ROLE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION IN ENHANCING THE SATISFACTION EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract: Higher education brings opportunity to choose courses globally as well as it brings challenges of living in a foriegn culture. While studying abroad, students may have to face challenges of the socially exclusive and culturally irresponsible environment, besides the normal academic rigor. Studies worldwide highlighted the adverse experiences of international students in their academic sojourn. They face a lot of challenges like cultural and communication problems, loss of social support, language difficulties, academic problems, financial, psychological, health and recreational issues. The socio-cultural problems regarding international students experiences may affect the satisfaction of international students negatively. International migration trends for acquiring higher education created a greater need for effective cultural competency in order to successfully tackle the raised challenges that arise mainly due to cultural contact. Socio-cultural adaptation refers the behavioural competence of international students in new cultural milieu. The cultural learning and community involvement enhances the satisfaction experiences of students in their sojourn. The present study attempts to analyse the role of socio-cultural adaptation in enhancing the satisfaction experiences of international students. It aims to address the challenges of international students from the socio-cultural adaptation point of view.

Keywords: Challenges, International students, Satisfaction, Socio-cultural adaptation

Introduction: There is a dramatic increse in the number of international students in recent years for pursuing their higher education. It encouraged international literature describing international students satisfaction and adjustment experiences in host country. International students have different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, they face more difficulties to adapting to the new situation in host country. These difficulties and problems complicate students lives. International students feel disappointed, and even exploited due to their adjustment difficulties [1]. As international students belong to diverse cultural backgrounds. Their socialization process would be very different from that of host country. Their upbringing would have been done as a member of particular society as the basis for one's culture. It resulted in learned patterns of behaviour common to members of a given society. Students normally feel alienated in a new environment; they need to confront new individuals, need to defeat dialect boundaries and adjust to changing social standards and conventions. International students experience extensive challenges while adapting to the new educational and cultural environment.Satisfaction experiences in a host country and university, is highly connected with their degree of integration into new cultural environment. The problems of the international students must be addressed urgently by the authorities of higher education institutions. Issues can be psychological in nature with learners feeling discouraged because of new social setting. Culture learning skills are required to negotiate in new cultural milieu. The present study will discuss about the role of socio-cultural adaptation in enhancing the satisfaction experiences of international students.

The following questions will be addressed in the present paper:

• What are the issues/challenges faced by international students in host country while their academic sojourn?

• What might be role of socio-cultural adaptation in enhancing the satisfaction experiences of international students?

Challenges faced by international students: Academic sojourn is not without its difficulties and there is confirmation by researches that international students encounter a range of issues and challenges that can affect on their academic engagement and overall satisfaction experiences. They face various challenges including social and curriculum and general living adjustment, sociocultural adjustment, personal psychological adjustment, and academic adjustment, languages difficulties[2],[3],lack of entertaining activities [4], teaching and learning environment challenges [5], cultural and languages difficulties[6],[7], lack of sufficient facilities of accomodation, tansport, food and campus restaurantand library, differences in social environment –cultural difficulties, English difficulties and language problems, problems with academic systems,teaching methodology & faculty supervisor and international office service programs-lack of entertaining activities and visa-application process [8], cultural and identity challenges, language barrier, culture shock and different types of stress caused by homesickness,cultural misunderstanding, academic achievement, social acceptance, identity confusion

and other societal pressures and expectations [9]. These negative experiences disengaged students psychologically from the university experience. Upon arrival in host country, international students initially remain very ignorant of the behavioral and cultural norms of the new culture and to adapt they must learn its features and acquire the sociocultural skills for participating in it. In light of pressing challenges due to cultural clashes, there would be more importance attached to the socio-cultural adaptation.

Socio-cultural adaptation: Sociocultural adaptation theory has been proposed by Ward and Kennedy (1999). Sociocultural adjustment refers to the capacity to "fit in" the new social environment and to establish connections with individuals from the new culture successfully. It fuses correspondence and social collaboration abilities, and it is described by the improvement of sufficient social and cultural aptitudes to deal with day by day social circumstances and requests of the standard social setting. Sociocultural adjustment includes a comprehension of the new culture's standards and qualities. Sociocultural adjustment does not require international students to acknowledge standards and norms of the new culture, however it obliges them to know about esteem contrasts and be set up to viably manage them[10]**.**

Culture is never static, however progressive, making changes within individuals by exposure to different societies [11]. Sojourners identities fluctuate in host country's cultural context. Actually, the socio-cultural adaptation reframes the identities while transitioning to host country which enable the individuals to live successfully within new society. Thus, socio-cultural adaptation facilitates the satisfaction experiences of international students by guiding their behaviour within social context of host country. Socio-culturally adjusted sojourners are able to meet social demands in their host culture through their behavioural competence and social skills [12]. Ethnocentrism can be a major barrier to adjust to new culture. It refers to the belief that one's own way of doing things is superior to that of others. International students possessing strong ethnic identity has been shown to face greater social difficulties in new culture [13], while those who integrate to the norms of host culture through bicultural identity has been shown to lead greater well being [14]. Integration acculturation strategy enables international students to sucessfully negotiate the host culture as it inculcate a set of skills in students to deal effectively in new culture.

Socio-social adjustment assumes an essential part in the advancement of the day by day living abilities by delivering socially built examples related with identifying with others to wind up distinctly a socially able being. Belongingness sense pays a critical part by securing against the negative impacts of homesickness that can undermine the change procedure and lessens the fulfillment encounters [15]. Psychological adjustment is influenced by the level of socio-cultural adjustment. Psychological adjustment precedes sociocultural adaptation[16]. By measuring outcomes of socio-cultural adaptation,we can predict the level of satisfaction of sojourners, as they are closely connected [17]. Socio-cultural adaptation of international students often has a major bearing on academic outcomes and psychological well-being [18]. Matching shared value profile causes individuals' feeling of 'cultural fit' and satisfaction occurring when experiencing this 'cultural fit'.

Discussion: While living in host country, the normal way of perceiving and behaving may not be appropriate for international students as they are conditioned through certain values and norms by their native society in a particular way. These values and norms create the personal interpretation of experiences. Values and norms change from one culture to another. Understanding of these values and norms is a key to understand the culture. International students may feel frustrated as the previously established norms and values to be in conflict in host culture context. It is a normal reaction to the challenges of cross cultural experience.Accepting this challenge offers students a tremendous opportunity for personal growth and awareness of your own culture, as well as to learn about the host culture in which they are now living. Sojourners need to learn not only culture-specific rules of how host nationals function in the environment but also the behavioral skills that help them fit into the new culture.

Conclusion: This research provides an understanding of the challenges felt by international students, and discusses how to improve their levels of satisfaction. International students can met the challenge of acculturative stress and transformed it into a satisfying experience through socio-cultural adaptation. While adapting in host countries, international students experience successful transformation in ways of living and are more satisfied with their lives. There is a growing trend in internationalization at higher education and thus, students mobilities will likely to get increase at a faster rate. If international students face a lot of challenges throughout their academic sojourn in host country they will not recommend it to anyone. Higher education institutions can play an important role in being sensitive to the problems of international students. This can be achieved by developing intercultural capabilities. In the current scenario of comeption among universities for attracting international students, socio-cultural initiatives might become a prime consideration to make these students satisfied with their experiences

in host country. It would also contribute in acheiving student loyalty so that after their academic sojourn when they return to their country, they would recommend the university to others. Socio-cultural adaptation help them face the range of challenges associated with internationalisation and to deal effectively the demands of new country.

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