

THE NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS IN A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND STUDENT ADMINISTRATORS

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Abstract

Research in the West has identified a number of adjustment problems for international students. This has helped student administrators in these countries and their international students to take informed measures that help make international student sojourn much bearable. Unfortunately, very little is known regarding international student adjustment issues in developing countries. This study examined data from 120 international students of a South African university in order to determine their adjustment challenges. Results suggest that respondents experienced numerous adjustment problems similar to those encountered internationally, thus global measures may be borrowed to mitigate problems common to South African universities.

Keywords: South Africa; international student; adjustment problems

1. INTRODUCTION

The international student adjustment literature is replete with studies conducted in the West. This has led to identification of the types and nature of adjustment problems that international students are likely to face in their educational sojourn in the western world. This knowledge can be used and is in all probability used by student administrators in the Western world universities to put systems in place in order to counteract these problems. The same knowledge can help prospective international students destined for Western country universities brace themselves up to face and deal with the often hostile foreign university environment. The implication is that, student administrators and international students have reliable information that they can use to take proactive action to make the international student experience more enjoyable.

As observed by Dzansi (2006), the same cannot however be said of the developing country context where there is little to no information on the kinds and types of problems international students are likely to face. This problem is no doubt due to the dearth of empirical research on the phenomenon in the developing country context. This situation occurs despite empirical research results indicating that international students' adjustment problems can differ significantly across countries and according to a number of demographic factors (Dzansi, 2006).

This situation has detrimental implications/consequences especially for international students and student administrators in the developing country universities. For example instruments used in Western countries may be inappropriate for the developing country context and may not provide administrators in third world universities with meaningful insight for managing the adjustment challenges of their international students (Dzansi, 2006). This paper reports the results of a study that investigated the types and nature of international students' adjustment difficulties in a typical developing world university, the Central University of Technology (CUT), Free State, South Africa.

2. DEFINING THE “INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADJUSTMENT PROBLEM”

It is deemed important to establish an operational definition for the term international student adjustment problem since there is no agreement on what it really means due to its multifaceted nature (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998:701). According to these authors, while some use the concept to refer to whether a student experiences specific problems or not, others use it to refer to the process by which students avoid some form of psychological distress. Nonetheless, the authors note some similarities in definitions. For example they noted the general agreement that student adjustment is a transitional process that unfolds over time as the student learns to cope with exigencies of the university environment.

Wang (2004) defined the concept as “strategies and process through which international students avoid or overcome some form of psychological and conceptual distress”. Maundeni (1999:28) regards it as “the process whereby individuals enter into physical relationships with their environment”. Yeung (1980:51) sees adjustment as “the process of finding and adapting modes of behaviour or attitudes that are suitable to the environment, to changes in the environment, or in response to a new environment”. Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998:701) on their part believe student adjustment has to do with the avoidance of psychological distress which manifests in self-esteem and define student adjustment as the maintenance or achievement of high self-esteem by the international student (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998:709).

In all these definitions the words process, distress, and environment are commonly used. We believe that international student adjustment has to do with the student's ability to cope with difficulties/problems posed by new social and academic environment in order to achieve academic objectives. Consequently and for the purpose of this study, international student adjustment is operationally defined as the international students' ability to easily overcome difficulties/problems in the process of adapting to a new social and academic environment. This definition allows one to consider both social and academic factors that make the international students' adaptation to the environment difficult.

3. THE CONTEXT WITHIN WHICH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS STUDY AT CUT

CUT, is a university undergoing transformation. It is one of the previous Technikons that are now known as Universities of Technology (UoTs). This transformation is not akin to CUT only. In fact, universities in South Africa be it the former Technikons or the traditional universities have undergone one type of transformation or the other, all aimed at bringing parity to the hitherto fragmented South Africa's tertiary education system through the development and implementation of several far-reaching higher education policies that commenced almost two decades ago. As a result of the post 1994 transformation in South Africa's education system, today, easily visible changes have taken place in the social, cultural, and academic lives of CUT students.

For example, there is now a multiplicity of social groupings that were not apparent in the past. Such social groupings include among others, the 'poor' versus the more 'affluent' and 'black' versus 'white' just to mention two. The emergence of these groupings is largely a direct result of legislation that has made it possible for all, irrespective of social background to attend university (Dzansi, 2006).

Apart from the changing social structure, transformation in the South African higher education system has also created a more multicultural environment in South African universities. For example, legislation has compelled universities to embrace internationalisation (mobility of students and staff). As a result of all these CUT has experienced increased diversity of students and staff. A consequence of this diverse population is the adoption of a language policy to take care of the different cultural groupings. Thus, although CUT is an English medium institution, Afrikaans, Sesotho, and Setswana remain important languages of communication because the university population is composed of students and staff who speak predominantly these languages. CUT is also now a predominantly black institution with fewer whites than pre-1994. It is within these contexts that the international students have to study.

4. CUT INTERNATIONAL STUDENT NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

Compared to pre-1994, CUT now admits a significant number of international students. However, data supplied by the Student Enrolment Service indicates a declining international student population in recent years. According to official statistics released by Student Enrolment Service, the number of international students on the books of CUT in 2003 was 1002; in 2004, the figure fell to 918; in 2005 it further fell to 768, by June 2006 there were only 460. In 2007 the number slightly rose to 532, in 2008 it was 582 and at the beginning of 2009 there were 499 international students at CUT (CUT, 2009).

5. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.1. Problem statement

The above figures indicate a general declining trend in international student enrolment at CUT but no one seems to know the cause. Research elsewhere however indicates that international students experience a host of adjustment problems that can impact their attrition. In fact, the impact of adjustment problems on student numbers is well documented. Maundeni (1999:28) argues that student adjustment can be positive or negative with positive adjustment occurring when the student experiences harmony with the environment and negative adjustment occurring when the experience is not harmonious.

In this study it is assumed that: (1) International students do not live in harmony with the CUT environment. In other words, the environment of the CUT creates adjustment problems for them. (2) These problems make international students' stay uncomfortable and the discomfort may be responsible for their dwindling number. (3) International student adjustment problems can be grouped under nine categories namely: socio/cultural, academic, emotional/personal, financial, housing or residence, food, health, immigration, and international student advisory services. (4) Identifying adjustment problems and taking corrective measures will improve international student recruitment and retention at CUT.

5.2 Research Questions

This research article sought to answer the following questions: (1) What are the most important adjustment problems for international students studying at CUT? (2) What is the nature of the adjustment problems faced by international students? More specifically, do international students regard their adjustment experience as problematic or not?

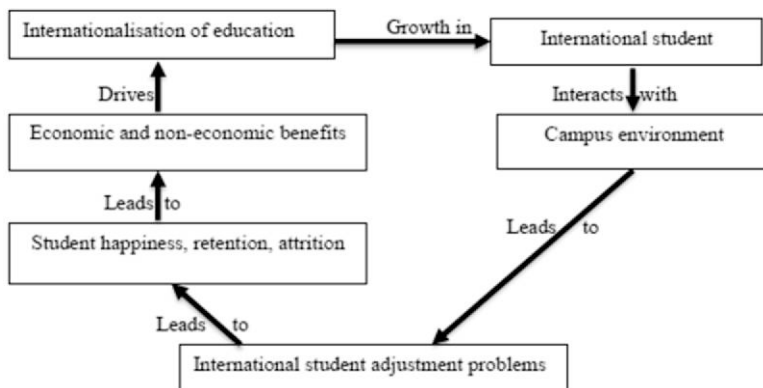
6. THE THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Chickering and Reisser (1993) identify four useful theoretical contexts within which student learning and development and eventual success takes place. According to these authors, student learning and development theories can be classified broadly under: (1) psychological, (2) cognitive-structural (3) typology, and (4) person-environment theories. In brief, psychological theories try to explain student development in terms of stages that students undergo in terms of thinking, feeling, behaving, valuing and relating to others; cognitive-structural theories are concerned with changes that take place in the way students perceive, organise, and reason and typology theories describe differences in learning styles, personality types, and temperament as context of development and learning; the fourth one, the person-environment theories provide the theoretical basis for this study hence deserves a much deeper discussion.

The person-environment theories address interaction between a student and the university environment (Chickering & Reisser's, 1993) and how this interaction affects failure or success of a student. According to Wikipedia (2006), the total environment of the student is educational hence can be used to help student achieve full development.

Acceptance of the person-environment theories imply that South African universities need to create conducive learning and social environments that would make international students live in harmony with their environment. This implies a clear understanding of problems that international students face. This need arises because the possibility exists that difficulties encountered in adjusting to a new educational environment have the potential of influencing their decision not to return. A further possibility exists that dissatisfied international students could spread their experiences by word of mouth hence discourage potential international students from enrolling. South African universities can use the findings of this study to profile their international student behaviour. Behavioural profiles can then be used in designing new courses, facilities, learning environments, and cultural integration programmes for their international students so as to make adaptation more bearable.

The conceptual framework for this study is student adjustment problems as applied to international students. That is: *the difficulties and challenges that international students have to deal with and overcome as they go about adapting to their new educational and social environments, how this adjustment process affects the students perception of the suitability of the institution, and the eventual impact that this perception has on the increase or decrease in international student numbers at a foreign university.* A representation of the conceptual framework for this study is summarised in Figure 1.



7. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Empirical data on international student experience in developing countries is almost non-existent. In fact, with the exception of Shindondola's (2002) work on international student experience of xenophobia at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa, most of the empirical studies to date have been in the developed country context. This apparent bias is understandable since until recently, the trend has been for people to move from developing to the developed countries for their higher education. As a result, the international student adjustment discourse has been shaped by empirical findings from the Western context. Consequently, this section reviews the Western 'sojourner adjustment' literature to identify recurrent adjustment problems for international students within this body of knowledge. For the purpose of this study, analyses of the various empirical findings on the international student adjustment are thematically classified as academic, personal, and socio-cultural.

It seems from the available literature that serious academic work on the international student adjustment problem really started and gathered momentum in the early eighties with the "pioneering" work of Yeung (1980) who collected data from 67 international students and identified financial (personal), language (academic as well as socio-cultural), and socio-cultural problems as the main problem areas for international students. In terms of language, understanding American idioms, slang and accent posed the most problematic. This probably explains why the same students were unable to participate in class discussions, found it difficult to write assignments, develop their English vocabulary and express themselves in English which are serious academic handicaps. In terms of finance, obtaining financial assistance and saving money emerged as the main problems. Socio culturally, the students found it very difficult establishing friendship with Americans and were unable to easily adapt to American food. This finding flies in the face of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) contention that international student environment affects student performance.

