

EXPLORING FOREIGN STUDENT'S CULTURAL AND ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC SECTOR UNIVERSITIES OF LAHORE

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Abstract

Many international students are studying at universities in Pakistan. The host nation gains various advantages from these students, and the students advance their education in exchange. However, studying abroad in a nation which is different from their culture and religion might have several disadvantages for international students, such as acculturative stress and issues adjusting to the local culture. In the current research, cultural and academic experiences of foreign student's in public sector universities are reviewed. Samples from Punjab University and university of engineering and technology were collected. Recurring topics in the text were recognized as themes and sub-themes utilizing the research structure provided by the research objectives, research questions and the theoretical framework. This process allowed a deeper understanding and explanation of issues that were being studied. To ensure greater validity and reliability, a peer reviewer read through the data to ensure themes and categories corresponded with the research questions. The results states that overseas students typically face were among the prominent variables from acculturation models examined in the literature (e.g., language barriers, educational difficulties, loneliness, discrimination, and practical problems associated with changing environments). Further examined were the effects of social support and coping mechanisms on the stress faced by

international students and the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of this student population. Furthermore, well-known acculturation models highlight the host society as a crucial element impacting international students' acculturation, suggesting the need for further involvement.

Keywords: *cultural, foreign, academic, discrimination ,experiences.*

INTRODUCTION

The education system in Pakistan supports students who are able to recall knowledge from a lecture. This emphasis encourages selective study behaviors and undermines critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation abilities. The need of social and academic assistance for foreign students is obvious. The current study supported this and is consistent with earlier studies showing that Asian students valued assistance from their families, fellow citizens, and friends from other countries. This was also evident in the accounts of Pakistani students, who were eager to seek assistance from the international office, academic advisors, and international student associations because they support effective acculturation and seek counselling services, as opposed to other Asian students, who appeared to be hesitant about receiving counselling. The practice of foreign student for higher education has been suggested to have the potential to change cultures. There is discussion on the advantages of studying at public universities for international students. According to academics, the goal of studying there is to gain experience in the host country rather than give up one's cultural background and accept the culture in which one spends a brief amount of time as an international student. Language plays a significant role in this process (Zafar, 2019).

Foreign students have traditionally provided academic and financial support to their host and sending institutions at public sector universities, which has increased their prominence in higher education. The relevance of internationalization education is demonstrated by the growing number of universities that accept more international students each year. International students are enrolling in more educational institutions in Pakistan these days. This study aimed to investigate the academic and cultural experiences of foreign students attending public universities. The research also explore the language barriers while moving within and outside university and the attitude of local people towards foreign students.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study aimed to investigate the academic and cultural experiences of foreign students enrolled in public institutions in Lahore, Pakistan. In order to examine each overseas student's personal experiences in this study, a qualitative, inductive methodology was adopted. According to the study, the qualitative nature of inquiry is more suitable when the issue needs to be

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examined and less is known about the phenomenon. Consequently, to fully comprehend the difficulties faced by overseas students. The reason Lahore was chosen for this study's sample of international students is that 20 students of Punjab University and 20 students from UET performed the survey, making Lahore a centre for educational activity. The elements of the academic environment that have a real impact on how well overseas students learn overall are included. These elements include the knowledge and skills of the lecturers, the structure of the academic material and courses, language instruction, and professional development. Prior studies revealed that faculty members commonly view the behaviour of international students in the lecture hall as inappropriate. As a result, it is crucial for institutions to identify and evaluate the different kinds of support needed by international students in the academic setting. A qualitative design was employed in this study and was reflective of structured interviews.

Convenience sampling was utilized to recruit participants for this study. Feasibility and access to participants were the underpinning for the sampling technique used (Andrews & Frankel, 2010).

Open coding was the method of qualitative analysis used with a focal point of establishing themes and main concepts coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The students whose study term was more than a year made up the carefully chosen sample. International students who are enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programmes at Punjab University and UET made up twenty of the participants. This sample size is sufficient for qualitative research to yield meaningful results. Furthermore, it used practical sampling to get data. 20% students were so chosen from Punjab and UET University using a straightforward random sampling procedure. The survey findings are used to suggest measures to make their nation a desirable study abroad location.

COMPONENTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Comprehensive examination of the issues faced by foreign students attending public sector institutions was provided by in-depth interviews. Among the extensive list of concerns voiced by the foreign students, accommodations were identified as the biggest difficulty.. Surveys aimed to measure the international students' satisfaction levels on the main themes of academic and cultural experience. Academic support and feedback, cultural diversity, university administration and operation, learning facilities and resources, personal development and career support and the cities in which they reside. According to survey results taken from Punjab University and UET, their accommodation directly becomes customer satisfaction. Such an approach is prevalent in many student satisfaction surveys and criticized in

several scholars' work. However, surveying on the satisfaction level of international students for academic and culture purposes require a further approach than standard resources, as it needs to focus and address the items that are important in quality of Pakistan universities considerations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings have been organized into two broad sections: the first discusses the Socio/Cultural experience of foreign students, the second disaggregates their academic experiences according to the semester/year of study to unveil further complexities. Further the researcher have explored the level of difficulties (foreign students) face and their perception regarding different things (parameters).

