

Influence of Intercultural Competence on Academic Adaptation of African Students

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Abstract:

A large number of international students face serious psychological and cultural adjustment issues while studying abroad. These may include challenges of living in a foreign culture, emotional issues, as well as academic problems associated with higher studies.

The results of a questionnaire survey conducted with 45 African international students in five disciplines in an Indian University, pursuing their bachelor, master and doctoral programmes, have been reported. The paper examined the predicting effects of the dimensions of intercultural competence- 'knowledge', 'attitude', 'skills' and 'awareness' on academic adaptation of African international students in India. The findings showed that attitude was particularly important and awareness was additionally important for academic adaptation of African international students. Implications for institutions and faculties of the host country, international students and future research were also considered in the paper.

Keywords: Knowledge, Attitude, Skills, Awareness, Academic adaptation, International students

1. Background

The experience of pursuing higher education in a different country always poses new challenges and opportunities for international students. "Study abroad" is defined as an academic learning experience that takes place outside one's home country" (Duke et al. 2014). During the past decade, India has attracted foreign students in large numbers. Some of the factors leading to the popularity of India are- the progress made by the country in the area of Information Technology, use of the English language as a medium of learning, the affordable price of higher education and the cultural versatility of the country. The total number of international students presently pursuing their higher studies in the country, is estimated to be around 48,000.

Among the international students in India, the largest group is constituted by the African students. The country is the topmost non-African developing nation, selected as a destination of higher education, by the African students. Sudan and Nigeria have been observed to be the third and fifth biggest source countries respectively of international students in India, as per All India Survey of Higher Education, conducted by UGC in 2019. The African students in the country are pursuing their education in varied disciplines such as Engineering, Management, Medicine, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy etc.

The major obstacles confronted by the African students during their stay in India are incidents of verbal and physical violence, various forms of economic exploitation, health

related issues, socio-cultural problems such as racial discrimination, psychological issues such as fear, anxiety and homesickness and adaptation to the new academic environment.

2. Literature review

2.1 Academic Adaptation

“The international students are more ‘student’ rather than being ‘foreigners’ and academic problems are one of the biggest concerns for them” (Furnham&Bochner, 1982; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Lewthwaite (1996) conducted a study on international students in New Zealand and found that for some students it was a pleasant experience to have so much freedom to select and design their research area. On the other hand, there was also a section of students who felt stressed in this situation. Some students stated that they did not think it to be culturally appropriate to approach their supervisors and build a rapport with them.

Hussain and Shen (2019) found that academic achievement of international students can be enhanced through their pre-departure preparedness, which includes awareness about the syllabi of courses, scholarship and their motivations to pursue higher education in a new country. On-campus orientation conducted by the host University should include information about campus life, institutional resources, academic requirements, sessions to make aware about the local culture, training about local language, extracurricular activities and friendship groups on social media, to reduce the feelings of nostalgia and the anxiety experienced in the new culture.

Cao and Meng (2020) stated that students having the personality trait of ‘conscientiousness’ are more systematic in their methods of learning and therefore had been consistently confirmed to show higher academic achievement. On the other hand, the neurotic students, due to their inability to manage routine situations, had lower academic achievement. They also assumed that the personality traits of ‘conscientiousness’ and ‘neuroticism’ would affect the learning of foreign language by international students.

The researchers have used different scales to examine the adjustment of students such as “College Adjustment Scale (Anton and Reed, 1991), the ‘Student Transition Questionnaire’ (Chertrand, 1992) and ‘College Inventory of Academic Adjustment’ (Borow, 1949, cited in Baker and Syrik, 1984)”. However, for the present study, academic adaptation as indicated by the “Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire ([SACQ], Baker and Syrik, 1999)” was selected due to its conceptualization of college adjustment as a construct with multiple dimensions, which includes a large number of variables. Some of these variables indicate the factors which are favorable for adjustment, while the others may point towards those factors which hinder the adaptation. This scale was validated by previous studies. Baker and Syrik (1980, 1984, 1989) found that academic adjustment depends on personal motivation, well-defined goals and satisfaction with the environment. Rientes et al (2012) used the SACQ and found that non-European international students reported low scores on social as well as academic adjustment, in comparison to those from Europe, in a study conducted for cross-institutional comparison, at five Dutch institutions. Glass et al. (2014) assessed the student adjustment, as conceptualized by the SACQ, at a research university in the US. Meng et al. (2018) employed the same tool to measure the adaptation of foreign students getting their education in Belgium. Mittelmeier et al. (2019) employed the SACQ to find about the adaptation challenges faced by students at a

University in South Africa. Lee et al. (2020) employed the SACQ to assess the adaptation of foreign students at an institution in Korea.

