

Adjusting to cultural differences: A case study of international participants experiences and voices in an higher education institute

Dr. Jayashree Balasubramanian

Mumbai, India

Abstract:

Cultural diversity has been regarded as an important and a positive aspect of internationalization of higher education through which students engage, learn a wide ranging of topics and enhance their knowledge and skills. This would in turn make the students suitable sought after individual global citizens in the intentional market. Generally cultures can change overtime; however, most cultures are basically traditional and always are liable to combat the change. The focus was on the cultural challenges of international students. Studying abroad is said to be challenging, as international students had to adjust to too many differences even though the university provided complete support and assistance. The stories, experiences, challenges, suggestions of the international students could be a great example and precursor for future prospective international students and the host university. Data was collected through semi- structured face to face interviews and follow up questions by the researcher who was also the staff at the coordinating office of the university. Participants reported various cultural differences in eating habits, administrative procedures, appearance, attire, festivals, attitudes at traffic signals, gestures, empowerment of women and caste.

Keywords: cultural, challenges, adjustment, international students

Introduction

Internationalization of Education is an idea that originally meant to help students develop international understanding and intercultural skills with the goal of preparing students to be active in a globalizing world. Presently, its definition has broadened to include cross-border institutions and programmes that contribute to mobility of students and faculty (De Wit 2008). Gabel, Dolen and Cerdin (2005) explained that cultural adjustments are modifications that persons go through to connect with the society. Cultural adjustment is a process that includes many interdependent several elements connected with social, observable, intellectual, analytical conditions that ends in adjustment from cultural acclimatization and metamorphosis (Kagan and Cohen, 1990). Cultural adjustment is the process of passionate amalgamation of etiquettes, ethics, and the conviction in the frame of reference of the host culture and his own culture of ancestry (Constantine, Okazaki, Utsey, 2004).

Students who participated in this study represented diverse cultures that came across various types of beliefs, values and structural systems during the course of their student life. They had to deal with various patterns of communication, sequences, understand signs, symbols and interpersonal skills. Students who participated in this study came from Australia, U.S.A, Greece, Turkey, Myanmar, Nepal, Dubai, Rwanda, Nonresident Indians, Person of Indian origin and Overseas citizens of India (Originally from India but not living in India).

Literature review

Adjustment is an immediate interactive process that takes place between the person and the environment, and is directed towards an achievement of the fit between the two in the short run (Anderson, 1994). The student should not only emphasize on academic adjustment but also the need of the student to be embedded in the culture of the host institution is important since learnings and perspectives hugely vary across cultures (Ridley 2004, 2005). A global immersion of both learning and culture can not only benefit the international students in their process of adjustment but also facilitate teachers to understand multiculturalism (Lewthwaite Steve Stoyhoff, 1997).

A recent study recapitulated the variables explaining socio cultural adjustment as student behavior and the ability to fit in either the society or the host institution (Brow Holloway, 2008). Innovative work revealed that cross cultural adjustment between the sojourner and the host or natives can enable the former to increase their cultural knowledge of the host institution, obtain local support and improve their language efficiency which in turn facilitates the process of cultural adjustment (Church 1882; Toyokawa Toyokawa, 2002). Such a form of cross cultural adjustment between the sojourner and the host is essential due to the prevalence of a cultural distance that exists between the two parties (Talbot Geelhoed, 1998; Redmond, 2002) and contact with a second culture (Wang Mallinckrodt, 2006; Johnson Sandu, 2007). It would indeed be puzzling for students who are from various cultures and new to the university with a different set of ideas and motives and would have no idea how to do it differently (Ridley 2004).

The researcher employed 2 models which represented a conceptual framework by first reviewing the U and W curve models of intercultural adjustment by Oberg (1960) and Gullahorn&Gullahorn (1963) and then the Integrated model of international student and adaptation by Schartner and Young (2015). The researcher also mentions the Culturation and Deculturation over time by Young Yun Kim (2001), and sociocultural adaptation and Psychological adaptation Colleen ward (2001) models to accentuate the study.

A study of the Literature finds that there has been limited research exploring the cultural challenges of international participants in Mumbai, India. While there is no doubt that all international participants may share some common challenges. Despite the growing information on the subject, there appears to be a need to amalgamate and harmonize findings in order to highlight the research. With the expansion of internationalization and increased number of foreign admissions in the universities, the expression and involvement of international participants has become increasingly important and extremely challenging to achieve the desired educational outcomes for them.