Five years later, Lanz (1985) interviewed 72 students on the subject. The study identified library use and understanding of lectures and textbooks (academic issues) as the most troublesome adjustment problems. Inability to use library and to understand lectures and textbooks are clear indications of language problems thus to a large extent validating Yeung's (1980) earlier findings. Through in-depth interviews Lanz (1985) then identified extended orientation programmes as a way of lessening international student adjustment problems.

In the same year, McCalmet (1985) shifted attention to adult students and identified learning and study skills problems (personal); college services (academic); time management and stress management (personal) as main problems.

Consistent with Lanz (1985), the study also revealed a positive effect of orientation on adult student adjustment. Barakat (1988) the last to study the issue in the 80s investigated eight specific areas namely: financial aid; placement; health services; social/personal; living/dining; orientation; student activities; and international student office services. Of these, financial aid, insufficient help, discrimination, and health service problems emerged as serious adjustment problem areas for international students. These issues appear more personal than academic. One may classify the health and discrimination as socio-cultural.

Starting with Wong (1991), the 90s can be described as the most productive as far as the international adjustment research is concerned. Wong (1991) adopted a different approach to the previous researchers by investigating the subject through a meta-analysis of six doctoral dissertations leading to the division of the international student adjustment problems into eight topical areas namely: (1) communication/language concerns; (2) academic concerns; (3) socio-cultural concerns; (4) financial concerns; (5) health concerns; (6) housing concerns; (7) food concerns; and (8) advising concerns which can also be aggregated into academic, personal and socio-cultural dimensions. Apart from this formal categorisation and consistency with earlier studies, the study identified financial, language, socio-cultural, housing and food, and health as the most problematic areas. However, significant variations were found in the degree to which problems were experienced from person to person and according to country of origin. This suggests that individual factors as well as country of origin could be useful bases for analysing international student adjustment problems. Following this, Sandhu (1994), identified six principal factors (perceived discrimination; homesickness; perceived hate/rejection; fear; culture shock/stress due to a change; and guilt) that impede the smooth adjustment of foreign students.

Like Lanz (1985), Junius (1997) used a revised form of the MISPI to investigate the phenomenon at the Northern Arizona University. But Lanz (1985), he used a larger sample size. Like in Wong's (1991) research, responses were analysed according to certain demographic variables with living/dining, English language, health services emerging as major areas of concern. Geographical area of origin, age, gender, marital status, academic level, length of stay, and primary language were found to significantly discriminate adjustment problems experienced by international students. A year later, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) investigated how certain aspects of the social environment provided by an American university impacted on the psychological wellbeing of international students. Using disproportionate sampling so as to avoid the likely exclusion of countries with fewer students, the study identified loneliness, unfamiliarity with American customs, norms and values, and loss of social status as the main problems.

Interestingly, loneliness, unfamiliarity with American custom, norms, and values and feelings of loss of social status were found to strongly correlate with self-esteem suggesting that self-esteem could play an important part in the international student adjustment research. In the same year, Chng, Ding, and Perez (1998) tested the so called East Asian Student Stressor Inventory leading to the identification of English efficiency, family pressure, financial difficulties, cultural shock, academic performance, and social support as factors that make international student adjust. Gender was found to be an important factor in the adjustment of international students (at least for Asian students). This could be deduced from the differences in the stress levels of females and males. Thus in the studies so far examined, language has always been identified as a major problem and gender the most significant discriminator.

Three important studies were further conducted by the end of the 90s. This includes the works of Kono (1999); Chng (1999) and Maundeni (1999). Kono (1999) interviewed international students from 13 different countries in America and identified language (academic) and social factors as the most problematic areas for international students. Chng's (1999) study identified financial aid, international student service, and living-dining as most problematic areas for international students. Maundeni's (1999) study revealed that female African students abroad found their adjustment more difficult than their male counterparts. This finding is consistent with that of Chng et al (1998) who earlier found significant differences in stress levels for male and female Chinese international students, thus, making a strong case for the inclusion of gender in the study of international student adjustment.

Research on the international student adjustment problem continued earnestly in the 21st century with the works of Leung (2001); Zhang (2002); Shindondola's (2002); Williams and Buttler (2003); and Wang (2004). However this time, attention was being paid to other continents. For instance Shindondola's (2002) study for the first time drew attention to the African context. In the study, face to face in-depth interviews were held with eight international students at the University of Johannesburg. The study found that international students experienced xenophobia. Specifically, it reported abuse of international students from other African countries by police and immigration officials. Zhang (2002); Leung (2001); and Wang (2004) turned their attention on Asian students and more specifically those from China. Strikingly, the three studies on Chinese students produced identical findings. Whilst Leung (2001) found that unlike sojourner students from other cultural backgrounds, Chinese international students felt lonelier, were least confident socially, and least confident with their academic studies, Zhang (2002) found that cultural differences significantly impinged upon academic adjustment of Chinese students. Wang's (2004) study pointed to a close interaction between the Chinese students' academic adjustment and socio-cultural environment. Leung therefore suggests that when planning, university administrators should consider the specific needs of all cultural groups.

