



**“ADAPTATION EXPERIENCES OF INDIAN SOJOURNERS IN
AMERICAN ENVIRONMENT – A QUALITATIVE STUDY”**

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“Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit.” - Jawaharlal Nehru

Abstract

The aim of this qualitative study is to explore the academic and cultural learning experiences of students from India in United States of America. The results of this study will be useful for future international students in U.S.A. in smooth transition from one culture to another. This study explores the learning experiences and challenges of Indian scholars in the of United States of America. This is a multiple case study. For data collection, a semi structured questionnaire was constructed to conduct interviews of thirty Indian students, these students are studying on F1 visa in different universities of the United States of America. Most of the students reported lack of social interaction, financial issue and unawareness of learning style and U.S. English language ascent problem. Students praised the education system of the United states. They also reported limited interaction with Americans peers.

Introduction

The number of international students are increasing dramatically in the American universities, According to the **Open door/IEEE reports**, there are more than one million students admitted in year 2016. This increase indicates that in the last 10 years, 32% more international students are studying in American colleges and universities. Although international student enrollment is on the rise, but the past studies indicated that arrangements in the universities are not according to individual differences & different culture values. Due to lack of pre knowledge about foreign national's educational and social system, this group (Indian sojourners) of students face various challenges.

The purpose of the study and research questions

"International students have to face many problems in a new cultural, linguistic and educational environment." (Curry and Common, 2005)

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic & cultural experiences of Indian sojourners in the U.S. environment. This research can be helpful in providing multicultural learning environment for addressing the issues of diversity in the international policy of increasing education and learning to understand and respect each other for local and international students.

Key words

Adaptation: “The process of change by which an organism or species becomes better suited to its environment.”(<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/adaptation?q=adaptation>)

Transition: Transition in this study, indicates a process of change in how Indian students feel, and behave in their lives and studies as they adapt from their home social and cultural environment to a new American one during their studies.

Culture: "The collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from another"(Hofstede 1991, p.5)

Overseas student: Overseas student is an individual who is enrolled for credit at an accredited higher education institution in the U.S. on a temporary(F1) visa.(UNESCO)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on learning experiences of the International students in their host countries usually involve features such as cultural, psychological, social and academic adjustments (Edwards & Ran, 2006; Hewitt, 2002).

Adjustment is a dynamic and interactive process that takes place between the person and the environment, and is directed towards an achievement of the fit between the two (Anderson, 1994). Thus Academic adjustment is a fit of a learner in the academic environment. Many researchers consider academic adjustment a complex process that impacts on all university students (Barker, Child, Gallois, Jones and Callan, 1991). The major reason is that culture of education differs from country to country. For example, universities in advanced countries pay more attention on class participation and the educational approach in these countries looks unfamiliar to international students who are habituated to expect more guidance and support from teachers.

Language is considered one of the greatest academic issues hindering smooth adjustment for international students (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). This Difficulty hamper in understanding lectures and lack of confidence in their second language inhibits them from participating in class discussions (Zhai, 2002). Similarly teaching styles and approaches that differ from those to which the international students are familiar in their own cultures may also be a source of complexity (Andrade, 2006, Zhai, 2002).

Extensive works have been done by many researchers highlighting International students learning experiences (Bamford, et al., 2002; Kiley, 2003). Despite the widespread report of the difficulties International students encounter, majority of the International students make reasonable adaptation to their cultural and institutional demands.

Thus, the importance of adjustment of the foreign students to the host university and its new environment has always been a critical issue. With the increased foreign enrollments in the international universities, development and promotion of effective adjustment has become increasingly important and challenging to achieve the desired educational outcomes.

Objectives of the study

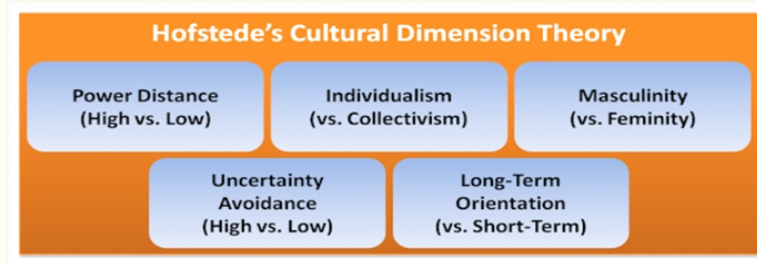
The main objectives of this research study are as follows:

- (1) What are the academic and cross-cultural experiences/challenges of Indian students while studying at the American Universities?
- (2) How do Indian students adjust in the US environment?