The present study seeks to fill in the gap on identifying challenges faced by international participants through addressing the following questions:

1. What are the cultural adjustment internationals students' face and make to acclimatize to a new environment?
2. How can international students adjust socially while adapting to a new culture?

Design

An inductive qualitative case study was used to taper down a very broad field of research into one or a few patterns, face to face interviews for data collection and content analysis for analyzing the data was conducted. Research questions grew from the researcher's observations, and case study was best to study the international participants and their cultural challenges in a bounded system which was unique. A research design ensures that the result obtained will facilitate the researcher to efficiently address the research problem in a logical undoubtful manner.

Study setting

The site of study, the host university was in a metropolitan city in western India a low income nation which had received overwhelming response and interest from the international students. This university had multidisciplinary programs with a coordinating office comprising of extensively experienced staff and collaborations with various universities abroad. The incoming international students in the university have been on the rise from 2006 to 2015 from approximately 45 to 400 in numbers. This indicated that the university created a welcoming and integrating international environment and has been a role model for several Indian universities offering similar programs. The university devised choice based credit system and oriented international students on work environment, relationship, orientation and Indian work culture before arrival.

Participants

The participants were selected based on the course duration ie. Students who were enrolled for one and two years respectively. They came from different socio cultural backgrounds and varied national or regional affiliations where the following categorizations have been used like Middle East, Non Resident Indian, Overseas Citizens of India and Person of Indian Origin, middle income and high income countries have been used. The details of the participants, their names (pseudonyms) background, country, gender, approximate age range, and nomenclature of courses (masked) are given in **Table 1**.

Table 1:

List of respondents; NRI =Nonresident Indian, OCI=Overseas citizen of India, PIO=Person of Indian origin, FN=Foreign National, MBM=Masters in Business management, DE=Developmental Economics, MSE= Management in Social Entrepreneurship, MP=Masters in Psychology, MD = Management in Disaster Development, SD=Social Development, RA=Research Affiliation, M= Male, F=Female

Sr No.	Gender	Pseudonym	Duration enrolled	Category NRI/OCI/PIO FN	Country of residence	Approximate Age Range	Program enrolled
1.	M	Naren	2	NRI	Dubai	26	MBM
2.	F	kamya	2	OCI	Australia	26	SD
3.	F	Prerna	2	NRI	Rwanda	24	DE
4.	F	Shaheen	2	NRI	Dubai	26	SD
5.	F	Subhashini	2	FN	Nepal	24	SD
6.	F	Trupti	2	FN	Nepal	24	SD
7.	F	Tom	2	FN	Myanmar	24	SD
8.	M	Jacob	1	FN	France	24	Courses across Schools
9.	M	Alfred	2	FN	Greece	26	MD
10.	M	Iqbal hadi	2	FN	Turkey	26	MP
11.	F	Asmita	2	FN	Nepal	24	MSE
12.	F	Nelson	1	FN	France	25-27	Courses across Schools
13.	F	Nancy	1	FN	Australia	25-28	Research

14.	M	Laura	1	FN	France	25	Courses across Schools
15.	M	Ali	2	FN	Afghanistan	30	DE
16.	F	Mary	1	FN	U.S.A	25-29	RA
17.	F	Lina	1	FN	U.S.A	30	RA

Data collection procedure

Semi-structured questions were used in the interviews however there was room for the participants to elaborate. These interviews were carried out on a one-to-one basis, face-to-face audio taping during interviews were backed and supported. The interviews were conducted by the researcher and recorded using digital recorder, running notes were taken. Transcripts were prepared which would mean the interview would be accessible to independent analysis.

An introductory guide was prepared with open ended questions to facilitate the interview sessions. Table. 2

1. Did you focus too much on social life?
2. Did you have problems with roommates/ flat mates?
4. Was there any interference of your social life with academic life?
5. What kind of accommodation and housing issues you faced?
6. How has this program increased your understanding of culture to the rest of the world?
7. What kind of skills and knowledge do you think will equip you to acclimatize in a developing country?
8. How has this program increased your awareness of your own identity and culture?
09. What cultural adaptation did you initiate when you were in the host country?
10. Please describe some of the major cultural differences that you have noticed since you have been at the host university?

Data analysis

The tape recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and the text was divided into meaningful units and directly content analyzed into units. A unit which was part of the original transcript and related to the aim of the study was selected. Units were sorted into codes; similar codes were identified and sorted into categories and sub categories. Depending on the study and objective the researcher decided to identify the relationship between categories and sub categories. Finally the recordings were kept guarded in a safe place and were attentively followed in a confidential place.