Williams and Buttler (2003) continued the trend of researching the issue in the western context but unlike predecessors, this time conducted a nationwide investigation. The significance of this study is that this large scale study to a large extent validates many previous ones. For instance the study identified English language; lack of social support networks; lack of social acceptance; racial labelling; difficulty in acquiring new learning styles; post-traumatic stress syndrome; and cultural differences as the main problem areas. In addition, the study found that international students did not face the same issues with some of the concerns relating to specific countries of origin. And these are all the issues identified in previous smaller scale researches on the phenomenon.

To sum up the review of the empirical evidence, the following conclusions can be said. Firstly, there is a glaring dearth of the literature on the subject in the African context. Secondly, there are a number of ways in which the international student adjustment phenomenon has been investigated. Whilst some used mainly quantitative approach, others preferred a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Thirdly, there are numerous factors that impinge on the ability of foreign students to adjust smoothly to their new environment. Fourth, enough evidence exists that shows that demographic variables such as nationality; gender; age; and year group influence the nature of international student adjustment problems (Chng, Ding & Perez, 1998). These variables were used as dependent variables in current studies. Lastly, it seems problems most commonly faced by international students can be classified under the following nine dominant problem areas:

- Social/cultural.
- Academic.
- Personal /emotional.
- Financial.
- Financial aid from host institution.
- Housing/accommodation.
- Food.
- Health.
- Immigration/visa.

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was an exploratory case study involving a single South African University i.e. the Central University of Technology (CUT).

Disproportionate random sampling was used to select 120 participants from a total of 460 international students that were registered at CUT at the time of the research. Disproportionate random sampling was necessary to allow for the inclusion of samples from countries with few students who join CUT.

The instrument for gathering responses from participants was a custom-made structured four-point itemised rating scale questionnaire. Validity issues that naturally emerge with such instruments were thoroughly dealt with.

Validity of a measuring instrument refers to what it is supposed to measure (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2005; Zikmund, 2003). Although there are several types of validity in research, three most common types of measuring instrument validity are referred to. These are content/face validity; construct validity; and criterion-related validity. Of the three, steps were particularly taken to ensure content validity and construct validity.

Content or face validity of a measuring instrument is the extent to which the instrument provides adequate coverage of the concept. In other words it is about the sufficiency or comprehensiveness of the investigative questions (Dzansi, 2006). Content validity is good if the instrument contains a representative sample of the universe of the sample (Cooper & Schindler, 2001:211). Gay and Airasian (2003:586) believe expert judgement can assure content validity. For the current study use was made of seasoned researchers at the University of the Free State and CUT. To ensure adequacy of the investigative questions (that is the coverage of the whole domain of student adjustment), the dimensions and elements of the construct 'international student adjustment problem' were identified. This enabled all areas of the construct to be covered.

Gay and Airasian (2003:586) describe construct validity as the degree to which a test measures an intended hypothetical construct. In other words it testifies to how well the results from the use of the measures fit the theories around which the test is designed (Sekaran, 1992 in Dzansi, 2004:189). On the other hand, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005:110) state that, content validity seeks to clarify the meaning of the construct as used by the researcher. In an earlier section, the construct 'international student adjustment problem' was operationally defined. The literature survey furthermore resulted in the identification of the theories about adjustment. This included cultural, social and academic contexts within which the international students have to adjust. The different sections in the questionnaire fit well with these theories. Nonetheless, a separate research will be undertaken in the future to investigate the construct validity of the current instrument using factor analysis.

Criterion validity requires comparison with an existing instrument. Since the literature search did not reveal any instrument specific to the international student adjustment experience in South Africa, no meaningful comparison could be made.

As said earlier, empirical evidence shows that international students' adjustment process is influenced by demographic variables (Chng, Ding & Perez, 1998) such as geographic region of origin; age; gender; marital status; academic level. As a result, these variables were used to compare the adjustment problems. The nine problem areas listed earlier were investigated.

The greatest concern for the participants was anonymity. Participants were, however, assured of anonymity and confidentiality of information collected and their trust was gained by sharing one of the researchers' own personal adjustment experiences as a former international student. In order to gain informed consent of participants, the rationale for the study, areas to be covered in the questionnaire, as well as explanation of its potential benefits was presented.

9. FINDINGS

The major findings were: (1) international students encounter many adjustment problems; (2) international students regard their adjustment experiences as a major problem; (3) and international students' adjustment problems differ significantly according to country/region of origin, age, and gender of students. These findings are consistent with previous studies in the USA, UK, Canada and Australia. Because of the limited scope of this article only the first two findings will be presented in the ensuing sections.

9.1 Demographics

Table 1 represents the summary of collected demographic variables. According to type of residence, 72.5% of the respondents reside outside university premises while 27.5% reside on campus. In other words as many as 72.5% (66) reside in privately arranged accommodation while only 27.5% (25) had access to accommodation provided by the university. In terms of country/geographical region of origin, students were classified into seven groups for the purpose of analysis.

