

Adjustment Problems of Non-Resident Students Pursuing Higher Education in Mizoram: A Critical Review of Literature

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Abstract

Adjusting to a new environment is critical for non-resident students' successful engagement with their learning at colleges and university. Identifying factors that causes problems in their adjustment will be of great significance to help improve their overall development. This paper critically reviews previous literature that investigated issues that hinder non-resident students' adjustment in higher education institutions. The findings indicated that language barrier, social support, length of stay, perceived discrimination or prejudice, establishing relationships, and homesickness were the most significant variables related to the adjustment problems of non-resident students.

Keywords : Adjustment Problems, Non-Resident Students, Higher Education, Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Leaving home to pursue higher education is an important milestone for students. However, the transition from home to higher education can be challenging, especially for students studying outside their home state. Many students across the country are enrolled in different institutions both in and outside the country to pursue higher education. As informed by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), approximately 1.2 million Indian students are studying abroad, including all streams of education (The Hindustan Times, 2023).

At the same time, students across the country also move from state to state in pursuance of higher education in different fields. Due to the expansion of professional higher educational institutions in Mizoram, students from various states across the country migrated in order to receive education. With the increase in non-resident students studying in Mizoram, certain problems and challenges are inevitable and could lead to different kinds of problems in their studies and everyday life.

Moving from secondary education to higher education can be a stressful endeavour for all students. Transitioning and adapting to new academic and social environments requires time and patience. Higher education for non-resident students is even more stressful for those who must contend with a second

or third language, a new culture, new academic values, and different expectations from professors and classmates. As stress increases social and academic life will be impacted for the students that find it difficult to adjust, and readjust, or who do not seek available resources to help them cope with this period of their lives (Misra and Castillo, 2004).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the current conceptual understanding of adjustment of non-resident students in higher education.
2. To provide an overview of the related literature pertaining to adjustment problems of non-resident students in higher education.

CONCEPT OF ADJUSTMENT

Adjustment means to fit, make suitable, adapt, arrange, modify, harmonize or make correspondent. Thus, when we make an adjustment between two things, we adapt or modify

one or both of them to correspond to each other. Adjustment is the maintenance of a harmonious relationship between man and his environment. Good (1995) state that adjustment is the process of finding and adopting modes of behaviour suitable of the environment or the changes in the environment. Adjustment is the establishment of a satisfactory relationship, as representing harmony, conformance, adaption or the like. An individual's adjustment is adequate, wholesome or healthful to the extent that he has established harmonious relationship between himself and the conditions, situations and persons who comprise his physical and social environment. Adjustment, in all its meanings implies a satisfactory adaptation to the demands of day-to-day life.

Studying in a new environment triggers different reactions among non-resident students. Thus, adjusting to a new culture can be a challenging and stressful experience. Rigorous academic demands along with the challenges to adjust to a new culture may put non-resident students at a greater risk than students in general. (Lin and Yi, 1997) mentioned that international students face common as well as their own unique problems such as racial discrimination, language problems, accommodation difficulties, dietary restrictions, financial stress, misunderstandings, and loneliness. Furthermore, coming from different cultures, international students cannot escape from cultural shock and are often with astounding difficulties. Students differ greatly in adjusting to their new circumstances and studies. Some adjust easily while others find it very difficult.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A systematic search of empirical articles was conducted and the number of reviews collected are 26 which ranges from the year 1987-2016. Even though the reviews may not have identified all of the articles relevant to the topic, the studies encountered are likely to be representative of the current knowledge base. Seven major findings in the literature concerning the adjustment problems experienced by non-resident students enrolled in higher education are categorised as under. Each of these issues are discussed in turn with illustrations from the literature.

i) **Language Barrier**

Samuelowicz (1987) indicated that international students faced the following difficulties: 'English language proficiency, coping with the Australian educational system and its demands, cultural adjustment to life in a foreign country and making good use of support services. On the basis of her own research, she added another two difficulties: ineffective or inappropriate study approaches and poor participation in group discussion. Anderson et al. (2009) argued that adjustment issues of international students could be viewed from five main aspects:

psychological issues (e.g. homesickness, isolation, loneliness, hopelessness, helplessness, frustration, depression), academic issues (e.g. language and communication, difficulty in adjust to the academic culture, use of library structures and services), sociocultural issues (e.g. cultural shock, cultural fatigue, racial discrimination), residential transition challenges (e.g. counseling and health services, documentation issues, dietary restrictions) and career development issues.

Swagler and Ellis's (2003) study, in turn, revealed that apprehension about speaking English affected the adjustment of Taiwanese students.