2.2 Intercultural Competence

Hofstede (1984, 1991, 2010) identified six dimensions along which the cultural values of different societies may be analyzed, which are enlisted below in Table 1:

Table 1- Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions:

Source: Hofstede, Geert (1991). Cultures and organizations: software of the mind. London: McGraw-Hill. ISBN9780077074746.

Cultural Dimension	Characteristic
"Power Distance"	"The extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally"
"Individualism"	"The degree to which people in a society prefer to be part of close knit networks or to be left alone to fend for themselves"
"Masculinity"	"The degree of preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards in comparison to that for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life"
"Uncertainty Avoidance"	"The degree of preference/aversion shown by a society towards unexpected or unknown events and ideas"
"Long-term Orientation"	"The degree of preference of a society for persistence, perseverance, saving and being able to adapt in comparison to that for short-term success and short-term emotional gratification"
"Indulgence"	"The degree to which a society allows the fulfillment of human desires related to enjoyment"

With reference to the aforesaid dimensions, Hofstede (1984, 1991, 2010) also indexed a range of differences among specific countries.

The scores on these dimensions of three African countries- Burkina Faso, Ghana & Nigeria along with those of India, are shown below in Table 2.

Table-2

Indexes of three African countries on Hofstede's cultural dimensions along with the value scores of India on each of the dimensions

(Source: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com>)

	"Power Distance"	"Individualism"	"Masculinity"	"Uncertainty Avoidance"	"Long Term Orientation"	"Indulgence"
Burkina Faso	70	15	50	55	27	18
Ghana	80	15	40	65	4	72
Nigeria	80	30	60	55	13	84
India	77	48	56	40	51	26

The African countries are collectivistic societies which promote strong relationships and long-term commitment to one's social network. The actions of the individual are affected by the opinion of the social networks to which one is affiliated. However, the Indian society exhibits both collectivistic as well as individualistic traits. Here, Hinduism is the major religion. Therefore, there is a belief that everyone has to go through a 'cycle of death and rebirth'. The manner of living the present life is responsible for the nature of rebirth experienced after death. There is a belief among Indians that people are themselves responsible for their present situation.

In general, Indians have a lower preference for avoiding uncertain and unexpected situations, in comparison to some of the African countries. Here, the people show a lesser willingness and drive to adopt change. They would prefer to comfortably settle into established roles and routines. While some of the Indians believe that this attitude empowers them to be more resourceful, others consider it to be a cause of misery. Due to this cultural difference, the African students are likely to face some challenges during their studies in India.

Some of the African countries have normative culture. They are strongly concerned about establishing the absolute truth and prefer to achieve quick results, while sticking to the norms and traditions of their society. The Indians believe that there are multiple truths and every seeker perceives truth differently. The concept of 'time' is not regarded as linear and therefore is not so important for Indians, as it may be for some other cultures. Many Indians are generally comfortable with discovering their goals and paths in life, rather than making their moves according to a pre-decided plan.

Countries such as Ghana and Nigeria have a culture of indulgence. They stress highly on the concept of 'leisure time'. India is generally regarded as a culture of 'restraint'. Many Indians do not give too much priority to 'leisure time' and believe in controlling their desires. Their actions are often subdued by social norms. Therefore, the African students

may experience difficulties in negotiating with some of the cultural differences, during their stay in India..

In spite of decades of studies conducted on intercultural competence, it is still widely debated as to which components to include in its scope and definition. "Bennett (1986, 1993) had proposed the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity" (DMIS)" which presented various approaches ranging from 'ethnocentric' to 'ethnorelative' view of cultural differences. Based on the DMIS, Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003) developed a new measure of intercultural competence, which is known as 'Intercultural Development Inventory' (IDI).

