

ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCES OF
INTERSTATE STUDENT IMMIGRANTS OF
JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract
Interstate students traveling from different parts of the globe for better education face challenges in adapting to the host culture. The researchers decided to take up this study to uncover the acculturation experiences of interstate student immigrants of Jammu and Kashmir at Selected University, Chennai. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 interstate migrant students. Thematic analysis was used to explore the four main questions of student happiness, challenges with adaptation, methods for overcoming obstacles, and variations in acculturation according to the year of study. The study concluded that interstate students go through various blindfolded challenges regarding adapting. It also highlighted that supportive strategies they employ to overcome the challenges along with adaptive physical facilities will improve the students' overall outcome.
Keyword: Acculturation, Inter state student Immigrants, Culture, Adaptive challenges and strategies.

INTRODUCTION
Migration flows have been increasing worldwide in recent years. Migration happens for various reasons; education is the prime one among all the reasons. So the migration wave is more common among students and they make up a large proportion of migrants. Students traveling from different parts of the globe for better education face challenges in adapting to the host culture. Acculturation occurs when people of different cultural backgrounds come into continuous, firsthand contact, as occurs following migration (Kennedy, Lisa Ann MacNeela, Padraig, 2013). Students of different cultures try to incorporate themselves into the new culture but still try to hold their heritage culture during acculturation. The process of acculturation may impact both the social and psychological well-being of the student immigrants.
One of the most notable problems of acculturation is imperialism, the common progenitor of direct cultural change which involves both home and host culture. For student immigrants, the challenges related to financial issues and lack of social support are compounded with acculturation shifts related to the difference in linguistic, ethnic, familial and religious norms (Khan & Watson, 2005).
When these experiences cause conflicts and create problems, individuals may experience acculturative stress and explore strategies to adapt to the heritage culture. There are a number of factors that determine the level of acculturation stress; such as lower sense of coherence, low perceived social support and demographic variables (Jibeen& Khalid, 2010). These acculturation challenges can increase immigrants' chances of developing mental health issues (Das & Kemp, 1997).
The acculturation strategies used by the student immigrant's aid in easing the challenges they experience in integration of home and host culture. Berry proposed a model of acculturation that

categorizes individual adaptation strategies along two dimensions (Berry, 1992).

Table with 3 columns: Identification with Home culture (HIGH), Identification with Home culture (LOW), and Identification with Host culture (HIGH). Rows include Integration (Bicultural)-Adaptation, Assimilation-Acceptance & positive orientation towards out group, Separation-Rejection, and Marginalisation-Feeling of insignificant.

Research suggests that the integrated acculturation strategy has the most favorable psychological outcomes (Nguyen, et al., 2007) for individuals adjusting to a host culture and marginalization has the least favorable outcomes (Berry, et al., 2006).

Background of the Study
The large amount of migrants in the world is moving with scholarly interest. The transition from school to college environment and residing away from family give rise to numerous changes which in turn will have an impact on their social and health behaviour.
Global migration has increased from 150 million in 2000 to 214 million in 2010 and data suggest continued upward trends in human movement worldwide (International Organization for Migration, 2011).
According to World Migration Statistics 2020, most of the international migrants are from India (18 million). As per census 2011, 1 out of every 100 migrants in India move in search of

education. India is the world's second largest student sending country with the number of Indian students abroad having increased four times in the last 14 years. A total of 32, 96,340 men and 21, 61,216 women have migrated in India because of education.

In India, interstate migration rate was 13% (41 million) in which 3% (2.9 million) were migrated for education (Indian Census Report, 2011). As the immigration rate gets increasing, it is necessary to understand the process of adaptation and acculturation experienced by immigrants, moving across borders and cultures.

Need for the Study

Acculturation may occur as an unconscious process and the immigrants may not orient to it. As stated in the background, India is the second largest country where students are migrating for education from their birth origin. The migration happens not only with other countries, students migrate between the states of India and the interstate migrants experience acculturation too.

Numerous studies are being conducted to explore the acculturation experiences of international immigrants whereas the interstate immigrants are ignored or unnoticed. Most of the acculturative studies described that language is the major factor which put fourth challenge on them to adapt to the new culture. As India is the country with people speaking different tongues, it is important to elicit the acculturation experiences of interstate migrants in our country.