Table 2: Themes pertaining to Socio cultural experiences of international students

CULTURAL CHALLENGES AND ADJUSTMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS	
Themes	Subthemes
(a) Socio cultural climate (on campus)	(i) Cafeteria, an ideal space for intergroup communication (ii) Socializing with multicultural classmates (iii) Eager to interact, but unable due to academic stress (iv) Cultural perception of time (v) Culture at the dining hall
(b) Socio cultural climate (Off campus)	(i) Cultural challenges off campus (ii) Travails at traffic signals
(c) On campus accommodation	(i) Easy access to classes, labs, computer labs, canteens, social events (ii) Engaging with friends of the same program (iii) Comfort zone, establishing and maintaining relationships and proximity with room mates (iv) Non availability of Gender-neutral housing
(d) Off campus housing	(i) Issues, Anxiety in off campus housing, Etiquettes, rules and conflicts (ii) Unsafe off campus housing (iii) No social interaction due to off campus accommodation

The analysis of the interview narratives highlights the cultural challenges and adjustments with Themes and sub themes as mentioned in the table above:

(a) Socio cultural climate (on campus)

Cafeteria, an ideal space for intergroup communication

In terms of socializing undoubtedly canteen was a nice place to share and students spent some time together. Some strongly emphasized that even if there were no activities they made it a point to meet in common places. The respondents felt that this was welcoming, good to unwind after a long, meticulous and diligent day in the classrooms. Eating together was a popular leisure activity among the participants.

Socializing with multicultural classmates

A nonresident Indian participant Prerna from Rwanda enrolled for a two year Master's program in Developmental Economics exemplified about her experiences with her local Indian classmates who hailed from different parts, metros and remote rural areas of the country said,

I was inclined to take the position that my friends had a kind of thinking process which may not match my wavelength.

However it was noticed that slowly but surely respondents started associating with host students and took at least a maximum of one month to adapt and socialize with them.

Prerna expressed her view,

The host university has a cloud around it, oozes out a culture of brilliance.

Participants felt and eventually realized that it was part of their personality to assume that the local students had an air of pride around them. Gradually they understood that the local host university students were very friendly got acquainted, accommodative and socialized. International students also became aware that the host university students were admitted through a very rigorous, competitive, common entrance written test and personal interview. They hailed from different parts of the country and the internationals had to compete with the best.

Not all learning experiences occur or happen inside a classroom and social life gives you the scope to share interests with like-minded people. Participating in such groups gave internationals additional opportunities to explore hobbies and new interests.

Social events with natives

Some participants tend to think differently and felt they experienced different culture. Tom who had enrolled in a two years Masters program in social development and community practice commented in a disturbed voice,

Here in India they celebrated too many festivals. I am a sincere student; unable to concentrate in studies, faced a lot of noise during the night due to fire crackers. In my country the only festival celebrated was Christmas in December and New Year. In India the culture is so diverse that every month they celebrated a festival.

The participants felt that any celebration in India was followed by fire crackers which resulted in a lot of noise and disturbed the entire neighborhood. Nevertheless awareness is created regarding environment and schools were educating children about cutting down noise levels and the government is taking steps to make it a punishable offence. A cultural activity, festivities promotes intercultural understanding and connections among international respondents and the society.

Asmita from Nepal who had enrolled for a Masters program in Social Entrepreneurship shared,

People here are very devoted to god and they enjoy and celebrate to the fullest, from their heart.

Some of the participants were overwhelmed after watching the Indian festivals. During festivals people met, rejoiced and took this as an opportunity in meeting relatives and friends. It was considered as a day to eat, have fun, and relax and this helped in integrating and bringing in peace and harmony within the society. Since the university enrolled students from all over India it was a heterogeneous diverse culture of students on campus and in the classroom. The celebrations, rituals were accommodated and encouraged on campus.

Lina a participant from U.S.A. revealed,

I have learnt to bargain in this country especially during festivals, I always negotiate for half the price as instructed by the coordinating office staff.

Participants shared their observations of facts, experiences and events during the festival season. They said,

People in the market recognize us as foreigners, and have the tendency to sell their products in a much higher price.

Shaheen expressed,

It would be nice if the students were left a little earlier than scheduled during Ramadan.

Hence the participant, a nonresident Indian from Middle East who had enrolled in the two years Masters program in Social Development expected similar culture as her home country. Participants from Middle East shared that during the holy month of Ramadan the timings in schools, colleges and offices were shorter and shut down as early as 12noon in their country. Institutions were strictly not allowed to keep the students in the premises for longer duration. The college authorities also ensured that they do not engage in demanding physical activities, not exposed to heat to minimize the risk of dehydration during fasting, eating and drinking areas were assigned at specific places out of respect during the month.