Using Delphi Technique, Deardorff (2006) identified the "core characteristics of intercultural competence". She stated the definition of intercultural competence, about which most consensus was reached among the experts was- "intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes". It was also found from this study that "the foremost component of intercultural competence was "an attitude of respect for other cultures", followed by "knowledge' and 'skills' about intercultural situations."

Some of the other researchers have also developed scales of intercultural competence, which may be used in survey research. These are- the "Behavioral Assessment Scale for Intercultural Competence (BASIC) (Koester &Olebe, 1988; Ruben & Kealey, 1979) and the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ISCI) (Bhawuk&Brislin, 1992)". The other prominent instruments developed by researchers in the area include the "Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI) (Olson & Kroeger, 2001) and the Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) (Fantini, 2000; 2006)".

Fantini (2000, 2006) developed the "Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC)" scale, to explore and assess the intercultural competence of British and Swiss participants in an international project in Ecuador. The scale was designed to assess the self-report of the participants about "the four dimensions of intercultural competence - 'knowledge', 'attitude', 'skills' and 'awareness'". The AIC included separate sections on personal characteristics such as "'flexibility', 'patience', 'sense of humor', 'level of interest' and 'motivation' to adjust to the host culture, language proficiency, participants' understanding of their styles of communication, their self-assessment of success achieved in intercultural areas such as maintaining good relationships, communicating with host country nationals and working together with them to accomplish tasks of mutual interest as well as a section on 'intercultural abilities', wherein the participants' 'knowledge', 'attitude', 'skills' and 'awareness' were self-reported by them. In order to validate his model, Fantini had also used qualitative methods such as interviews of the participants, the findings of which corroborated his assertions about intercultural competence. The scale developed by Fantini (2006) is consistent with common conceptualizations of intercultural competence (Aldawsari et al., 2018).

By definition, intercultural competence is a concept which is concerned with the adaptation of foreign students in the culture of the host country. The attitudes, skills and behaviors which may enable the adaptation of foreign students and allow them to focus on their studies, are reflected through this concept. It can provide the means to reduce the cultural differences encountered between the native and the new culture. It may also reduce the feelings of anxiety and fear about education in a foreign country. The students

who are intercultural competent may feel more comfortable and confident to study in the host country.

The aforementioned factors as well as the inclusion of multiple facets of intercultural adjustment by Fantini (2006), in his definition of the ICC construct (which included 'knowledge', 'attitude', 'skills' and 'awareness' as its dimensions), motivated the authors to make use of his instrument for the present study, which aims to assess the intercultural competence of African students.

2.3 Intercultural competence and academic adaptation:

The construct intercultural competence, as developed by Fantini (2006) included "four dimensions of intercultural competence- 'knowledge', 'attitude/affect', 'skills' and 'awareness'". A similar instrument had been designed by Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002), which is the "Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ)" to find out about intercultural effectiveness. They conducted their study on how academic adaptation is affected by factors such as "cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility, and social initiative", which are similar to the dimensions- 'Attitude' 'Skills', and 'Awareness' defined by Fantini (2006) in his explanation of the ICC construct. They found that the international students who scored lower on 'emotional stability' achieved a higher academic performance. They concluded that worries about failing the examinations, may have led the emotionally unstable group of international students to spend more effort in passing them, leading to higher academic performance. However, they stated that more studies are required to disentangle the relationship between 'emotional stability' and academic adaptation.

The effect of 'proficiency in the host language' on 'academic adaptation' has also been studied previously. Yu and Shen (2012) found self-confidence in using the second language as a major determinant predicting the academic adjustment of international students. They stated that the capability to interact with teachers and other students was an important requirement. Better interaction skills led to more familiarity with the academic environment and fulfillment of academic responsibilities. Chavoshi et al. (2017) proposed a 'Developmental Sequence Model to University Adjustment' and used the SACQ designed by Baker and Syrik (1989) to examine the factors predictive of undergraduate international student adjustment. Their findings suggested that the willingness of international students to be involved with the culture, language and people of the host country, irrespective of academic issues, would enable better academic adjustment, in comparison to those who view their experience of studying abroad as short-term and do not prioritize such involvement.