Poyrazli and Kavanaugh's (2006) study showed that English proficiency significantly affected the level of student sojourners' academic adjustment.

In another study, Mittal and Wieling (2006) qualitatively examined the experiences of doctoral-level international students studying marriage and family therapy. Results suggested that fluency in English affected participants' experiences.

Likewise, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) found in their qualitative study that English language competency was an ongoing concern for internationals.

Dao, Lee, and Chang's (2007) study showed that Taiwanese international students who had lower perceived English fluency were at risk of depressive feelings

Gebhard (2012) conducted a study called "International students' adjustment problems and behaviours" and found that international students faced difficulties with academics, social interaction, and handling emotions. Not surprisingly, many students emphasized challenges with academics, but a language problem that surprised some students was academic reading. Students also expressed emotional challenges of adapting to another culture. To manage their problems, students made use of behaviours that can facilitate adapting to the new culture, as well as behaviours that can obstruct them from adapting.

Ackah and Kuranchie (2015) in their study "Foreign students' adjustment in early days of their university education: the stress and strains". The findings revealed that respondents had language and cultural differences as challenges they experienced especially outside lecture halls. The international students claimed that some of the domestic students used local languages in some social discourses at the hostels, which made it difficult for the international students to interact with them. The participants indicated that some lecturers' approach to teaching, which was purely lecture, was alien and

uncomfortable to them. The teaching approaches they experienced were at variance with what they had had during their pre-tertiary education time.

Baklashova and Kazakov (2016) in their study of “Challenges of international students’ adjustment to a higher education institution” revealed that international students faced various problems as they had to deal with people, society and university to control their psychological condition, as well as behavioural changes in order to adapt to the new settings. The students had difficulties in communicating with their teachers because of cultural differences, expectations, which were different from the expectations of the teachers, as well as language barriers. They also faced challenges not only in the classroom but also in their social life. The participants experienced culture shock due to differences in views and values.

ii) Social Support

Atri, Sharma, and Cottrell (2007) found in their study that one type of social support, namely, emotional support, was significantly related to sojourners’ mental health. Relatedly, findings from Dao et al. (2007) indicated that Taiwanese international students who were at risk of depressive feelings were more likely to be those who had the perception of limited social support.

Ye (2006) investigated the relationship between sociocultural and psychological aspects of cross-cultural adaptation of Chinese international students in the U.S. and the support they perceived from traditional support networks and online ethnic social groups. Findings indicated that perceived support from interpersonal networks in the host country and from online ethnic social groups was negatively related to social difficulties.

iii) Length of Stay

In an attempt to determine whether students from non-Asian countries had higher scores on adjustment scales than students from Asian countries, Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) found that students who had lived in the U.S. previously scored significantly higher on the Social Adjustment and Institutional Attachment subscales than those who had not.

In turn, Wilton and Constantine (2003) reported that for international students, greater length of stay in the U.S. was associated with lower levels of psychological distress.

Relatedly, findings in Trice’s (2004) study indicated that “the longer student sojourners had lived in the U.S., the more frequently they socialized with American students”.

In Mittal and Wieling’s (2006) qualitative research, findings indicated that length of stay in the U.S. affected the experiences of internationals

iv) Perceived Discrimination or Prejudice

Sodowsky and Plake (1992) studied both the overriding culture effect and effects of specific sociocultural variables among international students, scholars, and new immigrants in America. Findings indicated that Africans, Asians, and South Americans perceived more prejudice than Europeans. In addition, international students tended to perceive prejudice significantly more than did the permanent residents and visiting international scholars (pp. 56-58).

In another exploratory study, Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Cadwell, and Utsey (2005) qualitatively examined the cultural adjustment experiences of Kenyan, Nigerian, and Ghanaian international college students in the United States. According to their findings, all of the interviewees reported prejudicial or discriminatory treatment. Constantine, M. G., Anderson, Also employing a qualitative general mode of inquiry, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) found that student sojourners experienced different forms of discrimination primarily outside of campus.

In another study, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found that international students reported higher levels of discrimination than American students. Internationals who had lived in the U.S. longer also reported higher levels of perceived discrimination.

Wu et.al, (2015) in their study “International student’s challenge and adjustment to college” revealed that international students encountered different challenges in the US. They have to deal with the people, society, school, psychological status, and behavioural changes in order to adapt to the new environment. The students noted prejudice and discrimination in their academic and social lives. Thus, they were marginalized in class or in social events. Most participants reported 2. It was particularly difficult for those students who did not have relatives or acquaintances nearby.

v) Establishing Relationships

Challenges in establishing relationships outside of their shared ethnic community (Olivas & Lee, 2006; Ward et al.,2008) specifically relating to lack of compatible social support within the host community.

Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found in their investigation that participation in an ethnic community via the establishment of strong ties with other co-culturalists was the most important factor influencing the personal adjustment of international students.

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vi) Homesickness

Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found that international students reported higher levels of homesickness than American students. Moreover, levels of discrimination among international students predicted their level of homesickness.

Tochkov, Levine, and Sanaka (2010) examined the incidence and determinants of homesickness experienced by international students using two samples: a sample of international college students from India and one of students from the United States. Findings indicated that international students from India experienced significantly higher levels of homesickness than American freshmen.

Anderson et al. (2009) argued that adjustment issues of international students

could be viewed from five main aspects: psychological issues (e.g. homesickness, isolation, loneliness, hopelessness, helplessness, frustration, depression), academic issues (e.g. language and communication, difficulty in adjust to the academic culture, use of library structures and services), sociocultural issues (e.g. cultural shock, cultural fatigue, racial discrimination), residential transition challenges (e.g. counseling and health services, documentation issues, dietary restrictions) and career development issues.

vii) Academic problems

Malakloulunthu and Selan (2011) in their study “Adjustment problems among international students in Malaysian private higher education institutions” revealed that the adjustment problems related to academic, religious, personal, and social adjustment problems were rated high, with financial, and language adjustment problems showing the least impact.

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uncomfortable to them. The teaching approaches they experienced were at variance with what they had had during their pre-tertiary education time.

Table 1 summarizes seven convergent findings that emerged in this review associated with the adjustment problems of non-resident students.

Sl. No.	Adjustment Problems	No. of Reviews	Name of Author	Major Findings
1.	Language Barrier	10	i. Baklashov and Kazakov (2016) ii. Ackah and Kuranchie (2015) iii. Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) iv. Mittal and Wieling (2006) v. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) vi. Dao, Lee, and Chang (2007) vii. Gebhard (2012) iii. Samuelowicz (1987) ix. Anderson et al. (2009) x. Swagler and Ellis (2003)	Lack of English proficiency, lack of fluency in English language, Problems using local language inside and outside the classroom, Difficulties in communicating with classmates and teachers, Difficulties in making friends, Communication barrier inside and outside the campus
2.	Social Support	3	i. Atri, Sharma, and Cottrell (2007) ii. Dao et al. (2007)	Lack of emotional support, lack of relation with others, less

			iii. Ye (2006)	interpersonal relationship
3.	Perceived Discrimination or Prejudice	4	i. Sodowsky and Plake (1992) ii. Anderson, Berkel, Cadwell, and Utsey (2005) iii. Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) iv. Wu et.al, (2015)	Marginalized in class or in social events, experienced social isolation and loneliness, discrimination outside the campus, academic and social difficulties due to being an outsider
4.	Length of Stay	4	i. Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) ii. Wilton and Constantine (2003) iii. Trice (2004) iv. Mittal and Wieling (2006)	Lack of socialising with resident students, lesser length of stay results in higher levels of distress compared to those who stayed for a longer period of time.
5.	Establishing Relationships	5	i. Olivas & Lee (2006) ii. Ward et al., (2008) iii. Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) iv. Gebhard (2012) v. Wu et.al, (2015)	Lack of compatible social support within the host community, difficulty in making friends, lack of social interaction skills, lack of relatives/acquaintances, communication problems, lack of student support service.

6.	Homesickness	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Poyrazlı and Lopez (2007) ii. Tochkov, Levine, and Sanaka (2010) iii. Anderson et al. (2009) 	Discrimination, language problem, isolation, academic problems, difficulty in making friends, culture shock.
7.	Academic Problems	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Malaklounthu and Selan (2011) ii) Wu et al. (2015) iii) Anderson et al. (2009) iv) Gebhard (2012) v) Ackah and Kuranchie (2015) 	Marginalized in class or in social events, loneliness, frustration, language and communication problems, racial discrimination, different and unfamiliar teaching approaches/strategies, difficulty in using institutional facilities and resources.

integrate services or create programmes within the university that promotes wellness and that makes the transition and adjustment of non-resident students less stressful.

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CONCLUSION

This review focused on previous literature on non-resident students' adjustment problems and summarized these different problems which are categorized into seven categories: language barrier, social support, perceived discrimination or prejudice, length of stay, homesickness, establishing relationships, academic problem. These findings can be used to guide the implementation of support programs designed to contribute to a successful academic experience for non-resident students. Universities and colleges should be encouraged to

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