The largest group of students come from Lesotho (33%), closely followed by Botswana (30.8%), Namibia (9.9%), Europe (8.8%), Asia (7.7%), other African countries excluding Southern African Development Countries (SADC) (5.5%), and other SADC countries excluding Lesotho, Namibia, and Botswana (4.4%). Gender distribution is fairly even. Males accounted for 48.4% and females 51.6% of the sample. In terms of age, 3.3% were 19 years or below, the majority that is, 57.1% were between 20-25 years, 25.3% were between 26-29 years, 12.1% were between the ages 30-35 years, and 2.2% were between 36-39 years. 92.1% of the respondents were married while 7.9% of them were single.

Variable		Frequency	%
Residence	Off campus	66	72.5
	On campus	25	27.5
	Total	91	100.0
Country/region of origin	Lesotho	30	33.0
	Namibia	9	9.9
	Botswana	28	30.8
	Other SADEC	4	4.4
	Other African	5	5.5
	Asia	7	7.7
	Europe	8	8.8
	Total	91	100.0
Gender	Male	44	48.4
	Female	47	51.6
	Total	91	100.0
Age	16-19 years	3	3.3
	20-25 years	52	57.1
	26-29 years	23	25.3
	30-35 years	11	12.1
	36-39 years	2	2.2
	Total	91	100
Marital status	Single	82	92.1
	Married	7	7.9
	Total	89*	100
Academic level	1 st year undergraduate	28	30.8
	2 nd year undergraduate	9	9.9
	3 rd year undergraduate	30	33.0
	B.Tech. Postgraduate	18	19.8
	M.Tech. Postgraduate	2	2.2
	Exchange student	4	4.4
	Total	91	100.0

* Two missing values

Two students did not respond to this question hence they were treated as missing values which did not count towards computations. In terms of academic level, 30.8% of the respondents were in their first year undergraduate studies, second year undergraduate students accounted for 9.9%, 33.0% were third year undergraduate students, 2.2% were masters level students, and 4.4% were exchange students from Germany who stay for one semester that is a maximum six months.

9.2 Adjustment Problems and their Degree of Difficulty

Table 2 shows that international students regard 43 out of the 62 (64.2%) items as problematic (with minor + moderate + major \geq 50%). Furthermore, the percentage analysis as revealed in Table 3 shows an average percentage of 56.7% meaning that the majority (56.7%) respondents regard their educational and social experience at the CUT as problematic (minor – 20%, moderate – 17.7%, and major – 16%). Clearly, this must be a source of concern to student administrators.

Firstly, the fact that majority of the international students (56.7%) regard their sojourn as problematic means that most of them might not be happy. As mentioned earlier, student learning and development theory suggests that learners are more likely to be successful in their academic endeavour when they regard their education experience as pleasant. Unfortunately this study reveals that most of the international students at CUT might not be in harmony with the environment.