Nonetheless participants should understand that Universities in the host country cannot work in similar patterns. Being a diverse multi-cultural nation, the University might not be able to cater to all religions. However the host campus made arrangements to break the fast and say their prayers on campus.

Shaheen repeatedly divulged,

Breaking the fast was time bound and would want to be in a proper attire, clean clothes and would not like to say prayers in the same clothes which I wore in the morning.

Respondents shared that no matter how well the coordinating office briefs and orients during induction the initial learning process one had to undergo, some specific to the university, some personal, and some environmental adjustments.

(b) Socio cultural climate (Off campus)

Cultural challenges off campus

When participants were questioned on their cultural challenges outside the campus they exchanged about their interactions and Bureaucracy in a Bank. They faced cultural complications and issues outside the classrooms as well.

Exchange student from France, John stated that,

We faced some awkwardness when we went to open a Bank account together, it took us 2 to 3 hours every time for almost a week, visited the Bank for transactions and clearly understood that it was not professional.

A couple of students claimed,

Every visit I was asked to fill out forms repeatedly and this created a conflict with the Bank employee and us.

Jacob from France said,

The administrative procedures in the Banks were so repetitive and we had to wait for a long time, as the system was not structured.

The participants shared that it was definitely not the fault of the person sitting behind the counter. There could have been special rules for foreigners which they had to adhere to. Nonetheless they sensed that the administrators in the Bank were unresponsive and this could have been resolved quickly without any hassle.

Alfred exclaimed,

I would stand on the top of the 10th floor building and look down at the roads, at streets, I felt like I was in a bubble and there was a lot of noise flowing around me.

At times being part of another culture makes internationals lonely, face arduous situations as they dream about exploring the world. They are fully aware and respect attitudes and cultures in another country. Cultural behavior is always different in different countries; maybe they were quiet impatient and irritant going through the process while opening an account in the Bank. We as administrators should not send out a feeling that we did not favor them by providing service to international guests. They have to be integrated in the system. It was enthralling for the researcher to note that participants were equally appreciative of the administrative staff at the host university. They felt they were very cooperative, welcoming and discussed thoughts and opinions with them when they experienced such issues.

Travails of local travel

Alfred from Greece who had enrolled for a Masters in Disaster studies was quiet shocked to see the traffic rules and travails in a Developing country.

Everyone riding a bicycle do not use flash lights, even pedestrians do not bother about it.

He exclaimed,

Cyclists sometimes ride on the wrong side of the road and would yell and create a chaotic scene that made me a bit nervous. This was not acceptable in Greece we have to follow strict rules and regulations.

Some international women participant's experiences stirred fear in them to travel in the local train as they had to jostle through the crowd. It was therefore, advisable for the coordinating office to briefly orient international students about travel facilities and exclusive travel convenience for women before their study in India began.

Another respondent shared that in Delhi (northern part of India) there were incidents where men were chasing them. Mary a researcher from U.S.A. shared,

Even though I did not have blonde hair, blue eyes, but still people were looking and staring at me.

Considering experiences of the participant they shared that there was a huge cultural shift between the Northern and Southern part of India. International participants who travelled all over India for pleasure felt that men were more polite; women were more visible outside in the roads and seemed to be more educated in the South unlike from many states in the North, although it cannot be generalized. Similarly it was not safe to travel alone in the Northern part of India unlike in Mumbai which was a cosmopolitan city and was definitely much safer.

Yet it was important to be alert in any part of the world not only in India, we just cannot or never make assumptions about anything.

Iqbal Hadi, participant from Turkey enrolled for Masters program in Psychology pronounced,

In my country people are shy to talk about sexuality, hyjras etc. on the contrary in the host country we could see transgender walking round in the traffic signals and had classroom discussions quiet openly about them.

The respondents shared that the host university students were welcoming and open to new perspectives, discussed openly about Transgender, expressed ideas, accepted differing viewpoints and strategies. Attitudes and tolerance towards LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) communities is different to different countries as there are always restrictions and less awareness in a new culture. It was noticed that the domestic students were ready to adjust and adapt with people of different multicultural backgrounds which is quiet unheard and unseen of and inconspicuous in many other Universities in the site of study.

c) On campus accommodation

Easy accessibility

Students generally preferred living on campus, or dormitory they wanted to maintain close proximity to resources, faculty, staff, class mates, computer center, cafeteria, sports center and social interaction with friends. They also felt it would provide them an opportunity to develop friendship with some of the host university students who lived on campus.

