

Bridging Cultures: Fostering Inclusivity for International Students in Educational Institutions in Bangalore

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of cross-cultural interventions in mitigating social exclusion and fostering intercultural understanding among international students in Bangalore, India. Addressing pressing issues of marginalization and cultural disconnect, the study aims to evaluate existing intervention programs and their impact on academic success and well-being. Employing an empirical approach, the research first assesses current levels of exclusion and understanding, followed by a rigorous evaluation of an annual intervention program. Ultimately, the study seeks to inform the development of dynamic teaching practices and inclusive policies, fostering a more supportive and culturally diverse academic environment for international students in Bangalore.

Keywords: International students, social exclusion, intercultural understanding, intervention programs.

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the last several decades, there has been a substantial rise in the number of students who are studying in other countries. According to Kearney and Lincoln (2017) and Wen and Hu (2019), higher education institutions in nations such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, as well as more recently in areas of Asia and the Middle East, have developed a variety of techniques to attract students from other countries. Institutions have also made attempts to accommodate foreign students by providing support services and rethinking systems linked to teaching, learning, and engagement (Ramachandran, 2011). These efforts have been made in conjunction with these initiatives. Over the past decade, Sociologists have started to focus on the experiential dimension of higher education, showing how higher education is not a neutral environment. Social markers such as class, gender and ethnicity significantly shape and structure students' abilities and experiences in higher education (Stuber 2011; Netz and Sarcletti 2021).

Sociological studies particularly indicate that students from different socio-economic and/or migration backgrounds arrive with different levels of economic, social and cultural capital at higher education, which has an important impact on their higher education experiences (Stevens, Armstrong, and Arum 2008; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Hurst 2018). Several studies highlighted, for example, how students with a different socioeconomic background engage in different activities throughout higher education (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Walpole 2003; Wilbur and Roscigno 2016; Pascarella et al. 2004). Institutions of higher learning have become more globally integrated in the last few decades,

dramatically altering the traditional model of higher education. A broad and active community of foreign students who are looking for educational possibilities outside their national boundaries has emerged as a result of this transition. International students are confronted with a wide range of problems as they negotiate the challenging terrain of a new cultural and social context. While this trend has substantially enhanced the cultural fabric of host institutions, it has also given birth to a spectrum of challenges that these students encounter. The widespread problem of social isolation, which is a phenomenon that presents a significant danger to the comprehensive educational experience of individuals who are studying abroad, is at the forefront of these issues. Compared to Indian citizens and permanent residents, international students do not have the same ability to participate socially, economically, politically or culturally within the community and the social dimension, international students frequently lose the support of family, friends and community when they move overseas to study (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). Students often find it difficult to replace these relationships due to language barriers, cultural differences, and heavy study and work-loads. These factors limit time for socialising. Limited financial resources also reduce students' ability to participate in many common social activities. The shrinking of the world has led to the continuous contact between people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Zakaria, 2000; Montagliani & Giacalone, 1998). The interdependency among the people of different countries has been increased to a large extent. People visit other countries for multiple reasons like education, health and business purposes etc. But their success is dependent upon the extent to which one becomes able to read the cultural patterns of the country visited which affects his/her overall adjustment with various challenges in the host country.

It may be mentioned here that India has been one of the favoured locations for education especially in case of the students belonging to the countries like Nepal, Afghanistan, Sudan, Bhutan, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Iran, Yemen, and Sri Lanka.

The foreign student's enrolment is increasing every year as in 2011-12, the total number of foreign students enrolled in Indian Universities and Colleges were 31632 (AISHE 2011-12) but this number has been increased as 46,144 (AISHE 2017-18) foreign students enrolled in 2017-18 in Indian Universities and Colleges. Karnataka is one of the advanced state of India providing higher education through reputed private and government universities that is why foreign students are attracting to continue their study in Bangalore in different streams like Science, Engineering, and Social Science etc. The importance of the study cannot be understated, as it is addressing the pressing concerns faced by international students within educational institutions in Bangalore. Social exclusion and cultural misunderstandings not only affect the students themselves but also have repercussions on the broader educational community. One of the major challenges faced by foreign students is the difficulty in adapting to the host country. The adverse impact of this phenomenon on students' scholastic achievements and subsequent attrition from higher education institutions is evident. By promoting intercultural understanding and reducing social exclusion, the study seeks to contribute to the creation of a more harmonious and culturally diverse learning environment, fostering a sense of belonging and academic success for international students. It commences with a comprehensive assessment of the current social exclusion and intercultural understanding levels among international students. Following this, as culturally sensitive intervention program conducted annually within the educational institution in Bangalore, a rigorous evaluation will be conducted to gauge the program's effectiveness in reducing social exclusion and improving intercultural understanding. To strengthen the global competitiveness of Indian universities, it is necessary to consider the structural differences among universities and assess the

effectiveness of policies in promoting internationalization (Pranjali, Kirloskar., N.R., Inamdar, 2022). Overall, creating an inclusive environment for international students in educational institutions in India requires adopting dynamic teaching practices, promoting social inclusivity, and ensuring consistent efforts towards internationalization. This research is poised to yield valuable insights and practical recommendations, enabling educational institutions to better support international students and promote intercultural harmony within their campuses in Bangalore.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the study:

- To assess the current levels of social exclusion among international students in educational institutions in Bangalore city.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention program in achieving its intended outcomes in institutions within Bangalore city.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the experiences of international students are investigated. These experiences include their participation in activities that include other cultures, instances of social exclusion, and the potential effectiveness of interventions that are designed to promote inclusion. In a number of important areas, the data reveals fascinating insights and encourages more investigation.