Table 2: Percentage analysis and rank order of problem items

PROBLEM	Problem area	minor		Moderate		major		Total %m	Rank order
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
Friendliness of Immigration officials	IMP	28	31.1%	32	35.6%	19	21.1%	87.8%	1
High cost of living in South Africa	FIP	14	15.4%	24	26.4%	39	42.9%	84.7%	2
Cost of food	FDP	21	23.1%	29	31.9%	26	28.6%	83.6%	3
Cost of health insurance	III.P	14	15.4%	25	27.5%	36	39.6%	82.5%	4
Getting visa extensions	IMP	15	16.5%	34	37.4%	25	27.5%	81.4%	5
Feel comfortable visiting immigration office	IMP	21	23.1%	31	34.1%	22	24.2%	81.4%	5
Work restrictions	IMP	14	15.4%	19	20.9%	40	44.0%	80.3%	7
Becoming a citizen of South Africa	IMP	9	9.9%	17	18.7%	47	51.6%	80.3%	7
Understanding immigration rules	IMP	16	17.6%	31	34.1%	24	26.4%	78.1%	9
Sufficiency of funds to meet expenses	FIP	19	20.9%	20	22.0%	29	31.9%	74.8%	10
Finding suitable student activities	SCP	26	28.6%	26	28.6%	14	15.4%	72.6%	11
Feeling homesick	EPP	26	28.6%	23	25.3%	16	17.6%	71.5%	12
Managing my finances	FIP	11	12.1%	32	35.2%	21	23.1%	70.4%	13
Access to medical services of choice	III.P	18	19.8%	11	12.1%	34	37.4%	69.3%	14
Adequacy of university health services	HLP	15	16.5%	22	24.2%	25	27.5%	68.2%	15
Availability of personal counselling services	III.P	31	34.1%	22	24.2%	9	9.9%	68.2%	16
Obtaining adequate health insurance	HLP	21	23.3%	14	15.6%	25	27.8%	66.7%	17
University accommodation	HRP	20	22.0%	15	16.5%	21	23.1%	61.6%	18
Helpfulness of international office staff	IOP	29	31.9%	15	16.5%	12	13.2%	61.6%	19
Unexpected financial needs	FIP	23	25.3%	11	12.1%	19	20.9%	58.3%	20
Adequacy of information at orientation	IOP	29	31.9%	16	17.6%	8	8.8%	58.3%	21
Interaction with South African people	SCP	28	30.8%	19	20.9%	5	5.5%	57.2%	22
Rooming with students of other nationalities	HRP	14	15.4%	15	16.5%	23	25.3%	57.2%	23
Availability of useful information	IOP	19	20.9%	15	16.5%	18	19.8%	57.2%	24
Coping with the volume of assignments	ACP	27	29.7%	14	15.4%	11	12.1%	57.2%	25
Coping with assessment methods	ACP	32	35.2%	14	15.4%	5	5.5%	56.1%	26
Grading system	ACP	20	22.0%	24	26.4%	7	7.7%	56.1%	27
knowing where to get financial assistance	FIP	19	20.9%	12	13.2%	20	22.0%	56.1%	28
Getting my native food	FDP	26	28.6%	13	14.3%	12	13.2%	56.1%	29
Sufficiency of orientation programme	IOP	28	30.8%	11	12.1%	12	13.2%	56.1%	30
Academic advising	ACP	29	32.2%	17	18.9%	4	4.4%	55.5%	31
Finding a place to live during college term	HRP	10	11.0%	21	23.1%	19	20.9%	55.0%	32
Getting sufficient exercise	HLP	16	17.6%	15	16.5%	19	20.9%	55.0%	33
Working in cooperation with RSA students	ACP	29	31.9%	14	15.4%	6	6.6%	53.9%	34
Experience of racial discrimination	SCP	22	24.2%	20	22.0%	6	6.6%	52.8%	35
Comprehending lectures	ACP	24	26.4%	18	19.8%	6	6.6%	52.8%	36
Finding suitable place to live during holidays	HRP	10	11.0%	9	9.9%	29	31.9%	52.8%	37
Experience loneliness	EPP	27	29.7%	13	14.3%	8	8.8%	52.8%	38
Dating	EPP	17	18.7%	12	13.2%	18	19.8%	51.7%	39
Friendliness of international office staff	IOP	24	26.4%	14	15.4%	9	9.9%	51.7%	40
Suffering from prejudice	SCP	23	25.3%	19	20.9%	4	4.4%	50.6%	41
Getting food of my choice	FDP	28	31.1%	9	10.0%	8	8.9%	50.0%	42
Experience of being called a foreigner	SCP	11	12.1%	17	18.7%	17	18.7%	49.5%	43
Time to rest	HLP	18	20.0%	13	14.4%	13	14.4%	48.8%	44
Opportunities for social interaction	SCP	24	26.4%	13	14.3%	7	7.7%	48.4%	45
Feeling of alienation (distant from others)	EPP	28	30.8%	11	12.1%	5	5.5%	48.4%	46

Friendliness of international office staff	IOP	24	26.4%	14	15.4%	9	9.9%	51.7%	40
Suffering from prejudice	SCP	23	25.3%	19	20.9%	4	4.4%	50.6%	41
Getting food of my choice	FDP	28	31.1%	9	10.0%	8	8.9%	50.0%	42
Experience of being called a foreigner	SCP	11	12.1%	17	18.7%	17	18.7%	49.5%	43
Time to rest	HLP	18	20.0%	13	14.4%	13	14.4%	48.8%	44
Opportunities for social interaction	SCP	24	26.4%	13	14.3%	7	7.7%	48.4%	45
Feeling of alienation (distant from others)	EPP	28	30.8%	11	12.1%	5	5.5%	48.4%	46
Obtaining assistance with registration	IOP	23	25.3%	13	14.3%	8	8.8%	48.4%	47
Feel a sense of helplessness	EPP	30	33.0%	7	7.7%	6	6.6%	47.3%	48
Getting courses I like	ACP	17	18.7%	13	14.3%	11	12.1%	45.1%	49
Getting sufficient personal help from my lecturers	ACP	19	20.9%	11	12.1%	10	11.0%	44.0%	50
Participation in class	ACP	24	26.7%	10	11.1%	5	5.6%	43.4%	51
Receiving money from home	FIP	13	14.4%	12	13.3%	13	14.4%	42.1%	52
Ease of making friends	SCP	21	23.1%	11	12.1%	6	6.6%	41.8%	53
Adapting to South African food	FDP	26	28.6%	11	12.1%	1	1.1%	41.8%	54
Library use	ACP	17	18.7%	7	7.7%	13	14.3%	40.7%	55
Taste of South African food	FDP	26	28.6%	8	8.8%	3	3.3%	40.7%	56
Adapting to South African climate	HLP	20	22.0%	11	12.1%	6	6.6%	40.7%	57
Finding worship place of my choice	SCP	19	20.9%	9	9.9%	7	7.7%	38.5%	58
Expressing yourself in English	ACP	22	24.2%	8	8.8%	2	2.2%	35.2%	59
Finding my way round campus	SCP	16	17.6%	13	14.3%	2	2.2%	34.1%	60
Distance from residence to class	HRP	17	18.7%	6	6.6%	7	7.7%	33.0%	61
Class attendance requirements	ACP	10	11.0%	5	5.5%	2	2.2%	18.7%	62
Total		1293	1424.0%	996	1096.8%	904	995.2%		
Average percentage			23.0		17.7		16.0	56.7%	

The ten most problematic items (see Table 3) come from only four problem areas namely immigration (IMP) with 6 items; finances (FIP) with 2 items; food (FDP) with 1 item; and health (HLP) with 1 item.

