

International Students Challenges and Strategies for the Success of Academic Sojourn: A Review

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Abstract:

Globalization provides opportunities of higher studies to students beyond borders. Many students leave their home country for their academic sojourn and get enrolled in their choice of programs in International universities. Research evidences indicate that studying in a foreign country is not without the academic and socio-cultural adjustment challenges that can impact overall experience in academic sojourn. International students at universities have always been considered as a source of economic contributions towards their host institutions. Researches in this field have gained considerable importance in recent years. The purpose of international universities should be to make students satisfied with educational experiences. In order to meet their expectations universities must address their challenges through suitable strategies. The present paper aims to enlist the challenges as well as identifies best practices and strategies to cater these challenges through extensive review of existing literature. The present paper contributes not only in drawing the attention of administrators towards the challenges faced by international students but also providing the suitable strategies to cater these challenges.

Keywords: Challenges, Globalization, Higher education, International students, Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

While studying in international universities, many international students face challenges in their academic sojourn. In new cultural and social environment, they face different cultural and social norms, differences in academic environment, teaching and learning styles. In most of the cases, international students see a huge gap between their expectations before joining the institution and perceptions after joining the institution. Universities must address the issues of international students on campuses to make their academic sojourn pleasant and satisfying consequently retaining these students in the institution. Usually, International students attend classes with their earlier cultural attitude and assumptions that ultimately impact their academic performance, resulting in learning shock. University administrators must recognize the expectations of international students for joining the courses so that they can achieve their set goals in higher education. It is

important to investigate international students' problems. The present study aims to review the challenges of international students in the process of cultural and transformation and identity crisis that arise during the transition and providing strategies to cater these challenges through extensive review of literature. Increasing international student population represent a diverse group on campuses, indicating an urgent need to understand both international student challenges and the strategies of the universities in catering to these challenges. Thus, the two main objectives of the present study are:

- 1.To explore the challenges faced by international students in their academic sojourn.
- 2.To provide the strategies to cater these challenges.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most of the studies on international students reported that the campus life and academic culture was not what they had expected. International students experienced culture shock as a result of the differences between their own culture and host culture. The challenges faced by international students as reported in the literature is given below sectionwise:

Language and Communication: Most of the international education literature focussed on the language difficulties (reading, writing, listening, speaking) as well as communication barriers [1]. Mostly, students find it hard to comprehend the English accent of the staff as well as lecturers [2]. Language difficulties hinder the academic dialogue in as well as out of classroom. Due to this, international students find it hard to interact with classmates and lecturers and also find themselves unable to contribute in the class discussion [3].

Curriculum and method of teaching:

International students come to the host institution with their previous academic culture and attitude in mind. They face 'learning shock' when they encounter totally different academic culture with differences in learning and teaching styles. Many researchers explored curriculum and method of teaching as major problematic area [4] [5].

Personal psychological adjustment: International students may experience homesickness, loneliness, depression, feeling isolation and worthlessness in host

society due to loss of a social support system among international students. Social isolation is experienced by many students as they do not use social skills to mix up in new culture. As a result, they feel loneliness and depression [4] [6] [2]. Lack of entertainment activities also contribute in enhancing the personal adjustment problems of international students.

Visa-related and accommodation problems: Students face problems in international student office as they are not informed well regarding the arrival and departure formalities. Many studies reported problems in getting nice accommodation while staying away from family and hometown [7].

Financial problems: International students have to bear a lot of financial pressures as such students generally are required to pay more fee than domestic students, and exchange rates may be unfavorable to them such that a small amount of money in the currency of their host country is equivalent to a large sum of money in their home country. Getting part-time job and sustain it in host country is a problem in itself in order to compensate the financial expenses.

Strategies to overcome the challenges:

International students often feel unfulfilled, disappointed, and even exploited if their adjustment issues are not addressed [8]. Thus, some good strategies must be adapted by the host institution to make the international students' experiences satisfying. Some of the recommended strategies to cater the challenges are listed below:

1. To cope up their difficulties in adjustment and acculturation, international students must be fully prepared for the challenges in academic sojourn. Before departure from their home country, they must become familiar with the university's education system and campus as well as about the culture of the host society where they are going for higher education [9].
2. Orientation programs must be organized by the host institution, just after fulfilling arrival formalities of international students to motivate them for their struggle in academic sojourn as well as make them aware of the academic culture. A welcoming environment may be created by organizing some events at the campus.
3. Students must be skilled in daily-living skills and social skills for the challenges ahead in their academic sojourn.
4. English language proficiency must be considered as a very important part in their academic sojourn as communication barrier was reported as the major

challenge in most of the international education literature for building social network in the host country.

5. As the length of stay in new environment increases the loneliness and homesickness often decrease among international students [10]. However, making new friends of other nationalities is a good strategy to remain happier, more fulfilled, and less homesick [11]. Moreover, it would contribute in getting social support system in new culture.
6. Technology may be seen as a boon for international students to cater the problems of loneliness, homesickness as well as ignorance about the host country. Using internet students may explore any information related with host society's culture or anything related with their studies. Social networking sites may be used to remain in touch with family and friends.
7. International students may find it hard to interact with classmates and lecturers or to work with a group of other domestic students or to participate in class discussions. Faculty must be able to communicate and encourage these students to make the academic environment conducive. Due care may be taken for not using code mix of English and local language by the faculty.
8. Financial pressure adversely impacts international students' level of academic performance. International students without scholarship may search part time jobs, in order to compensate for their financial expenses [12]. Universities may provide part-time job opportunities for these students on the campuses.
9. International students counselling centers must be established in the university to help students having psychological problems of loneliness and depression, resulted from cultural shock in the host country.
10. International students office must be established in the university to guide the students in fulfilling visa and other arrival related formalities.

DISCUSSION

Most international students struggle in their academic sojourn by facing challenges including language barrier, isolation, adjustment issues in host culture, academic problems due to differences in education system. Most of the studies stress on recommending the orientation sessions for newly arrived students to actively seek information in host institution. Attending these orientation programs would help international students in managing their social isolation. Some other strategies reported in the

literature included establishing a link initially with the students from ones' own country, extending social networks to the host society, interaction with the locals, building friendships and social support networks. International students must practice social skills to overcome their shyness and build social networks. The awareness as well as preparation for the challenges is a good strategy to counter emotional difficulties. Finally, literature suggested that international students may visit university counselling centres and seek counselling services in case of psychological distress.

CONCLUSION

In the current globalization era, students make up their minds for higher education abroad and join international universities but they remain unaware of the academic shocks they would be facing there. The present paper identified best strategies in catering the challenges of international students population. These findings surely be helpful to academicians and educational managers to devise new strategies for catering international students' challenges.

The findings provide information for developing effective university policies and teaching practices as well as counselling strategies to enhance the well-being of the international students.

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