Fundamental principles of research:

The research paper presented is based on the cultural dimension model rendered by Hofstede. According to this model, the norms of the culture and society of each country are different. When a person moves into a foreign culture, he realizes the differences. By using Hofsted's cultural dimensions, one can evaluate his views, his decisions and actions and how he can be treated according to the thinking and reaction of the people of a particular society and the process of adjusting in the new environment. No society is equal, using this model one can achieve pre-knowledge about the social and cultural environment of different countries and custom & rules of society. Pre-knowledge helps in reducing the complexity of the adjustment process in new environment.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory



Methodology: In this study qualitative research method has been used, and the case study protocol was used. This is a collective case study. To gain insights into the experiences of each participant, the data of this study was collected through interviews.

Sample / Participant:

This study was organized on Indian students studying in five different Universities in USA (Sample -30). All the participants of the study are graduating students. Keeping in mind the privacy objectives, the identity of students was kept secret. Participation was completely voluntary in this study. **Purposeful and convenience sampling** techniques were used to recruit participants for the study.

Tool of the study is Interview. The main purpose of conducting interview is to get in depth understanding of learning experiences of overseas Indian students in US environment. Students were contacted via email/phone and on referral base.

Interviews is “well suited to understand the social actor's experience and perspectives” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). Observation is also used to collect information from the participants.

Process: A semi-structured interview protocol was prepared for this study. Each participant was asked about various questions related to its cross cultural and academic experiences in America. The questionnaire was prepared on the basis of objectives of the study and previous studies, and. The pilot study was conducted on a different group of students before conducting the actual study. During the interaction with the participants many relevant questions arose, but most participants answered the questions on the questionnaire, and there was no need for redirection. Each interview lasted about 25-48 minutes.

Data analysis was done through **thematic analysis**. A qualitative data analysis software was adopted to arrange analysis results and represent data effectively.

Outcomes of the study:

The data from this study showed that international students face many challenges. The main categories of challenges are as follows:

- (1) The Challenge related to language.
- (2) Social Life; (3) Financial Challenge (4) Unrecognized learning style (5) Food and dietary choices

In the process of data analysis, the following results were obtained:

The Challenge related to language and education.

Previous studies have shown that language barriers are the biggest challenge of international students during their initial adjustment period (Elcina, 2002; Tucker, 2003; 2003, 2002). Many students did not have the ability to understand the adequate English language dialect initially. All participants in this study told that to achieve their degree in the US, it was their priority to get a good grade, but in the beginning months of admission, participants were disappointed and Feeling stressed. One student said that "language barrier is the biggest challenge for me, because I do not understand the questions of professors, so I cannot answer."(a girl participant)

Social Life:

99% participants believe that it is difficult to engage in American society. Many times, international students feel isolated and feel the lack of support for mental and emotional fulfillment. Therefore, most often Indian students spend time with the students from their own country and keep up their group. Even in any trouble this group of students seek help from their own native people, instead of taking help from Professor or University.

Financial Challenge:

Most of the participants have not received financial support from the Universities. Most of the participants work part time jobs . The cost of living in America is higher than these students' countries. In spite of limited financial resources, international students are working hard to succeed.

Different learning style:

This study focused on the various factors affecting the educational, cultural and social experiences of international students. Sai (2002) suggested, that many international students were often overwhelmed, because they were not familiar with American active academic learning and learning style. Apart from this, having close ties with teachers can also contribute to the academic achievement of international students. Many of them said that due to inadequate knowledge about American education system and learning styles, they are often emphasized as compared to their American colleagues and less "smart" appear. Research has shown that close teacher / student support can lead academically to lead positive results for international students (Myles and Cheng, 2003).

Apart from the problem of language, international students also faced another challenge which was related to their academic performance. Most participants said that "Study in U.S. is far more different than their home country due to different learning styles and different classroom culture." many Indian students took the help of their professors and showed better performance in the school. One student said that interaction with professor and express yourself in the class are the most important part of classroom culture. It has been observed that interaction with professors can help perform better at school.

