

Problems faced by international students during study period

Sarwat Iqbal* Maliha Nasir** Razaqat Ali*** Mohd. Abaidullah****

Abstract

International students not only have to follow new cultural norms and make adjustments with a different life style, but also have a burden of their academic assignments to be completed in a new academic environment and by adopting new study habits. International students face adjustment problems while experiencing changes in cultural habits, language, environmental surroundings etc. Academic sojourners who are culturally well adjusted can easily cope with these challenges in their cross-cultural experiences. This study was intended to explore problems that international students face during their study period in a foreign country. The sample consisted of 116 international students randomly selected from two universities: International Islamic University Islamabad and National University of Modern Languages. Data was collected through a questionnaire consisted of 22 questions regarding various problems that international students may encounter during their stay in a foreign country. Some major problems included language barrier, food adjustment and lack of acknowledgement of cultural diversity in classroom.

Key words: International students, Adjustment problems, Cultural diversity, Language barrier.

This Article can be cited as:

Iqbal, S. Nasir, M. Ali, R. Abaidullah, M. (2015). Problems faced by international students during study period, Journal of Arts and Social Sciences. 2 (1).¹

Introduction

The rising trend of globalization has increased the number of international students who cross their national boundaries to look for learning experiences in a different culture. The transition from one institute to other is a stressful event in a student's life, especially, for the foreign students who are away from their homes. They have to be acquainted with new people, understand the social codes, follow new cultural norms and make adjustments with a different life style. Besides, they have a burden of their academic assignments to be completed in a new academic environment and by adopting new study habits. International students face adjustment problems while experiencing

*Sarwat Iqbal , Visiting Scholer, Lahore College for Women University,Lahore. Email: sarwatiqbal95@yahoo.com

**Maliha Nasir, Lecturer, institute of Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore

***Razaqat Ali, Professor, institute of Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore

****Mohd. Abaidullah, Assistant Professor, institute of Education, University of the Punjab, Lahore

changes in cultural habits, language, environmental surroundings etc. Academic sojourners who are culturally well adjusted can easily cope with these challenges in their cross-cultural experiences.

International students not only face challenge of learning in a new cultural environment, they also have to adjust in a foreign culture outside the classroom. Further than attending lectures and carrying out other academic tasks, international students face challenges of fitting in the social system of the campus and the social life out of the campus (Bentley, 2008). Foreign students have to make changes in their thinking and behaviour and modify their conduct in accordance with the host culture. They need to be aware of and comply with the differences in the social and cultural norms without losing their own cultural identity. Being aware of social and cultural differences is very important because it helps in building healthy relationship with the members of host society.

A number of research studies have focused problems of international students during their stay in a foreign country for educational purposes. The major adjustment problems of international student, identified in these studies, include differences in language, food, social environment, cultural values and work environment.

Various scholars have studied adjustment to new culture among international students (Wester, Kuo and Vogel 2006; Swagler and Ellis, 2003; Gong, 2003; Mehdizadeh and Scott, 2005; Blake, 2006; Poyrazli and Grahame, 2007). The major adjustment problems of international students, identified in research literature, include general living adjustment, for example, adjusting to food, adapting to climate, coping with language problems, etc; academic adjustment, for example, problems in understanding educational system and institutional culture; and socio-cultural adjustment, for example, making new friends, lack of social support (family, friends, etc.) and understanding differences in the host culture.

Constantine, et al (2005) explored the cultural adjustment experience of 15 Asian students through semi-structured interviews. They found that participants were excited about the academic and personal experiences offered in the United States but were sad to leave their countries. They found English language fluency and stereotypes about Asian culture were problems in making cultural adjustment. Alazzai and Chiodo (2006) found language issue, social support and stress as main problems of foreign students in making adjustments.

Reynolds and Constantine (2007) examined the extent to which cultural adjustment difficulties predicted career development outcomes in a sample of 261 international college students from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The

result indicated that higher levels of cultural adjustment difficulties were predictive of lower levels of career outcome expectations among these international students.

In a longitudinal study on 294 international and domestic sojourners in an American university Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen and Van Horn (2002) found that international student sojourners had greater difficulty in adjusting during their initial transition into the university as compared to domestic sojourners.