Table 3: Frequency distribution and percentage analysis of 10 most difficult adjustment problem items of respondents in rank order.

Problem	Problem area	Minor		Moderate		Major		Total	Total	Rank
		n	%	n	%	n	%	%m	n	order
Friendliness of Immigration officials	IMP	28	31.1%	32	35.6%	19	21.1%	87.8%	79	1
High cost of living in South Africa	FIP	14	15.4%	24	26.4%	39	42.9%	84.7%	77	2
Cost of food	FDP	21	23.1%	29	31.9%	26	28.6%	83.6%	76	3
Cost of health insurance	HLP	14	15.4%	25	27.5%	36	39.6%	82.5%	75	4
Getting visa extensions	IMP	15	16.5%	34	37.4%	25	27.5%	81.4%	74	5
Feel comfortable visiting immigration office	IMP	21	23.1%	31	34.1%	22	24.2%	81.4%	74	5
Work restrictions	IMP	14	15.4%	19	20.9%	40	44.0%	80.3%	73	7
Becoming a citizen of South Africa	IMP	9	9.9%	17	18.7%	47	51.6%	80.3%	73	8
Understanding immigration rules	IMP	16	17.6%	31	34.1%	24	26.4%	78.1%	71	8
Sufficiency of funds to meet expenses	FIP	19	20.9%	20	22.0%	29	31.9%	74.8%	68	10

Out of the six items under immigration (IMP) the problem item Friendliness of Immigration officials ($n = 79$; $\% = 87.8$) emerged as the most problematic (see Table 3). This does not augur well for our country as a whole, and South African universities in particular given the fact that the world is becoming global and that internationalisation is unavoidable. The problem is that as the first port of call for any foreigner, the immigration office represents the face of South Africa's hospitality. The image created by the officials who work there to a large extent affects the country's image that has the potential of jeopardising South African Universities' chances of attracting international students. In fact, if South African universities are going to be regarded as institutions of choice, then our immigration officials need to show more friendliness otherwise they may scare away potential students.

The fact that cost-related items (cost of living in South Africa, availability of food, and health insurance) ranked numbers two, three, and four respectively (see Table 3), is not surprising given the generally high cost of living in South Africa. These results, particularly as they relate to the availability of food are in concord with what international literature since the 80's has revealed.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The first research question was "What are the main adjustment problems for international students studying at CUT"? In order to answer this question, percentage analysis of the major adjustment problems was done. Analysis of responses revealed 64.2% (43) of the 62 questionnaire items as major problems for respondents (see Table 2). Of the 43 problem items, the ten most important adjustment problems (see Table 3) identified according to their order of importance are namely:

1. Unfriendliness of immigration officials.
2. High cost of living in South Africa.
3. Cost of food.
4. Cost of health insurance.
5. Getting visa extension.
6. Discomfort in visiting visa office.
7. Work restrictions.
8. Becoming a citizen of South Africa.
9. Understanding immigration rules.
10. Sufficiency of funds to meet expenses.

These problems are not necessarily academic, but have a direct and adverse impact on academic success of students in general.

The second research question was "What is the international students' overall assessment of their adjustment experiences at CUT"? In other words how do CUT international students rate their overall adjustment experiences as either problematic (major, moderate, minor or not problematic)?

That is, what do the majority say? From the data in Table 2, the majority (56.7%) of respondents rated their experiences as problematic. Based on this evidence, it is concluded that majority of international students at CUT regard their adjustment experiences as problematic.

11. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Like most previous studies done elsewhere in the world, this study has found that adjustment problems of international students are numerous at CUT. Student administrators at CUT and elsewhere in South Africa need to be aware that as long as they pursue the policy of internationalisation of education through the recruitment of students from other countries, adjustment problems are unavoidable. Since these consequences cannot be totally eliminated, student administrators need to find creative and effective ways of managing/reducing these problems to tolerable levels. In this respect, the following specific actions are recommended:

Because of the inevitability of adjustment problems for international students, it is necessary for student administrators to institute appropriate support systems in order to assist these students to cope with adjustment. Support should be sought from local students and lecturers in this regard. Jou and Hiromi (1995) found that support provided by local Japanese students and lecturers significantly assisted in the adjustment of Chinese students in Japanese universities. University administrators will have to devise means of actively involving academic staff and local students in supporting international students. Social integration of international students should be vigorously pursued. This is based on the belief that the more international students are socially involved in host institution, the more they are likely to understand their host and in turn be understood. This in turn has the potential of reducing prejudices and unnecessary tension.

Although these items do not rank in the top ten, the very high percentages of socio-cultural problems reported in the study is indicative of the lack of social integration of international students at CUT and this may be the case in other South African institutions. This means that student affairs administrators at CUT and elsewhere in South African universities have to find ways of getting international students actively involved in social activities. But dealing with this particular problem should not be superficial. In order to adequately deal with the reported high levels of social non-participation it is recommended that research be conducted into why this is the case and how best to get international students involved. One other way of dealing with this problem is to introduce international student days whereby, activities that can enhance contact with South Africans are undertaken. In this regard, it is worth noting that the University of the Free State (UFS) has such an occasion where students from all cultural groupings and nationalities showcase their diverse cultural heritage. This practice might also assist in among other things reducing the high levels of xenophobia and prejudice reported in this study.