Demographics and Participation:

It is important to give further thought to the study's concentration on UAE students, who made up 41.4% of the international population within the campus. This study offers significant insights into the experiences of the nations examined in the research (Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Syria) as well as foreign students in general. Nevertheless, it also raises concerns about the generalizability of the results to other ethnicities. To resolve this problem, more inquiry conducted by increasing the inclusiveness of the participants. The majority of undergraduate students, namely about 80.8%, are essentially distinguished by their distinct obstacles and requirements. Nonetheless, the scanty presence of postgraduate students (1.0%) and PhD students (18.2%) creates a void in our comprehension of their distinct encounters.

Intercultural understanding and social exclusion:

The university has shown a strong commitment to fostering intercultural understanding, as evidenced by the noteworthy revelation that 63.6% of students participate in activities that include other cultures. Nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance to carry out a more comprehensive investigation of the 27.3% of individuals who have not participated. Having a thorough understanding of the underlying problems (such as a lack of information, time constraints, and so on) is very necessary in order to devise specific outreach strategies. It is concerning that 27.3% of overseas students are socially marginalized. This is a problem that should be addressed. In order to establish solutions that are effective, it is essential to recognize the specific factors that contribute to this predicament. Some of these factors include constraints on financial resources, difficulty in communicating due to language barriers, and cultural differences. Additionally, it is required to do additional research in order to have an understanding of the perspectives held by the 9.1% of individuals who are unclear about the possibility of being excluded.

Intervention programs and its subsequent effects:

The overwhelming endorsement (72.7%) for the implementation of cultural awareness programs confirm

the study emphasis and indicates a possible remedy. Nevertheless, the "Maybe" replies, accounting for 27.3% of the total, indicate uncertainty over the program's precise content and presentation. This highlights the need for future improvement based on input from participants. The favorable assessment of the intervention program's efficacy 63.6% "Yes" and 36.4% "Maybe" suggests its capacity to meet defined requirements. Nevertheless, the "Maybe" replies underscore the need for ongoing assessment via focus groups or in-depth interviews to pinpoint areas that require improvement. The substantial overall satisfaction ratings, with 45.5% and 36.4% of respondents giving a rating of 5 or 7, are promising. However, the 9.1% who rated it as 6 indicate that there is still potential for development. Ongoing feedback and program adjustment, informed by participant participation, are essential for optimizing efficacy. The moderate hopefulness about the program's capacity to be sustained in the long run (45.5% "Maybe") highlights the need of continuous assistance, resolving underlying cultural disparities, and establishing procedures to uphold favorable outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the experiences of foreign students have been investigated. Specifically, the study has investigated their participation in intercultural activities, instances of social exclusion, and the possible influence of interventions that target the promotion of inclusion. In spite of the fact that the results provide encouraging insights and bring attention to a robust institutional commitment to promoting comprehension, they also unearth knowledge gaps and areas that need more inquiry. Indicative of a real desire for connection and a dedication to constructing bridges between different cultures is the high level of engagement in intercultural activities, as well as the favorable appraisal of the intervention program. The general satisfaction with the program's performance in eliminating social isolation is another factor that lends extra significance to this point. However, in order to maintain a cautious optimism on long-term durability, it is necessary to provide continuous support, adapt in order to address underlying cultural differences, and use reinforcement mechanisms in order to guarantee sustained change. Concerns have been raised over the generalizability of the results, despite the fact that the emphasis on students from the UAE provides unique insights into their experiences. Through the diversification of the participant pool to include a larger variety of academic levels and countries, future research should try to achieve a greater degree of inclusion. However, in order to build successful treatments and focused outreach tactics, it is essential to have a solid knowledge of the factors that contribute to students' lack of engagement in intercultural activities as well as the experiences of students who are subjected to social exclusion. In order to go ahead, it is necessary to acknowledge and appreciate difference and to build bridges of understanding. Creating a more inclusive environment in which all students, regardless of their background or academic level, feel welcomed, valued, and empowered to thrive can be accomplished by addressing the challenges that have been identified. These challenges include limited generalizability, underrepresented academic levels, reasons for non-participation, and the specific needs of students who are excluded from being included. This research urges us to continually improve our interventions, adapt to changing demands, and push for policies that promote intercultural understanding and social inclusion inside academic institutions. It acts as a stepping stone from which we may go forward. As a conclusion, this study, despite the fact that it provides significant insights and good signs, also highlights the need of continuing to explore and actively working together. We can establish a genuinely inclusive and inviting atmosphere for all students by recognizing the hurdles, embracing

diversity, and actively developing bridges of understanding. This will help us cultivate a global society in which differences are embraced and individual contributions are held in high esteem.

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