It was observed that offering separate and luxurious apartments to international students would create again another globe of only internationals. Homogenous groups generally do not encourage an intercultural environment and framework. Being on campus would have given them a secured feeling, warded off homesickness, and were able to have more interactive sessions with domestic students compared to that of off campus residents.

It was found that all participants were of the opinion and jointly said,

Sharing rooms and living with host students on campus would have made the program truly international.

Participants realized that in the host university there were many local students who came from different parts of the country. They were geographically and culturally different in their food habits, and learnt to live among themselves in the host university. They were selected through a rigorous two tier selection process an entrance test which is attempted by around approximately 25,000 applicants and around 12,000 students were shortlisted for a very limited 2,500 seats. Foreign participants noted and realized the cross cultural differences on campus and learnt to live among them as they were interacting with students from all over India. It being a land of many languages, diverse physical features, group of people, castes, and religiously heterogeneous people. The participants met students at the host university with varied cultural background on campus and learnt to cope with this unique opportunity.

Laura from France disclosed,

We have just arrived, we need to look for housing and attend the orientation at the university, and we do not have enough time to complete the paper work.

Shaheen from Dubai reiterated that,

I being a nonresident Indian was lucky enough to get housing in the first week itself, as soon as I put down my papers.

Some of the participants had a major problem just for the fact that they were on different international passports. It was found that house owners were interrogative and many students were rejected housing owing to the fact that they were foreigners. They prohibited foreign participants as tenants due to the fear of violation of rules by them. Nevertheless the government is prioritizing and taking measures in stepping up security to make participants comfortable to house hunting on foreign land.

Research participants shared in chorus that in the initial week they were very busy on the academic front and also completely involved with the induction program. Due to this they felt that they do not have enough time to argue and negotiate with house owners. Most of the students lived off campus, complained about high cost of rentals and were unable to locate reasonable rented accommodation in a new location.

Engaging with friends of the same program

International participants who had enrolled for a Master's program in Social development perceived that making friends of the same program, spending time together, sharing insights and personal experiences could eliminate all the stress. One of the respondents said,

We felt time spent together helped us relieve stress.

In the initial induction period the coordinating office at the university conducted orientation for foreign participants where the integration took place, it was like laying a foundation. The support services and key locations were oriented to participants and a platform was created to integrate internationals and domestic students. It was difficult for local students to interact with all internationals as they were spread across various classes and were unavailable at a single point of contact and expressed the pleasure of engaging with friends of the same program.

a) Off campus housing

Comfort zone, establishing and maintaining relationships and proximity with room mates

Some participants highlighted on how they managed to stay and shared their room to avoid conflicts in maintaining cleanliness. They laid down rules for the chores and made sure none of them got offended because one of them was from a community where they do not consume alcohol. The other room mates were very tolerant towards this as it was a sensitive issue. Flat mates were extremely good, receptive, adhered and made consented efforts to keep things in place. Participants shared that they did not entertain friend's to stay overnight to avoid complications.

Shaheen from Dubai confessed,

I am a very reserved person make friends very rarely and slowly, I am a border line obsessive compulsive disorder you need to remember this.

Most of them very articulately said,

Never forget your old friends remember to nurture the old.

Internationals reiterated that living on campus dormitory was very important for the first year/ first semester because their first bunch of friends and support were the hostel mates. Participants shared that they took time in finding friends with similar interests in the huge batch. Nevertheless some participants found their own circle of friends while moving into the city through social networking sites.

It always takes time in building a social circle; students do end up looking at communality and themes within the groups to create a basis while making friendship. Students are able to adjust to the new environment if they cut a communication chord, watch people's behaviors, gestures and double check on their queries and doubts.

Issues, anxiety in off campus housing tenancy, Etiquettes, rules and conflicts

Participants had mixed responses some acclimatized well others did face some disagreements and squabbles in housing locations. It was human nature and was bound to have small minor conflicts or arguments. Regardless of the arguments, at the end of the day they did find solace and were caring for each other. Kamyia from Australia who had enrolled for a two years Master's program in Social Development shared,

The flat mates started slowly drifting apart, wouldn't talk much to each other and noticed that they started getting closer to perhaps their own classmates than roommates, and this change was inevitable.

As the saying goes familiarity breeds contempt and guess that would happen automatically. Initially as roommates they did spend a lot of time together, once the foreign participants started meeting new friends from other courses they invariably chose to look at wave lengths and created their own subsidiary groups of friends.