Under Prime Minister's Special Scholarship Scheme, it has been observed that many students from Jammu and Kashmir are allotted seats in various Universities across the states as per the students' choice and eligibility of marks. Kashmir students are opted for nursing course also and are studying in different parts of India.

The researchers have come across with interstate student migrants who were imposed with lots of challenges due to cultural shift and change during the process of acculturation but not aware of it. Hence the researchers decided to take up this study to uncover the acculturation experiences of student immigrants of Jammu and Kashmir.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

A Qualitative study to examine the Acculturation experiences of Interstate Student Immigrants of Jammu and Kashmir at Selected University, Chennai.

AIM & OBJECTIVES

- To understand the experiences of acculturation among Interstate student immigrants of Jammu and Kashmir

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How satisfied are the student Immigrants with their experiences during the process of acculturation?
- What are the adaptive difficulties encountered by the student Immigrants during acculturation process?
- Are they using any acculturation strategies to overcome the difficulties?
- Will there be any difference in acculturation experiences according to students' year of study?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Approach – Qualitative Approach

Research Design – Phenomenological method

Population– Student Immigrants of Jammu and Kashmir, pursuing their undergraduate degree

Research Setting - The study was conducted in selected University, Chennai.

Sample Size – 15 Interstate student immigrants of Jammu and Kashmir.

Sampling techniques – Purposive Sampling technique

Tools and Techniques for data collection includes the following components

The **interview schedule** is designed by the investigators, comprising of four **open-ended questions** in relation to the acculturation experiences of the participants. The demographic questions such as pseudonym, age, gender, course & year of study, state of domicile, Religion, Economic status, Medium of instruction 12th standard was asked to the participants prior to the open ended questions. The questions were read aloud in English and the participants were allowed to share their responses freely, using their own knowledge and experience. The interview was recorded with the consent of the participants.

INCLUSION CRITERIA

- Student immigrants experiencing Acculturation for the first time
- Student immigrants, who are connected with the host culture for a period of 6 months to 3 years.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA

- Students who are not available at the time of data collection

PROCEDURE PROTOCOL

Permission and consent from the concerned institutions to conduct the study was obtained. The informed consent was obtained after having participants' fully comprehend the purpose of the study. The researcher started the interview with the demographic questions followed by which the four open ended questions, focused on the acculturation experiences of graduate interstate student immigrants was asked and the responses were recorded for transcription purpose.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The qualitative interviews were assessed using Thematic Analysis in which raw data were coded into themes based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework

RESULTS

A total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with interstate migrant students. The data analysis revealed three major themes:

1. Cultural Differences:

Cultural differences can make the adjustment difficult for student migrants. The overall shift in societal context, including values and behaviors, can create a sense of disorientation and challenge the process of assimilation into the new cultural environment.

Adjustment to New socio cultural environment:

Adapting to a new cultural environment can vary widely among student migrants. Unfamiliar social norms and customs may lead to misunderstandings or discomfort.

Many of them stated that they faced challenges to plan life with the new cultural norms. Two participants said that they tended to postpone celebration of birthdays or their cultural festivals to the weekends.

Issues with Food:

Food issues may arise due to unfamiliar cuisines, dietary preferences, or limited access to familiar ingredients. Adapting to new eating habits can be challenging, affecting both physical well-being and emotional comfort.

Participant number 2 stated, "I haven't had any of my culture's food here since I got here." Participant number four pointed out, "I failed to locate my familiar food anywhere here."

Few participants also commented on their frequency of eating in restaurants as undesirable. At least one of them commented on restaurant food and its negative effects on her body.

Problems with Hot weather:

Climate differences can also pose challenges. Students may struggle with extreme temperatures, seasonal variations, or unfamiliar weather patterns. Adapting to a new climate requires adjustments in clothing, daily routines, and overall lifestyle.

Majority of the students would clearly prefer a cold climate but at the same time realized that all they can do is to endure.

Dealing with Language:

Language barriers can impede effective communication, making it harder to connect with others. This may block the migrants from building relationship with the neighborhoods.