The study conducted by Brown and Holloway (2008) found that the stress caused by the struggle to cope with the challenges of an unfamiliar academic and socio-cultural environment was at its height in the initial stage of the academic sojourn when students were beset with homesickness and loneliness. They made an association between passage of time and gradual decrease in acculturative stress. However, adjustment process was not found to be generalizable, rather, it was subjected to individual experiences and student's subjective sense of success in different aspects of life.

According to Tseng and Newton (2002) international students mainly face four types of adjustment problems: general living adjustment, academic adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment and personal psychological adjustment. They have listed eight strategies that international students use for making adjustment in a foreign country: 1) they understand their selves and others, 2) develop healthy friendships, 3) have a broad worldview, 4) seek help for managing problems, 5) set up cultural and social links, 6) develop relationships with faculty, 7) develop proficiency in language skills, and 8) use the approach of letting go. These strategies involve emotional skills that help students understanding others and developing healthy relationships in order to overcome the problems of adjustment.

Significance

This study intended to explore problems faced by international students studying in Pakistani institutions of higher education. This study may help institutions of higher education understand the major problems of international students. This study may be significant in developing awareness in teachers and administrative staff who deal with international student. This study may be helpful in developing appreciation of cultural diversity in native students. Though it is a limited study, it may provide a base for further research on problems of international students on a larger scale.

Objective

The main objective of the study was to find out what are the major problems that international students faced during their study period in Pakistan.

Methodology

This was a descriptive study. The data was collected through survey method and analyzed through percentages of frequencies.

Population

The population of this study comprised of international students studying in Pakistani institutions of higher education in Islamabad.

Sample

The participants of the study were 116 international students randomly selected from two universities: International Islamic University Islamabad and National University of Modern Languages. The sample included 48 male students and 68 female students. Their age range was 18-35 with mean 24.78 and standard deviation 6.05. Frequencies and percentages of three age groups are given in table 1.

Table 1

Frequencies and percentages of three age groups

Age group	Frequencies	Percentages
18-23	58	50%
24-29	35	30%
30-35	23	20%

Table 2 shows frequencies and percentages of students belonging to various areas of origin. Most of the participants (88%) were Asian and 12% were African in origin. 40 students were from East Asia, 11 from Central Asia, 16 from South East Asia, 20 from Middle East and 15 from South Asia. 8 students were from Kenya and 6 from Somalia.

Table 2

Frequencies and percentages of students according to areas of origin

Area of origin	Frequencies	Percentages
East Asia	40	34%
Central Asia	11	10%
South East Asia	16	14%
Middle East	20	17%
South Asia	15	13%
Kenya	8	7%
Somalia	6	5%

Instrument

A questionnaire was developed which consisted of 22 questions regarding various problems that international students may encounter during their stay in a foreign country. The questions were responded as yes, no and undecided.

Data Collection

Data was collected through survey method. The participants were personally contacted and after taking their consent questionnaires were given to be responded on the spot.