NATIONALITY OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1 Nationality of Respondents

Sr.no	Nationality	F	%
1	Iran	4	10
2	Yemen	3	6
3	Sudan	5	16
4	Kenya	4	8
5	Bangladesh	5	12
6	Nepal	4	12
7	India	4	10
8	Palestine	5	10
9	Syria	3	6
10	Canada	3	10
11	Total	40	100

The above table shows that 16% respondents belonged to Sudan, while 12% each respondents belonged to Bangladesh and Nepal, 10% each respondents belonged to Iran, India, Palestine, Canada respectively followed by

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8% respondents belonged to Kenya whereas 6% each respondents belonged to Yemen and Syria.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS (VIEWS OF PUNJAB UNIVERSITY AND UNIVERSITY OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY)

Many international students are motivated to attend higher education abroad from a professional standpoint because many businesses and organizations around the world demand that their employees be able to think critically, communicate effectively, and innovate. These skills can be improved through exposure to higher education abroad. According to Valdez (2015), the imbalance between educational supply and demand in many countries of origin and access to economic resources are two factors that contribute to the mobility of foreign students. It fits with the existing research. According to the study, societal effects on students, certain nations regarded as having high standards of education, and social-economic pragmatism are all important factors in influencing students' decisions. Despite the motivation of international students to pursue higher education in Pakistan and their country of origin, international students face numerous special problems that can hinder their experience while pursuing higher education and, as a result, have an impact on their learning experience.

Participants' expressions of loneliness and homesickness were common, in addition to emotions of alienation. However, there is also evidence of a stronger expression of kinship and love. Furthering the participants' feelings of helplessness is the absence of positive reinforcement, which is necessary for self-esteem. Informants primarily find comfort from other people in the international student ghetto.

BARRIERS/DIFFICULTIES FOREIGN STUDENTS FACE

In this study, after international students experienced culture shock, they passed through a period of appraisal, which was a transitional stage. This transitional period, even if brief, involved students in the appraisal of their personal situations, the identification of their needs, and formulation of challenges.

Following the transition stage, some students actively responded to challenges in the individuation stage, which corresponds to recovery stage in terms of how individuals' confidence increases. Individuation describes the process by which students developed insight into their own identities, which enabled them to engage in sociocultural situations more effectively. It is important to stress, however, that this was at times a deeply uncomfortable process involving

challenges to self-esteem, which is a core feature of “functional autonomy” which is in turn, central to self-identity.

International students encounter a great amount of challenges that domestic students would not normally encounter. Unlike domestic students, international students in addition to transitioning to a foreign country with the goal of pursuing higher education are required to adjust to a new academic/learning environment that varies in most instances from their host countries, a new culture, language barriers, and communication style.

Further challenges include but are not limited to: lack of social support excessive amount of loneliness and isolation, academic challenges, disengagement from educational activities, acculturation challenges, unfamiliar teaching practices, communication barriers, and identity issues.

STATISTICS OF RELIABILITY

Table 2

Reliability analysis was performed of the factors (variables) which were examined

Item-Total statistical details					
Factors	Mean scale if Item is removed	Variance scale if the object is removed	Complete item correlation corrected	Multiple squared correlations	Alpha of Cronbach if Item removed
Problems in getting information before admission (application process)	15.39	9.295	.412	.292	.682
Problems related to visa procedures	15.13	9.474	.562	.453	.634
Problems in getting residence permission	15.36	8.812	.495	.386	.647
Financial and accommodation problems	14.95	9.340	.492	.397	.651

by surveys. The value of Cronbach Alpha is 0.708, which means factors are highly correlated with the independent variable.

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Alpha of Cronbach	Alpha focused on structured pieces of Cronbach	Number of Items
.708	.725	4

Table 3 Reliability analysis on Barriers/difficulties

INTERPRETATION

The themes that emerged are Problems in getting information before admission (application process), Problems related to visa procedures, Problems in getting residence permission, Financial and accommodation problems.

The ability to network (make friends). Networking is a challenge for international students, which often has a rippling impact in the learning environment especially as it relates to group assignments and discussions. It was revealed that it is a frequent practice for international students to network and support each other especially those from the same country. In the learning environment, most international students would be in the same group.

One participant revealed that the challenge that exists is that as soon as a friendship is developed, it would not be long before that individual graduates and moves on with his or her life. To the contrary, another participant indicated that just making friends was a challenge.

Other challenges associated with networking/making friends included negative stereotypes associated with being an international student and language/communication challenges. However, there was one international student whom indicated that he often is not recognized and fits in as the traditional international student because of his social status (financially advantaged). On this premise, he feels isolated as an international student with other international students.