Each participant verbalized that linguistic barriers were one of the causes for the initial challenges they encountered in Tamil Nadu. Though institutions offer all courses in English, it is pretty hard to engage with local community and learn basic Tamil phrases.

2. Difficulties in Relationship Building

All participants reported establishing relationships with people in the host nation as difficult. Participants expressed being unable to form long-term friendships with domestic students; insecurity in engaging with domestic students was noted as a challenge by all participants.

Feeling lonesome:

Loneliness is not uncommon due to challenges of adapting to a new environment. Language barriers, cultural differences and being away from familiar support networks can contribute to feelings of isolation.

Participant No.9 stated, "Loneliness creeps in, especially during quiet evenings; the cultural gap and language barriers amplify the sense of isolation."

Participant No.13 said, "The initial excitement fades, and you realize you're in a place where nobody knows your story; that isolation is hard to ignore."

Five participants expressed, "Adjusting to a new environment is tougher than I expected; sometimes, I feel really alone, missing the familiarity of home."

Roommate issues:

For many student migrants, one of the most pressing challenges arises from their living arrangements, particularly with roommates. The excitement of embarking on a new educational journey often collides with the reality of navigating shared living spaces with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This diversity can lead to clashes in lifestyles, routines, and expectations, sparking tensions that may escalate into conflicts. Participant No.13 stated, "Living with roommates as a student migrant has been quite challenging for me. There's this constant clash of lifestyles and habits. For instance, my roommate prefers

to stay up late, whereas I need quiet time to focus on my studies. It's tough finding a balance."

Some of them shared, "Living with roommates as a student migrant has been quite challenging for me. There's this constant clash of lifestyles and habits. For instance, my roommate prefers to stay up late, whereas I need quiet time to focus on my studies. It's tough finding a balance."

Problems in socialization

Cultural differences, linguistic hurdles, and unfamiliarity with social norms and conventions in their new environment can all make it difficult for immigrants to socialize with locals. Feelings of loneliness, discrimination, and homesickness can also make it difficult to socialize. It is crucial to recognize and appreciate the unique experiences and viewpoints that immigrants offer, as well as to develop open and welcoming communities to enable social integration.

One of the participants said, "Building meaningful relationships takes time, and it's hard when you're starting from scratch in a new place. I miss the familiarity of my hometown and the ease of socializing with people I grew up with."

Many of them expressed, "Adjusting to the social scene in a new place has been challenging. The language barrier makes it hard to connect with locals, and sometimes I feel like an outsider in social gatherings."

3. Self – Adaptation Issues

Confusion orienting self to new environment

Navigating a new environment as a student migrant can be a bewildering experience. The familiar landmarks, routines, and social dynamics that once provided comfort and stability are suddenly replaced by a whirlwind of unfamiliarity. From the moment they step foot into their new surroundings, student migrants are thrust into a world where even the simplest tasks can feel like daunting challenges. Simple errands like grocery shopping or using public transportation become nerve-wracking adventures, as student migrant's grapple with the nuances of local customs and systems. Each decision feels like a gamble, as they navigate the maze of their new reality without a guidebook or compass to point the way.

The following are some of the verbatim stated by the student migrants:

"Everything feels so different here. From the layout of the streets to the way people interact, I'm constantly trying to make sense of my surroundings. It's like I'm navigating through a maze without a map."

"I often find myself feeling lost and disoriented, like I don't belong anywhere. It's hard to shake off the feeling of being an outsider, even when surrounded by people."

Participant No. 9 expressed, "I thought I was prepared for the cultural differences, but nothing could have prepared me for the reality of living in a completely new environment. It's like I'm relearning how to navigate everyday life from scratch."

Adaptation to Eating habits

Culinary landscape as a student migrant presents its own unique set of challenges, often accompanied by a host of issues that can impact one's relationship with food. Cultural differences in dietary norms and availability of familiar ingredients may also influence the eating habits of student migrants.