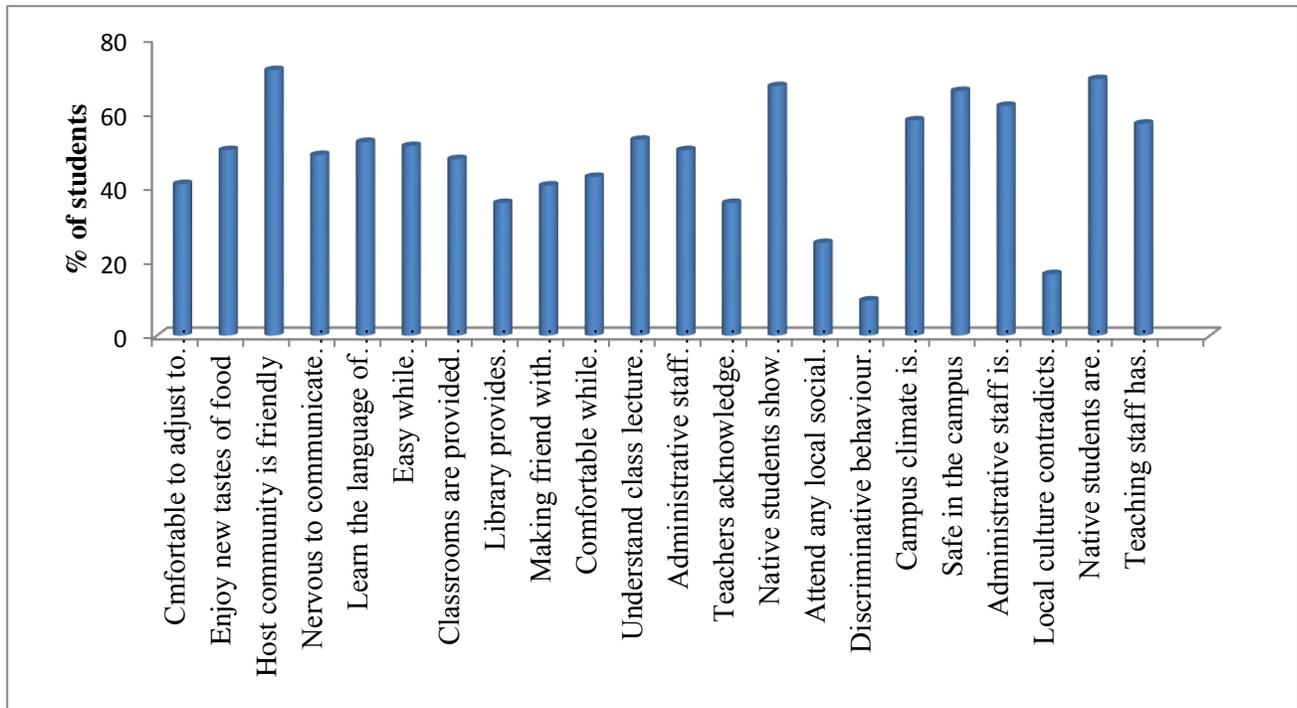
Data Analysis

The data collected through survey was analyzed in the light of objective of the study. The frequencies of responses to the questions were tabulated and their percentages were calculated to examine the frequency of various problems faced by international students. Table 3 shows the percentages of responses given.

Table 3

Percentages of responses to various problems faced by international students

Statements	Y	UD	N
Do you feel comfortable to adjust to local food?	40.9	42.4	16.7
Do you enjoy new tastes of food?	50.0	28.6	21.4
Do you think your host community is friendly to you?	71.5	14.3	14.2
Do you feel nervous to communicate in English?	48.7	23.8	27.5
Do you try to learn the language of your host community?	52.2	26.4	21.4
Do you feel easy while communicating with local community?	51.1	17.9	31.0
Do you think classrooms are provided with sufficient facilities?	47.6	38.1	14.3
Do you think that library provides sufficient facilities?	35.8	35.7	28.5
Do you like making friend with native students?	40.5	31.0	28.5
Do you feel comfortable while working with people of diverse backgrounds?	42.8	42.9	14.3
Do you understand class lecture easily?	52.8	28.2	19.0
Do you think administrative staff provides appropriate guidance when needed?	50.0	31.0	19.0
Do you think teachers acknowledge cultural diversity in classroom?	35.8	33.3	30.9
Do you think native students show understanding to your cultural values?	67.2	13.8	19.0
Do you like to attend any local social gathering?	25.0	38.5	36.5
Do you feel any discriminative behaviour about students of your community?	9.5	26.2	64.3
Do you think that the campus climate is supportive?	58.0	20.5	21.5
Do you feel safe in the campus?	65.9	23.8	10.3
Do you think administrative staff is helpful?	61.9	31.0	7.1
Do you think that local culture contradicts to your cultural values?	16.6	31.0	52.4
Do you think that native students are cooperative and helpful?	69.1	16.6	14.3
Do you think teaching staff has supportive attitude towards foreign students?	57.1	31.0	11.9



Discussion

The results of this study show that international students studying in Pakistani institutions

Findings

1. The result shows that adjustment to local food is not easy for majority of international students. Only 50% students enjoy new tastes of food and only 40.9% students comfortably adjust to local food.
2. Majority of international students (71.5%) think that host community is friendly to them and there is no discrimination shown for their community. However, only 40.5% students like making friends with native students and only 25% students like to attend local social gatherings. 52.4% feel that local culture does not contradict to their cultural values.
3. Language and communication is another major problem of international students. 48.7% students feel nervous while communicating in English. Only 51.1% students feel easy while communicating with local community, and only 52.8% students easily understand class lecture.

4. Only 47.6% students are satisfied with classroom facilities and 35.8% students think that library provides sufficient facilities. However, 58% students think that campus climate is supportive and 65.9% students feel safe in the campus.

5. 61.9% students think that administrative staff is helpful and 50% think that appropriate guidance is provided when needed. 57.1% students think that teaching staff has supportive attitude however, only 35.8% students think that teachers acknowledge cultural diversity in classroom.