Another participant from Afghanistan who enrolled for Master's program in Developmental Economics, shared a room with another fellow participant from the similar community was dissatisfied with his roommate as he was a very religious person. Ali said,

He would very randomly get up in the middle of the night, say his prayers and discuss about gay, lesbian relationships and modernization etc. and that was disturbing my sleep.

Ali a broad minded personality from a developing nation reiterated,

I am more open to human rights, open to woman rights and a secular person.

A participant from France shared that he had some acutely distressing experiences with an alumni student from the host university who got closely acquainted with him. Initially he was very friendly and the international participant visited the alumni family in his hometown as well.

Eventually it was observed by Jacob that,

He started behaving weirdly, would always come near my door, knock, call, send messages, disturb, and invade my private space.

It was noticed by the participant that some local friends expected international students to solve their personal problems. Jacob added,

The local student was learning French, preparing for GRE & TOEFL exams, wanted to go to U.S.A. he was very intrusive and I kept distancing from him.

Jacob vehemently said,

I am not a Psychotherapist, nor a counselor.

This student from France had come to India for one year as an exchange student, was living on campus, and had to share a room with a student from Central Europe for a short transit period until he found housing outside the campus. He said,

My roommate on campus was of a different personality. We as internationals were two different people, poles apart, we do not talk to each other, I have my own friends, have my own opinion and I respect his views.

Since the study was focused on participants from abroad it can be noted that those who came from High income nations experienced the culture of living in independent spaces, private housing and may not have experienced living in sharing rooms, accommodating friends, siblings and family etc. Sharing rooms could indeed be challenging as explained and felt by many participants. Nevertheless this is an universal problem which was not only pertaining to international participants but it was an issue for the local students from the host university too.

It might be even difficult to share for the first time, personal space with somebody whom they have never met before and must have lived in grandiose back in their home country. Embracing this kind of a situation was demanding for students universally. However the coordinating office at the university informed the researched participants well in advance about the demanding time, transit housing availability on campus and the culture at the host country.

Tom from Myanmar revealed that,

My study times were different, I am an early riser and therefore sharing would hamper my routine, as roommates may have deviating sleep patterns.

Some participants tend to think differently and preferred to stay alone in single accommodation; this obviously meant that they had issues about sharing with flat mates. They also proclaimed that they could be independent, had more privacy and they could invite friends. They wanted to avoid sharing bathrooms, kitchen, and bedrooms, get detached from the academic environment and directly associate with the host country's culture.

One participant mentioned that,

There were occasions when the classroom was divided into groups, we had to perform, prepare, complete and present projects together.

If the participants stayed, lived on campus, felt it would have been convenient and their performance as a team would have been better as some of their local classmates were living on campus dorms. They also felt that they had been excluded by staying outside the campus.

Unsafe off campus housing

Safety was one of the biggest concerns for the participants and the university. Besides the area, people, vicinity, train and bus stations the crime levels and statistics can also be looked into before suggesting students for off campus housing. One of the biggest and most important hassle was safety as they are unfamiliar with the culture of the country in which they intend to study. This can have a huge influence on the university. In case of students who choose to live off campus, there were many parameters like proximity, accessibility, safety, budget, and neighborhood had to be considered. Unfortunately the housing scenario was quiet complicated as the site of research was a highly populated, expensive, metro city to suit to the needs of every international participant.

One participant Shaheen from Dubai represented her other roommates by sharing their experiences felt,

It was unsafe outside the campus; recently there has already been an incident which had occurred where we were eve teased during multiple festival celebrations on the road side.

Participants shared that they were afraid as some of the girls were being harassed on the road as early as between 8am and 9pm, because boys were loitering around the area teased and passed lewd comments. During festivals there was lesser policing as the police were spread all over, and were busy in other marquees around the city. Girl participants were quiet petrified to walk alone on the roads, however they formed their own strategy and self-defense by walking in groups and were extremely alert during the nights. On the contrary foreign students felt that if they lived within the campus their family and relatives could have been at peace back home. Getting eve teased listening to snide remarks marred their confidence and liveliness.

A nonresident Indian participant revealed,

It is daunting and intimidating, we feel discouraged, as there is inadequate housing for long term stay on campus. I would have preferred staying on campus.

It was a sensitive decision for the participants to make choices regarding housing off campus which was an arduous task. Decisions regarding choosing roommates, shifting, moving belongings, making it livable, modifying the available area into a cozy home in an unknown location was challenging for research participants. One cannot decide the room partner just by looks and appearance. Habits may not match with each other and might recognize it only after living with him or her.