Hu et al. (2020) stated that CQ (cultural intelligence) can be an important means to find a relationship between 'proactive personality' and intercultural adjustment. They conducted a study to enquire how a 'proactive personality' is responsible for variations in intercultural adjustment along with the role of boundary conditions. They found that "CQ partially mediates the relationship between 'proactive personality' and academic adjustment", and "fully mediates that between 'proactive personality' and social adjustment".

2.4 Research Gap:

According to Yu and Shen (2012), “in the western countries, researchers in the area of cross-cultural psychology have conducted a considerable amount of research focusing on culture shock, socio-cultural adaptation and psychological adaptation. However, little attention in the area has been directed to investigation about the academic adaptation of international students.” Yu (2013) stated that “academic adaptation, emphasizing college impact on students’ positive learning outcome in higher education”, has not been sufficiently covered in studies of international students.

Similarly, there has been little empirical research conducted about how the dimensions of ‘intercultural competence’, as stated by Fantini (2006)- ‘Knowledge’, ‘Attitude’, ‘Skills’ and ‘Awareness’ may affect the academic adaptation of international students. The present study intends to examine the influence of these dimensions of intercultural competence on the academic adaptation. It has made an attempt to predict the relationship of the dimensions of intercultural competence of African students with their academic adaptation in India.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were to investigate:

- (1) How much variance in academic adaptation could be accounted for by ‘Knowledge’?
- (2) How much variance in academic adaptation could be accounted for by ‘Attitude’?
- (3) How much variance in academic adaptation could be accounted for by ‘Skills’?
- (4) How much variance in academic adaptation could be accounted for by ‘Awareness’?

Based on the above, the following hypotheses were posited:

Hypothesis 1. ‘Knowledge’ of African students is related to their academic adaptation.

Hypothesis 2. ‘Attitude’ of African students is related to their academic adaptation.

Hypothesis 3. ‘Skills’ of African students is related to their academic adaptation.

Hypothesis 4. ‘Awareness’ of African students is related to their academic adaptation.

3. Method

3.1 Procedure and Participants

Among the indirect methods of assessment of intercultural competence, self-report surveys are preferred despite some theoretical and methodological shortcomings, as these are readily available and the data collection and analysis is convenient and less time-consuming.

The study used quantitative methods, based on a questionnaire survey conducted on a group of African international students, studying at a Private University in Delhi-NCR, India. Hard copies of Self-Administered Questionnaires were distributed in-person to the students, by the researcher, in the campus. Data collection was conducted from July to November, 2020.

Background information was requested from the student sample and included: gender (measured with ‘M’ = male and ‘F’ = female), age-group (18-20, 20-22, More than 22 years), name of programme & year of study (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th), residential time in India (less than 12, between 12-24, more than 24 months). A total of 45 African international students (20 males and 25 females) completed and returned the questionnaire.

The descriptive data of respondents’ background characteristics are reported below from Tables 3.1- 3.8.

Background Characteristics of the Sample**Crosstabs****Table 3.1 -Notes**

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	Cases Used	Statistics for each table are based on all the cases with valid data in the specified range(s) for all variables in each table.
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[DataSet2]

Table 3.2 Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender Recoded *						
Residential Time in India(Months) Recoded	45	100.0%	0	.0%	45	100.0%
Gender Recoded * Study	45	100.0%	0	.0%	45	100.0%

Program Recoded						
Gender Recoded *						
Current Year of Study Recoded	45	100.0%	0	.0%	45	100.0%
Age Recoded *						
Residential Time in India(Months) Recoded	45	100.0%	0	.0%	45	100.0%
Age Recoded * Study Program Recoded	45	100.0%	0	.0%	45	100.0%
Age Recoded * Current Year of Study Recoded	45	100.0%	0	.0%	45	100.0%