The study also indicates that international students have serious problems with academic issues at CUT with the most problematic items being: coping with the volume of assignments, coping with assignment methods, understanding grading systems, academic advising (or the lack of it), getting help from lecturers, and class participation. These problems seem to be linked to the insufficient orientation services reported by international students. Specifically, the study revealed that international students experience problems with insufficiency of the orientation programme. It seems that the once-off orientation programme that CUT operates for its international students is not effective. The institution could benefit from extending its orientation over the first three months of the year.

The fact that six immigration items rank among the ten most important adjustment problems and the fact that friendliness (or the lack of it) of immigration officials ranks as the single most important adjustment problem (see Tables 3 and 4) is an indictment on the Department of Home Affairs. While individual behaviours are not policy issues as such, the Department of Home Affairs can do well to educate their staff on the fact that they represent the face of the hospitality and the friendliness of the entire nation. Obviously, problems of delays in visa extensions, work restrictions, and difficulties in becoming South African citizens are issues that policy makers have to pay attention to. Since we are not experts in immigration or international relations matters, it is difficult to make any meaningful recommendation except to caution that unless these issues are addressed by policy makers, they have the potential of undermining the competitiveness of South African universities in the global market for international students.

With the above background, re-designing and implementation of an extended international student orientation programme becomes imperative. An extensive orientation programme to particularly explain immigration procedures, the South African educational system, culture, values and attitudes to international students is therefore needed. The same programme could be used to explain all academic-related issues and expectations to international students. Doing all these could go a long way in assisting the international students in understanding and coping with their adjustment problems.

Informal conversations with local students suggest that these frustrations cut across nationalities. This situation is not surprising at all given the history of South Africa. It is therefore recommended that additional to taking actions directed at international students, formal research should be done to determine whether these problems are generic and also to determine the best way of dealing with them.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

More studies are needed to fully understand the general student adjustment process and to shed light on the specific problem of international student adjustment difficulties in South African universities in particular. Furthermore, there is need for empirical research to support the plethora of normative assertions in the international student literature. Based on the findings from this study, recommendations for future research can also be made.

Firstly, identifying adjustment problems is only one step in dealing with the whole question of the international student adjustment problem. As mentioned in the foregoing sections, support for international students is crucial to their ability to deal with problems of adjustment. All problems cannot be addressed by the same support system. The support needs to match the contexts. There is therefore need to carry out scientific investigation into the kind of support structures that can assist international students in dealing with specific problems.

As mentioned earlier, single institutional studies are no doubt important for identifying adjustment problems. However, they are limited in terms of generalisability. There is therefore a need for a nationwide (multi-institutional) study on the international student adjustment in South African Universities.

Another area in need of research is comparison study of the adjustment problems of local and international students studying at South African universities. It is also recommended that since the usefulness of latitudinal studies like the present one has inherent limitations, future research on the subject should also include longitudinal studies as earlier suggested by Yang and Clum (1995).

There is also need for empirical research on the net real benefits of internationalisation of education for South Africa. So far, whatever benefits South Africa can derive are largely based on normative assertions and at best based on experiences of the developed world. According to Sam (2001), the claims to benefits from internationalisation are too presumptuous and not adequately supported. Thus, there is a need for confirmation with empirical data.

Another potential area of research is to investigate challenges that South African universities are encountering in trying to provide effective support for international students.

Also, we have earlier postulated that adjustment difficulties might not be peculiar to only international students. We recommend that research should be done to determine whether or not adjustment problems are general to both international and nationals.

We finally recommend that research be conducted to investigate the high levels of social non-participation by international students at CUT and how best to get international students involved.

13. LIMITATIONS

The following limitations are acknowledged but should not necessarily diminish the value of this paper. Since these limitations could at worst limit the generalisability of the results they should therefore be noted.

Although there are close to thirty universities in South Africa, the study was limited to only a single institution, CUT. Still, only the Bloemfontein campus was covered and did not include international students of the other campus. This is likely to affect the extent of generalisability of the results. The ideal procedure would have been to include international students of the other campuses. However, due to mainly financial and time constraints, it was not possible to include other campuses and other universities in South Africa.

The analysis is limited to only select demographic factors that might appear in-exhaustive. However, the list was considered sufficient for the purpose of this study. Prior to the empirical study, Cheng (1999) reviewed a number of related literatures and came to the conclusions that: (1) when faced with problems they cannot solve, this often leads to emotional conflict; (2) host universities should always endeavour to provide services and programmes that meet the special needs and circumstances of international and in particular provide sufficient orientation to enable cross-cultural adjustment; (3) adjustment problems of international students are mainly due to social interaction in the host country (4) adjustment problems are as a result of international students coming from educational and cultural backgrounds that differ significantly from that of the host country; (5) one of the most common concerns of international students is the lack of sufficient funds; (6) the adjustment problems of international students are based on the demographic factors age, gender, marital status, academic major, academic classification, language proficiency, length of stay, and primary source of finance. Although Cheng's conclusions are based on studies carried out in the developed world, they remain valuable guidance for collecting and analysing data regarding international adjustment problems even for third world environments.

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