Participants had to take chances and look for independent, private housing, as single accommodation was expensive. The tenancy rule was that irrespective of whether you like the mate or not they had to continue living and sharing the space at least for a minimum of one year. Once the participants settled down and if the room partner or flat mate was found not in concordant, or not of the same wave length, they had to still continue staying in the housing until the agreement lapsed.

No social interaction due to off campus accommodation

Most of the participants expressed their discontent about being unable to concentrate on social life while living outside the campus. The roommates or the flat mates sharing rooms outside the university had a different mindset, nothing was common among them. Hence an association of likeminded individuals mingling together would enhance social life. It was important to have social support system otherwise it would be very difficult for participants to live off campus.

Unanimously foreign research participants echoed,

No free time and space for socializing.

Shaheen from Dubai shared,

Unfortunately we do not have a public platform to discuss.

Social life suffered due to lack of continuous interaction. Socializing relieves the stress of college life and connecting with other people was very important for incoming foreign participants. A formal social integration support through sports activities or any other athletic physical activity at the university will help participants to create a public representation of research participants.

Hassle free rental market, learnt to negotiate understand social structure

On the contrary some of the participants were quiet accommodative staying in paying guest accommodation which suited their needs. They also experienced good vibes and relations with the house owners and felt they were pretty helpful in giving them good advice about the city. A participant Asmita from Nepal who had enrolled for a two years Master's program Management in Social Entrepreneurship expressed her glee,

Oh I enjoyed house hunting as well. It helped me explore places, studied, researched and understood about market prices.

Some of the international participants understood the housing scenario, neighborhood rates, watched the facility, accessibility and did a comparative study of the rents before finalizing what they ultimately got. In this process they also learnt the social norm, structure, class, the economic base during the process.

A nonresident Indian a student who originally from Delhi the capital of India, completed his undergraduate studies in the Northern part of the country, another metro in the host country. Naren exclaimed,

One of my roommates was a Civil Engineer like me, had similar interests, this enhanced our bonding.

It was interesting to note what Naren shared,

My third flat mate was also an Engineer, studied in the same university as me, from the same community and home town. I chanced upon grabbing the housing opportunity as somebody dropped out and was lucky enough to clinch it.

Housing challenges were mixed among participants, some preferred to stay off campus but majority wanted to enjoy facilities like the local students. Shared dormitory and housing with extreme prices were available in the metros. Landlords generally asked too many personal questions, hence participants got offended during the process. Sanitary and hygienic conditions differed from location to location. It was much easier to get housing in the site of study (Mumbai) compared to other metropolitan cities in India. However living expenses in Mumbai was much cheaper than the northern part of the country. It was also marked that if all flat mates were from the same course, it would have been easier in adjusting with each other as they were aware of the requirements. Their schedules were similar and this would match with each other and this helped them bridge their commitment and maybe able to understand each other better.

Discussions

This study was an attempt and effort to understand how cultural challenges could affect academic learning of international students. To internationalize and create a social friendly, adjusting environment and university it was crucial and vital for the host university students, administrative staff, coordinating offices, faculty members and the Institution heads to fuse and blend the international students to their host university. The researcher was inspired to explore, looked at the cultural challenges of international students, concluded and believed that an amalgamation of cultural and social adjustment would lead to a sound academic environment for them.

The international students also felt that cross cultural passage and conversion during the period was a reconstruct of mental, character, ideals and conscience of the individual. The results were compared to other studies conducted which showed that social and cultural environment does play an important role in the international student accomplishment in a new land (Chen, Rubin, Li, 1997; Gabel, Dolen and Cerdin, 2005). It was important to note that American students had some academic and social adjustment problems during their study experiences in an Irish university which was examined (Aileen O'Reilly, Tina Hickey, & Dermot Ryan, 2010).

The researcher's particular study was variant and emerged with other cross cultural themes to create a work load lighter at least during the end of the semester and to have more cultural programs and entertainment. The Institutions should make efforts to be proactive in balancing the social and emotional wellbeing of International students.

International students do adjust exceedingly well in a new culture (Savicki, Burnette, Heller, Binder, and Suntinger, 2004) face up to more complications and strain than native students in the induction period (Furnham, 2004; Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, Horn, 2002). Living with other host university students, study abroad international students may have benefitted in facilitating their access. Ultimately, this is something which Pederson and colleagues have argued how residing outside the campus hinders international student's experiences abroad (2011).

Similarly in the researchers study international student did raise questions of staying outside the campus with non-university students or class mates who were not matching with similar wavelengths. They demanded on campus housing with local students as they had to complete assignments and participated in group study, and were unable to socialize with the local students.