Gender Recoded * Residential Time in India(Months) Recoded

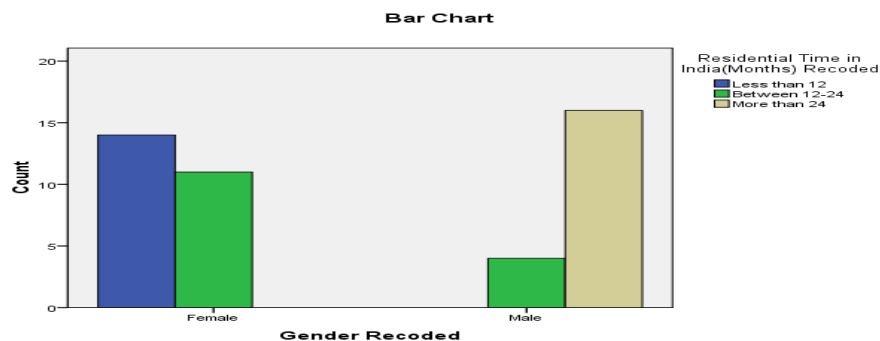
Table 3.3- Crosstab

Count		Residential Time in India(Months) Recoded			Total
		Less than 12	Between 12-24	More than 24	
Gender Recoded	Female	14	11	0	25
	Male	0	4	16	20
Total		14	15	16	45

Table 3.4- Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.120 ^a	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	44.429	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	30.231	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	45		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.22.



Gender Recoded * Study Program Recoded

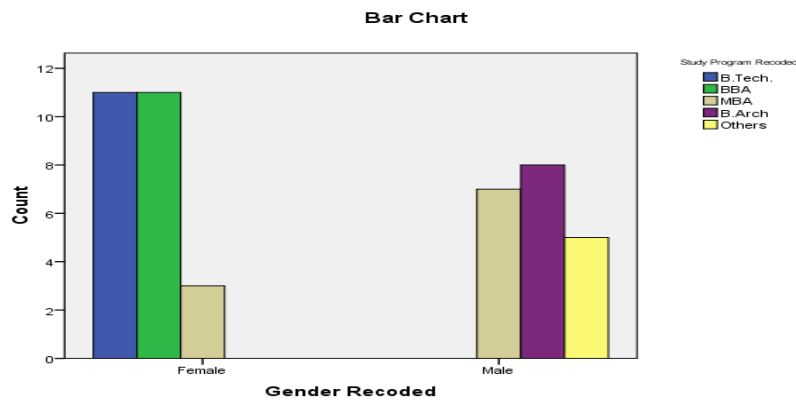
Table 3.5- Crosstab

Count		Study Program Recoded					Total
		B.Tech.	BBA	MBA	B.Arch	Others	
Gender Recoded	Female	11	11	3	0	0	25
	Male	0	0	7	8	5	20
Total		11	11	10	8	5	45

Table 3.6- Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.495 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	49.609	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	30.890	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	45		

a. 7 cells (70.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.22.



Gender Recoded * Current Year of Study Recoded

Table 3.7- Crosstab

Count		Current Year of Study Recoded					Total
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	
Gender Recoded	Female	12	13	0	0	0	25
	Male	0	1	10	4	5	20
Total		12	14	10	4	5	45

Table 3.8- Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	41.239 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	54.622	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	30.301	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	45		

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.78.

3.2 Measures

The survey questionnaire consisted of a questionnaire which included the following two scales:

3.2.1 Intercultural Competence

The 54-item scale - 'Intercultural Abilities' (Assessing Intercultural Competence-Part VII) in Fantini's (2006) study on intercultural competence (ICC), was a measure of the "four dimensions of the ICC construct i.e. "Knowledge', 'Attitude', 'Skills' and 'Awareness'". It was a measure of degree of development of the dimensions of intercultural competence among the respondents. The items of the scale assessed intercultural knowledge, attitude towards host language and culture, skills related to intercultural situations and awareness about the adjustments required in the personality to successfully adapt to the new culture.

3.2.2 Academic Adaptation

Baker and Syrik (1999) designed the "Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ)" to assess the adjustment of students. It is a 67-item self-report questionnaire. Each of the subscales of SACQ has a different area of focus. The 'Academic Adjustment' subscale measures the response of a student to the various educational demands of his studies. "The 'Social Adjustment' subscale contains items relevant to the interpersonal-societal demands of the college. The 'Personal-Emotional' subscale is designed to examine how a student is feeling psychologically and physically. The 'Attachment' subscale focuses on the satisfaction of a student with the college experience in general" as well as that of being at the present institution, in particular.

