular, contradictory findings emerged when examining the extent of perceived MCCs between Malaysian professional counsellors (most competent in multicultural knowledge) and American professional counsellors (i.e., most competent in multicultural skills).

Implications for Theory, Practice and Research

Malaysian-based studies that were conducted through a dialogue with the West have several implications for theory, practice and research. Firstly, the development of a truly Malaysian-based theory would not be possible using Asia as Method through a dialogue with the West because of the following reasons:

1. Diversity in the Malaysian population (multi-ethnic, multireligious, and multilingual), unless the focus is on a specific ethnic group, then this would generate a specific theory for that community;
2. Lack of empirical studies to validate local theories. As mentioned earlier, research culture in Malaysia is still in its infancy.

Secondly, the use of both culturally adapted theories from the West and local wisdom generated from Malaysian-based studies helps to improve current practice in the local context. This is because the culture-specific and the generic elements of knowledge are preserved to make existing knowledge more meaningful not only to the local, but also, global audience. For example, the findings of Case 1 will help to enhance self-awareness and cultural awareness among professional counsellors when working with diverse clients. The findings will be disseminated through revised counsellor education programs, future counselling conferences, and upcoming journal publication. Similarly, valid knowledge regarding the influence of personality on problematic behaviours obtained from Case 2 could benefit several parties, such as mental health professionals (counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists) and educational psychologists (measuring personality accurately and meaning fully among Malaysians). This widens the knowledge base of existing theories and makes practice more meaningful.

Lastly, the studies used as cases in this paper caution international researchers regarding the need to comprehensively review existing theories from the West before adopting and adapting such models in their research. We recommend certain rules that must be followed when designing context-specific studies. These are:

1. Extensive reviews of existing literature, in particular, by acknowledging and addressing the critiques and limitations of existing models or assessment instruments;
2. Selection of instruments must be carefully considered to incorporate the role of culture and context;

3. The adoption of a direct translation strategy is problematic because some terms may not be culturally meaningful to local people;

4. To take continuous efforts to validate existing Malaysian-based models and instruments. This will improve the psychometric properties of such instruments and encourage a wider use in the scholarly community; and

5. To globalise and promote the local wisdom by participation in international conferences, publication in international journals, and organizing international conferences. This will enrich existing knowledge and contributes to the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of the knowledge.

Conclusion

As Chen (2010) initially argued, there is an urgent need for international scholars and researchers from former colonies and ex-imperial countries in Asia to rethink and re-examine their own colonial and imperialist histories by engaging in dialogue with each other rather than with academics from the West. However, in view of the limited resources in the Malaysian context, especially in the field of psychology and teacher education, this paper argues for the need to have a dialogue with the West in research to address the role of culture and context. By being sensitive to the local values, needs, and norms and, at the same time, embracing the waves of globalisation, diversification and internationalisation, Malaysian-based studies can contribute to existing knowledge by globalising their local wisdom. Therefore, future research should focus more on generating Malaysian-based knowledge by continuing to use Asia as method through a dialogue with the West or by conducting local research using a grounded theory approach.
References