It is also worth noting that some participants indicated that the emersion with different cultures and social variety created a richer learning experience. The opportunity to learn about different cultures and its influence on the learning process and the diversity present in the Pakistani society creates a holistic learning experience and creates opportunities for future networking.

Racial identity and associated stereotype. It was revealed that racial identity and stereotypes associated with being an international student was noted and concerning. It was expressed that because of some noted difference associated with being an international student-- language barriers, communication style

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and physical appearances-- this created some identity issues and hence stereotypes.

FOREIGNERS PERCEPTION

Table 4
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.961	.963	17

Table 5

Variables	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Scholarship conditions are easier in Pakistan when compared to other countries	47.67	193.470	.646	.960
Pleased with the quality of education	48.15	193.585	.829	.957
Pakistan courses were adequate for my further studies	47.86	192.342	.917	.956
Access to counselling services in the university	47.91	192.197	.919	.956
Pleased with the services of international office	48.14	192.141	.858	.957
I have access one-on-one academic advising	47.58	197.752	.679	.959
Get support from student representatives in academic and social matters	48.37	189.782	.762	.958
Participate in social activities in campus	47.62	199.364	.541	.962
Social conditions in Pakistan meet my expectations	47.69	197.461	.596	.961
Pleased if special programs with Pakistani students are organized	47.91	191.359	.767	.958

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I feel secure and participate in social activities in city	47.56	193.464	.703	.959
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INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Findings from this study present a counter-narrative to discourse presenting internationals as passive and struggling, and their problems permanent, to reveal the multi-dimensionality and fluidity of their identities and experiences. Participants in this study reported overcoming initial learning challenges to earn high GPAs or institutional recognition of their academic achievements. Findings from this study also illuminate the complexity and non-linearity of student development.

Findings discussed in this article, which are a subset of a larger study, and is not to be interpreted as a refinement of the hybrid sociocultural framework. Instead, it speaks to U-shaped stage theories on adjustment. This proposed theory of an uneven ascent to describe undergraduates’ evolution is still nascent, given the limited and specific sample in this study, and would benefit from studying a wider range of international undergraduates across all years over a longer time period. For instance, as students volunteered to participate in the study, this may skew results more positively as students who were maladjusted might not have volunteered for the study. Should a larger and more diverse sample be incorporated, this theory might see more than one line.

These findings spell implications on several fronts. Firstly, institutions need to support transcultural understanding across their community members – that is, faculty members, host students, staff – by dispelling stereotypes around internationals, or internationals in general, and encouraging the community to adopt a less ethnocentric perspective. Secondly, student offices, for example, international student/ career/ counseling offices, need to understand the changing needs of internationals and vary their support accordingly.

First years may need greater academic and socialization support and second years may need stronger career and post-graduation guidance. Seeking internationals’ opinions on-site offers ways of keeping their provisions targeted, as with disaggregating feedback collected from students according to different categories.

Thirdly, incoming and existing internationals must be discouraged from internalizing deficit notions of themselves: like their predecessors, they have the agency to change themselves and their circumstances. Finally, more research is needed to ascertain the experiences of third- or fourth-year internationals as well

as those in other contexts so that we can refine and reimagine our understanding and engagement with internationals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *The study was conducted with a sample of 50 foreign students on the basis of study findings following recommendations have been drawn:*
- *At the time of admission department may provide proper guideline and information to the foreign students.*
- *University may provide separate student advisor for foreign students as well as services of guidance and counselling center may also be extended to the foreign students.*
- *Hostel and department staff members may be advised for more cooperative behaviour with foreign students.*
- *Educated staff members may be employed in the hostel of foreign students so that they can easily communicate with them.*
- *Insufficient furniture was provided to them moreover its condition was poor. It is recommended for provision of better furniture.*
- *Local students may also be provided guidance and counseling for more appropriate behavior with foreign students and avoid bullying them.*
- *It is recommended that teachers offering course to their class give more stress on English language during their lectures.*
- *They may be given more representation in mess committee and encourage their participation in finalizing mess menu.*
- *University may consider for provision of separate buses for foreign students or allocation of separate seats in university buses.*

FURTHER RESEARCH SCOPE

Gaps between foreign students and staff/faculty. May be explored future more experiences of local students with foreign students may also be identify. The findings of this study can be a stepping-stone for further researches on this topic.

It is also important to conduct studies that perform observations and interviews and include both students and university staff. These studies could yield much more information on the overall experience of not just the students, but also the experience of university staff in working and interacting with international students.

Findings from such studies could yield very useful information regarding the study abroad experience as well as that of the host institutions. May be, results from these studies could be used to help improve not only the students'

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experience, but as well as guide the professional development of university staff that work with these international students.

Finally, it is very useful to conduct studies that focus on the impact of programs that universities offer to support international students.

In other words, exploring and assessing the impact of certain international student support programs/services offered by universities could provide constructive results that can be used to help improve, if necessary, the services provided to these students. The practical implication here is that such studies could provide the needed or necessary evidence to improve the rationale as well as boost the impacts of such programs or services provided to this group of students.



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