3.3.3 Adjustments in SACQ for the present study:

The present study assumes that the SACQ obeys the properties of a normal probability distribution. As per the properties of normally distributed scale, considering a limit of 2 standard deviations from the mean, approximately 4.5% of the values may lie outside 2 standard deviations (2.25% each on positive as well as negative sides) from the mean. The SACQ consists of 67-items. This implies that a maximum of 4 questions out of 67 may be dropped from the scale (for a limit of 2 standard deviations). Considering the conditions in which the present study was conducted, four questions of the scale were found to be unsuitable. Therefore the SACQ was reduced to a 63-item scale, for the present study.

3.3 Analysis of the data

The method of multiple correlation with simultaneous entry of predictor variables was used in data analysis. In this method, the criterion variable was 'academic adaptation' and the predictor variables were "knowledge, attitude, skills and awareness"- the dimensions of ICC. It was proposed to check the degree of covariation of 'Academic Adaptation' with 'Knowledge', 'Attitude', 'Skills' and 'Awareness'. Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) was calculated for 45 respondents. Two- Tailed Hypothesis-Testing Procedure at 1% level of significance, was applied.

The following SPSS output was obtained, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Correlations

		Knowledge	Attitude	Skills	Awareness	Academic_Adaptation
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	1	.736**	.616**	.462**	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.001	.944
	N	45	45	45	45	45
Attitude	Pearson Correlation	.736**	1	.760**	.699**	.788**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	45	45	45	45	45
Skills	Pearson Correlation	.616**	.760**	1	.768**	-.142
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.351
	N	45	45	45	45	45
Awareness	Pearson Correlation	.462**	.699**	.768**	1	.623**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	.000		.000
	N	45	45	45	45	45
Academic Adaptation	Pearson Correlation	.011	.788**	-.142	.623**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.944	.000	.351	.000	
	N	45	45	45	45	45

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As a sequel, the following alternative hypotheses were addressed:

(i) H_{11} : There is a significant correlation between 'Knowledge' and 'Academic Adaptation'
 $r = 0.011$

$p\text{-value} = 0.944 > 0.01 = \alpha$, the level of significance.

Thus, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Therefore, there is no significant correlation between 'Knowledge' and 'Academic Adaptation'.

(ii) H_{12} : There is a significant correlation between 'Attitude' and 'Academic Adaptation'
 $r = 0.788$

$p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.01 = \alpha$

Thus, we reject the null hypothesis.

Therefore, there exists a significant correlation between 'Attitude' and 'Academic Adaptation'.

(iii) H_{13} : There is a significant correlation between 'Skills' and 'Academic Adaptation'
 $r = -0.142$

$p\text{-value} = 0.351 > 0.01 = \alpha$

Thus, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Therefore, there is no significant correlation between 'Skills' and 'Academic Adaptation'.

(iv) H_{14} : There is a significant correlation between 'Awareness' and 'Academic Adaptation'
 $r = 0.623$

$p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.01 = \alpha$

Thus, we reject the null hypothesis.

Therefore, there exists a significant correlation between 'Awareness' and 'Academic Adaptation'.

4. Conclusions

4.1 No Significant Correlation between 'Knowledge' and 'Academic Adaptation'

The items under 'Knowledge' as defined by Fantini (2006), include knowing the definition of culture, norms of the host culture, historical and socio-political factors shaping the host culture, ability to describe a model of cross-cultural adjustment, etc. There has been no direct empirical evidence of a significant relationship between "knowledge" and "academic adaptation", in the previous studies. Poor academic adjustment of international students has been attributed to feelings of isolation experienced, due to lack of engagement with the local students (Trice, 2004). Zhang (2004) had stated that a different education system and new academic demands in the host country may cause poor academic adjustment of international students.

4.2 'Attitude' as a major predictor of 'Academic Adaptation'

Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002) had concluded that worries about failing the examinations, may have led the emotionally unstable group of international students to spend more effort in passing them, leading to higher academic performance. The factor 'emotional stability' has been included in the dimension 'Attitude' as defined by Fantini (2006). From the previous studies it has been reported that 'Integrative Motivation' is concerned with "a positive affective disposition towards the second language (L2)

community and the desire to achieve L2 proficiency in order to be a member of and develop a sense of belonging to L2 community” (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Lightbown & Spada, 1999). “Integrative Motivation” is an important factor responsible for academic adaptation (Yu, 2010). Glass and Westmont (2014) also found a significant relationship between a ‘sense of belongingness’ with academic success. The dimension ‘Attitude’ as defined by Fantini (2006) clearly includes ‘integrative motivation’ and ‘sense of belongingness’. The finding of the present study corroborates that ‘Attitude’ of international students affects their academic adaptation.