The researcher's study was different because it was a qualitative study, a site which was a public funded university and the local students had to be lodged on campus. There was absolutely not enough space to construct more rooms specifically for international participants.

There were fewer gatherings and interactions for international students since they were away from family; they faced a lot of stress and anxiety ((Lui, 2009).

Similar responses were expressed by international participants in the present research that the international office should organize more gatherings, games, social get together, rejuvenating picnics, treat them with ethnic cuisines and have entertaining evenings. The only meeting was once or twice a year which was welcome, farewell parties, national holidays and annual cultural events.

The results of this study documented the impact of internationalization on cultural challenges like housing on and off campus, social interaction, festivities, travels, and suggested some insights to their challenges as international participants.

Conclusion

This contemporary study was a summary drawn from the experiences and personal reflections of international students. This was the key to globally understanding learning groups. It also led to strategies for developing an intercultural playground for international students in the host nation. Being a global citizen seems more complex than the phrase and it was open to more discussions and arguments.

International students who adapted more quickly had a better comfortable living. They performed well in an academic environment and adjusted culturally at the university. Their interactions, and networking with the host students would be a simple solution to benefit both the groups. Determining and assessing international student's adjustment to college has a lot to do not only with the behavior of the students but also the structure and function of the institution that they attended away from their home country.

This can be made desirable by organizing social outings, coffee clubs, and workshops for support staff and senior management to unravel cross-culturism and ethnicity towards inclusiveness of international participants. Studying abroad is said to be challenging and international participants had to adjust to too many differences. We cannot actually communicate with each other until we as individuals practically get involved in it, it is like learning to ride a cycle without falling or bruising your knee it is just not possible to learn to bike without hurting oneself.

Bibliography

- Abe, J., Talbot, D., & Geelhoed, R. (1998). Effects of a peer program on international student adjustment, *Journal of College Student Development*.
- Anderson, L. E. (1994). A new look at an old construct: Cross-cultural adaptation . *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*.
- Berry, J. W. (u.d.). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*.
- Chen, R. L. (1997). Social and Emotional Development From a Cultural Perspective.
- Church, A. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*.
- Ward, Colleen, Stephen Bochner, and Adrian Furnham. 2001. *The Psychology of Culture Shock*. Philadelphia, PA: Routledge.
- Constantine, M. e. (2004). Self-concealment, social efficacy, acculturative stress and depression in African, Asian and Latin America international college students. *American Journal of orthopsychiatry*.
- De Wit, H. (2011). Globalisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education. *Revista de Universidad y Sociedad del Conocimiento (RUSC)* .
- Furnham, A. (2004). Foreign students: Education and culture shock. *The Psychologist*.
- Gabel, R. S. (2005). Emotional Intelligence as predictor of cultural adjustments for success in global assignments. *Career Development International*.
- Gullahorn, J. T. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis, *Journal of Social Issues*.
- Brown, Holloway, I. (2008). The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university: an ethnographic study, *Journal of Research in International Education* .
- Hechanova-Alampay, R. B. (2002). Adjustment and strain among domestic and international student sojourners, *School of Psychology International*.
- Kagan, H. a. (1990). Cultural adjustment of international students. *Psychological Science*.
- Kim, Young-Yun. 2001. *Becoming Intercultural: an Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.
- Knight, J. (2004). Internationalization remodeled: Definition, approaches and rationales. *Journal of studies in International education*.
- Lewthwaite, M. (1997). A study of international students perspectives on cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*.
- Lui, M. (2009). Addressing the Mental Health Problems of Chinese International College Students in the United States.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments. *Practical Anthropology*.
- O'Reilly, A., Ryan, D. and Hickey, T. (2010) The psychological well being and socio-cultural adaptation of short term international students in Ireland, *Journal of College Student Development*.
- Ridley, D. (2004). Puzzling experiences in higher education: Critical moments for conversation. *Studies in Higher Education*.
- Savicki, V. D.-B. (2004). Contrasts, changes, and correlates in actual and potential intercultural adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*.
- Schartner, A. & Young, T.J. (2015). Towards a conceptual model of international student adjustment and adaptation (under review).
- Toyokawa, T. a. (2002). Extracurricular activities and the adjustment of Asian international students: a study of Japanese students. *International Journal of Intercultural relations*.
- Wang, C. D. (2006). Acculturation, attachment, and psychosocial adjustment of Chinese/Taiwanese international students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*.
- Yi, D. (2012). *Acculturation, social connectedness, and subjective well-being among Chinese international students: A test of Berry's acculturation framework*. Graduate theses, IOWA state University.