One prevalent issue revolves around the availability and accessibility of familiar foods. Finding ingredients for traditional dishes or locating restaurants that serve authentic cuisine from their home country can be a daunting task. This

scarcity can lead to feelings of homesickness and dissatisfaction with the local food options, affecting their enjoyment of meals and overall nutrition

All the participants reported, "Finding familiar foods here is a struggle. Sometimes, I just want a taste of home, but it feels like I'm constantly searching for ingredients or restaurants that serve dishes from my culture."

Homesickness

Homesickness, the longing for familiar surroundings and the comfort of home, is a poignant emotion experienced by many student migrants. Being separated from family, friends, and the familiar rhythms of their homeland can evoke feelings of loneliness, sadness, and isolation.

Homesickness often manifests as a sense of disconnection from their cultural identity and a longing for the warmth and familiarity of home. The absence of familiar sights, sounds, and smells can intensify feelings of nostalgia, amplifying the sense of longing for the places and people they hold dear.

Most of the participants stated, "It's like there's a constant ache in my chest, this feeling of missing out on moments with my family and friends back home. No matter how hard I try to immerse myself in my new surroundings, there's always this lingering sense of homesickness."

Impact of culture on self presentation and language

Self-presentation among student migrants is influenced by cultural values and norms from both their home country and their host country. The process of adjusting to a new cultural environment involves negotiating their own cultural identity with the expectations and norms of their host country. This dynamic interplay between their native culture and the culture of their adopted country influences how they present themselves to others and how they use language to communicate.

Three participants verbalized, "Adjusting to a new culture while staying true to my roots is a constant balancing act. I want to fit in here, but I also don't want to lose touch with whom I am and where I come from".

Coping issues

Student migrants often encounter a myriad of coping issues as they navigate the transition to a new cultural and academic environment. From culture shock to academic stress and social isolation, these challenges can have a significant impact on their well-being and overall adjustment.

Participant No.5 stated, "Culture shock hit me hard when I first arrived, but I'm slowly learning to adapt. I've been immersing myself in local customs and traditions, and it's been eye-opening to experience new ways of life."

Physiological disturbances

Physiological disturbances among student migrants can also stem from the challenges of environmental changes. Adapting to new climates, pollution levels, and exposure to allergens can affect respiratory health and immune function. Student migrants may experience respiratory symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath, particularly if they have pre-existing conditions such as asthma or allergies. Exposure to new environmental allergens, such as pollen or air pollutants, can trigger allergic reactions and exacerbate respiratory symptoms. One common physiological disturbance among student migrants is disrupted sleep patterns. Changes in diet and nutrition can also contribute to physiological disturbances among student migrants.

Most of the students reported the following:

"Since moving to this new environment, my sleep patterns have been all over the place. I struggle to fall asleep at night and often wake up feeling exhausted."

"I never used to have allergies before, but since moving here, I've been sneezing and itching all the time. It's like my body is reacting to something in the environment."

"I've noticed changes in my appetite and digestion since coming here. The food is different, and I find myself experiencing stomachaches and bloating more frequently."

4. Adapting to Academic Challenges

Anxiety about education

One of the primary sources of anxiety for student migrants is academic expectations. Many students feel pressure to excel academically in order to justify the investment of time and resources in their education.

The fear of falling behind or not meeting academic standards can lead to heightened stress and anxiety, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with the educational practices and grading systems of their host state.

Cultural differences in educational practices and expectations can further exacerbate anxiety among student migrants.

Most of them stated, "I feel like I'm constantly on edge about my studies. The language barrier makes it so hard to keep up in class, and I worry that I'll never be able to meet the academic expectations here."

Adjustment to new academic environment

Academic adjustment is another significant aspect of the transition for student migrants. The academic expectations, teaching styles, and assessment methods of their host country may differ significantly from those of their home state, requiring students to adapt and learn new strategies for academic success. Students may struggle to keep pace with leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. Students may struggle to adapt to new teaching styles, classroom dynamics, coursework, understand academic conventions, and meet the standards of their new educational environment, assessment methods, which may differ significantly from what they are accustomed to in their home state.

All the students verbalized, "Navigating the academic system here is like learning a whole new language. The expectations and teaching styles are so different from what I'm used to, and it's been a steep learning curve."

5. Protective Factors:

Friends

Friends can offer a listening ear and emotional support during times of stress, homesickness, or uncertainty. Simply having someone to talk to and share experiences with can provide a sense of comfort and belonging.