4.3 No significant correlation between ‘Skills’ and ‘Academic Adaptation’

The dimension ‘Skills’, as defined by Fantini (2006) includes items such as using models, strategies and techniques to learn the host culture, using information about the particular culture to enhance the style of interaction and playing an important role in sorting out culture related differences etc. There has been no direct empirical evidence of a significant relationship between “skills” and “academic adaptation”, in the previous studies. Therefore the finding of the present study about ‘skills’ may be attributed to the possibility that acquisition of intercultural skills requires specialized training and happens after spending a long time in a new country. It may also be more relevant in specific areas of work and may not be so important a factor while determining successful academic adjustment of international students.

4.4 ‘Awareness’ as a major predictor of ‘Academic Adaptation’

It is clear from the definition of ‘awareness’ proposed by Fantini (2006) that this dimension of intercultural competence refers to an in-depth self-examination by the individual wherein he analyses how the host-culture members perceive his social identity and the possible causes of their perceptions. He also examines whether any adjustments are required in his value-systems, to successfully adjust to the new culture. He assesses the level of the intercultural development of host-culture members who come in his contact and is also aware of the level of his own intercultural development. The ‘awareness’ dimension is concerned with the extent to which the individual assesses himself as suitable, to perform the roles of ‘communicator’, ‘facilitator’ and ‘mediator’ in intercultural situations.

Therefore, it may be inferred that an international student who shows high ‘awareness’, would readily engage himself with the host students and faculty members, whenever he is confronted with any hardships during his academic pursuits. Accordingly, it may be concluded that ‘awareness’ is one of the factors which leads to better academic adaptation of international students, which is verified by the above finding of the present study about the relationship between ‘awareness’ and ‘academic adaptation’.

5. Limitations:

Some of the researchers have expressed their concerns with the potential drawbacks of the self-report questionnaires characterizing the assessment of intercultural competence, whereas other scholars have doubted the capability of respondents to submit correct self-assessments.

This survey was confined to a particular Indian University and due caution should be exercised while generalizing the findings to all the African international students in

India. The present study was a cross-sectional study, therefore it was only able to provide a snapshot of the current situation. It could not observe the changes which happen with time in the intercultural competence or the academic adaptation of international students.

6. Implications and Strategies:

This study has practical suggestions for international students, host faculties and host institutions. Making efforts to improve the 'attitude' and 'awareness' of international students, would build more confidence among them and would lead to their satisfactory academic adaptation. The findings of the study suggest that it is important for the institutions, faculties and international student support offices to know and understand the kinds of support that would be helpful to the students who come to a foreign campus to pursue their higher studies. This would lead to the conduct of appropriate induction programmes and socio-cultural events for the international students. Active participation in these activities should be stressed, in order to ease their concerns and worries related to adaptation in the new environment. The objective of these activities should be to develop their intercultural attitudes and awareness about similarities and differences between their native culture and the new culture, which would enable them to deal in an appropriate manner with the specific studies-related challenges in the new environment.

Interactions involving local and foreign students should be encouraged through compulsory participation in extra-curricular and community events. The institutions may design a "buddy system", through which the international students may participate along with local students, in academic and socio-cultural activities which may increase the intercultural contact between them. This would lessen their anxiety levels and make them feel at ease in the new environment. Institutions should make efforts to achieve balance in the proportion of international students and local students enrolled in a specific programme. According to Jacob and Greggo (2001), "international students should be ready to develop friendship with diverse peer groups, understand non-verbal behavior, be ready to communicate with teachers and to get involved in the university community".

The study has some indications for future research. The future studies may be designed to be longitudinal, in order to contribute more towards establishment of causal relationships between variables (Bong, 1996). The findings of the present study may help to provide a suitable background for future researchers in the area, to help them develop a model showing how the dimensions of intercultural competence, affect the academic adaptation of international students.

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