6. 67.2% international students think that native students show understanding to their cultural values and 69.1% think that native students are cooperative and helpful.

Discussion

The results of this study show that international students studying in Pakistani institutions face various problems. A major problem is language barrier which hinder communication with host community. This may be a reason why majority of international students remain restricted to their own community and do not intend to make friend with native students.

Adjustment to local food is another problem faced by international students. It is not easy for majority of the students to get used to new and different flavours of food.

Lack of acknowledgement of cultural diversity is also a problematic situation for international students. Though majority of students do not feel any discriminative behaviour about their community, they are not satisfied with classroom environment where cultural diversity is not given appropriate concern.

Only half of the sample students are satisfied with help and guidance provided by the administrative staff. However, majority of international students think that native students are cooperative, helpful and sensitive to their cultural values.

Though majority of international students are satisfied with supportive and safe environment of campuses, they think that facilities provided in classrooms and libraries are not sufficient.

Conclusion

International students have a challenge to study in a new academic environment as well as to adjust in a new social environment outside the classroom. They face challenges like communication difficulties, learning new cultural norms, developing sense of belonging in the new social setup, working with new and different kind of people and

adjusting to different type of food, climate and general environment. The process of adjustment adversely affects their academic performance. Therefore, it is necessary to provide support for adjustment of international students through individualized, intentional and culturally sensitive ways.

Recommendations

International students may be provided with special language courses in order to enable them to communicate with local community.

Counselors or advisors may be assigned to international students who can help them overcome the difficulties of new cultural experience and make connections with the host community.

Teachers may be facilitated through training workshops and courses to develop understanding of cultural diversity for better communication with their international students.

Administrative staff may also be trained for providing appropriate help and guidance for international students.

REFERENCES

- Alazzi, K., and Chiodo, J. J. (2006). Uncovering problems and identifying coping strategies of Middle Eastern University students, *International Education*, 35, 2, pp. 65-105.
- Bentley, J. M. (2008) Supporting International Student Adjustment, Central Michigan University, Retrieved December 16, 2008 from <http://www.fye.cmich.edu/publications/Supporting%20International%20Student%20Adjustment.pdf>
- Blake A. C. (2006) The experiences and adjustment problems of Africans at a historically black institution, *College Student Journal*, Retrieved December 29, 2008 from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FCR/is_4_40/ai_n27094505
- Brown, L and Holloway, I. (2008) The adjustment journey of international postgraduate students at an English university, *Journal of Research in International Education*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 232-249
- Constantine, G. M., Kindaichi, M., Okazaki, S., Gainor, K. A. and Baden, A. L. (2005) A qualitative investigation of the cultural adjustment experience of Asian International College Women, *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 11, 2, pp. 162- 175
- Gong, Y. (2003) Goal orientations and cross-cultural adjustment: an exploratory study, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Volume 27, Issue 3, pp. 297-305
- Hechanova-Alampay, R., Beehr, T. A., Christiansen, N. D. and Van Horn R. K. (2002) Adjustment and Strain among Domestic and International Student Sojourners, *School Psychology International*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp. 458-474

- Mehdizadeh, N. and Scott, G. (2005) Adjustment problems of Iranian international students in Scotland, *International Education Journal*, 6(4), pp. 484-493
- Poyrazli, S. and Grahame, K. M. (2007) Barriers to Adjustment: Needs of International Students within a Semi-Urban Campus Community, Retrieved December 20, 2008 from http://www.redorbit.com/news/education/907480/barriers_to_adjustment_needs_of_international_students_within_a_semiurban/index.html
- Reynolds, A. L. and Constantine, M. G. (2007) Cultural Adjustment Difficulties and Career Development of International College Students, *Journal of Career Assessment*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 338-350
- Swagler, M. A. and Ellis M. V. (2003) Crossing the Distance: Adjustment of Taiwanese Graduate Students in the United States, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(4), 527-536.
- Tseng, W. and Newton, F. B. (2002) International students' strategies for well-being, *College Student Journal*, Retrieved April 20, 2009 from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FCR/is_4_36/ai_96619965/
- Wester, S.R., Kuo, B. C. H. and Vogel, D. L. (2006) Multicultural Coping: Chinese Canadian Adolescents, Male gender role conflict and psychological distress, *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 7, 2, pp.83-100