Food and dietary choices

“America is known as a melting pot of cultures” – Each immigrant brings their own culture to this country, so a person can find many different varieties of food from almost all of the countries. But there is a limitation of this versatility, that is the authenticity of a particular food is lost. Also the food culture is completely different from India. Most of the students expressed that they do not get the authentic Indian food in U.S and Indian restaurants are very limited in numbers and not available everywhere like India. Most of the participants cook food by themselves. Also they took time to get adjusted with the American food culture and schedule.

Learning experiences of Indian students in American universities	Participant response	
	(YES)	(NO)
Language(dialect) issue	25	05
Limited Social Interaction	24	06
Different learning style	28	02
Financial Challenge	22	08
Food and dietary choices	26	04

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents by encountered challenges.(Total Number of participants=30)

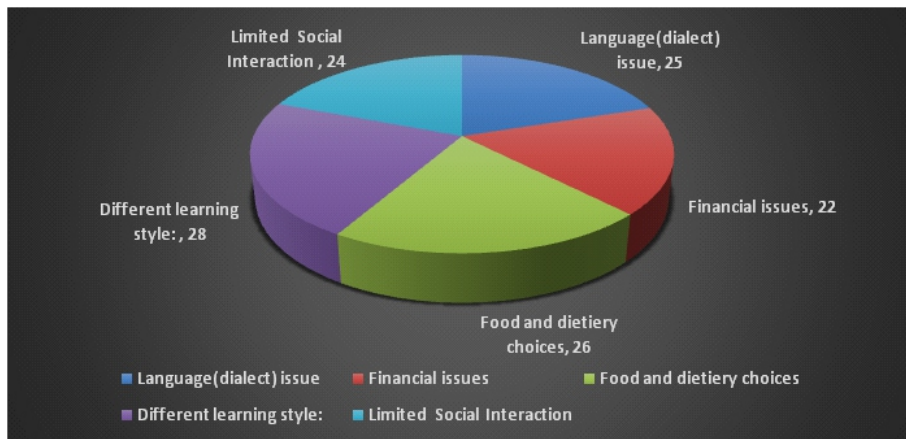


Figure 1: Pie chart representing challenges faced by Indian students in American Universities.

Delimitations of the study

- (1) Data do not represent the whole group of Indian and other international students
- (2) The results can not be generalized on the entire population of all international students studying in American universities.

Conclusion & Discussion

This study shows academic, cultural and social experience and adjustment of Indian international students studying in the US. The findings of this study might help the future students who are going to study overseas in the future. This study can broaden the understanding of cultural, social, intellectual and personal challenges and suggests ways of converging in cultural diversity. This study also pointed out some hurdles in the success of international students studying in the United States. The results of this study indicated that participants faced cultural differences in many aspects of their lives in America. Some tried to confront the differences, and some decided to live with their cultures and reduce their conversation with the Americans. One of the participants in this study revealed the negative survival mechanism of withdrawal.

It is important to know for every student about the student service centers and the services offered by American Universities, which are available to them because language, cultural variations and academic pressures are different from the indigenous campus community. Higher education institutions provide opportunities to meet people from all over the world and gain understanding of different cultures. In this era of dramatically increasing globalization, faculty and staff are considered important to be culturally responsible for the different needs of international students.

It is clear that professors play a major role in the internationalization of higher education and their students have a lot of influence on both local and international levels. This study suggests that Students who wants to study in foreign universities they must attend orientation programs before landing on foreign land. Also, every student must know about the do and don't and the cultural set up of the particular country before going there.

Pre knowledge can minimize the transition difficulties of a overseas students to a new culture.

In US, technology is everywhere. Every information can be obtained through technology. Therefore it is necessity in US to have knowledge of technology. In the starting days students have to go through a deep learning process to know the working strategy/system in United State. For e.g. in colleges/universities sources of information sharing (receiving or sending information) is email, or text messages. students can access library through internet. The easiest, fastest and most preferable way to get connected with other people is technology. But in the beginning days in US, students feel hard with working the system and some of the students feel it very confusing. But gradually they found it easy and work according to the system and they do appreciate the technology.

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