Participant No.11 narrated, "Having friends who understand what I'm going through has been a lifesaver. They're always there to listen when I'm feeling homesick or stressed. I'm grateful to have friends from different backgrounds. They've taught me so much about their cultures and traditions, and it's made me feel more connected to this place." "

Parents

Parental relationships can provide crucial support to student migrants as they navigate the challenges of adapting to a new environment.

Majority of the students stated, "My parents have been my anchor. Their consistent support, words of encouragement, and invaluable advice has empowered me with the strength and determination to overcome the hurdles of adjusting to a new environment."

Approachable professors and other faculty

Professors can offer encouragement and constructive feedback to student immigrants, recognizing their strengths and efforts while also providing guidance for improvement. Positive reinforcement and personalized feedback can boost confidence and motivation, helping student immigrants navigate the challenges of adapting to a new academic environment. Professors can serve as mentors and role models for student immigrants, offering guidance and support beyond the classroom. Building mentorship relationships can provide student immigrants with valuable advice, networking opportunities, and career guidance as they navigate their academic and professional journeys.

Most of the students expressed, "My professors have been like mentors to me, guiding me through the challenges of adapting to a new culture and educational system. Their encouragement and understanding have boosted my confidence and made me feel capable of overcoming any obstacles."

Financial Security/ PMSSS

Access to financial funding is essential for student immigrants pursuing higher education, as it helps alleviate financial barriers and enables them to focus on their studies. Prime Minister's Special Scholarship Scheme designated for students of Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh region to offer needed financial assistance and recognition of their unique challenges and contributions.

All the students expressed, "The Prime Minister's Special Scholarship has been a lifeline for me and my family. It's allowed me to focus on my studies without worrying about financial constraints, and I'm committed to achieving academic excellence in return for this support."

Self optimism

Self-optimism fosters a positive outlook on the adaptation journey. Student migrants who maintain an optimistic perspective are more likely to perceive challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable obstacles. This positive mindset enables them to face adversity with resilience and determination, seeing setbacks as temporary setbacks rather than permanent barriers to success. Participant No. 10 & 4 noted, "Maintaining an optimistic outlook has been a key to my adaptation as a student migrant. Embracing each challenge as an opportunity for growth and learning has allowed me to navigate unfamiliar territory with resilience and determination".

DISCUSSION

The study attempted to investigate the four main questions of student happiness, challenges with adaptation, methods for overcoming obstacles, and variations in acculturation according to the year of study.

The majority of students are mostly pleased with their academic demands, but only partially with their physical needs, which include access to food, sleep, and a comfortable dorm environment.

The majority of them stated that their largest obstacle to adoption was language. Nos. 9 and 13 mentioned that blending in with roommates in a hostel made the adaption process

challenging, primarily because of language barrier, and that loneliness posed a serious concern.

The students maintained a positive attitude despite all of the cultural and academic barriers they encountered and used them as teaching tools for their own development. They demonstrated perseverance and determination in navigating unknown territory. Having support from friends, professors, and parents also helped foster confidence and make the process of transition smoother.

The cost of a higher education is one of the main obstacles to obtaining it. However, that was promptly handled by the PMSS fund, which greatly relieved the students and their families. Acculturation shock was lessened for the majority of students by learning about local norms and practices, which they employed as a coping technique to get acquainted to cultural and social differences.

Overall, regardless of whether the students are satisfied with having access to excellent education and other resources, the trauma of being away from family, abandoning customs and culture of their own, and giving priority to strange socio-cultural practices remains a "hard nut to crack".

SCOPE FOR FURTHER WORK

Psychological assessment can be done for Student immigrants periodically since acculturation is an unconscious process.

Supportive Psychotherapies and counselling can be offered to student migrants to develop the strategies to identify and tackle the difficulties.

Interventional studies can be done among student immigrants to equip them with the skills to face the challenges of acculturation.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the interstate student immigrants go through various blindfolded challenges in regards of acculturation. It also highlighted that supportive strategies they employ to overcome the challenges along with adaptive physical facilities will improve the students overall outcome.

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