

Internalization of Higher Education: International Students' Adjustment

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Universities and other institutions of higher education have played and continue to play a pivotal role in generating and sharing knowledge, ideas, and concepts. Institutions of higher education transform based on the needs of society. According to Chen (1999), globalization has redesigned the world into a smaller living space and technology has decreased distances among countries. People from different countries, traditions, and cultures are working or studying together in a considerable way. Furthermore, each culture uses distinct interactions and ways of communication, which leads to discrepancies in language, body language, conflict resolution and communication. The quest for knowledge has been expanding and transforming since the Middle Ages to present day. Students have searched for an education in countries different from their own from the inceptions of institutions of higher education. Hendricks and Skinner (1977), state that international students have been seeking higher education in the United States since 1784. In Puerto Rico, the legislature created the School of Tropical Medicine of the University of Puerto Rico in 1924 (López Yustos, 1997). Essentially it functioned as a medical research center; “many important discoveries related to peculiar tropical diseases and their treatment were made during 1927-1948” (López Yustos, p.221). Many foreign students arrived to the island to study; therefore, this can be considered the beginning of international students studying at an institution of higher education on the island. According to Osuna (1949), students came from Brazil, Colombia, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Venezuela from 1945-1946. The number of international students in Puerto Rico has increased over the decades and continues to grow.

Globalization has been affecting the educational realm for several decades and the Keynesian model has been influencing institutions of higher education and education in general since the 1980s. One of the basic notions of the Keynesian model is that a stable economic

growth is simply straightforward. However, the problem with this policy is that it has “difficulty of forecasting economic trends and making timely fiscal adjustments” (Lee, 2012, p. 473). Which are needed in educational institutions, so administrators can make the proper decisions according to their institution. Another problem this model comes across is foretelling all the economic downturns, their duration, declines, and frequencies (Lee, 2012; Guzmán Plata, 2011). Additionally, the Keynesian economic and political model focuses primarily on short-term demands and not on long-term important productivity (Lee, 2012; Guzmán Plata, 2011). The proposition of free market and free trade propagated during the 80s by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Saunders, 2010; Popkewitz, 2000; Zheng, 2012) still sways today’s political, cultural, educational, and economic systems. Moreover, the Keynesian model ties into the neoliberal model of “free-market individualism, private property, constitutional order, and the minimal state” (Robertson & Scholte, 2007, p. 865). Unfortunately, the neoliberal model is not only an economic view but has expanded into the cultural, political, and ideological realms; hence, influencing decision-making in education (Zheng, 2012). This economic model has created a brain drain in developing countries since developed countries attract the best and talented individuals from all over the world. Roberts and Scholte (2007) contend that brain drain “combines elements of the global movement of labor and capital [by hiring the highly skilled and talented individuals] with investment in human capital” (p.104). Apple (2000) alleges that students are seen as human capital. Therefore, it stimulates international students to seek higher education outside of their native countries.

According to Saunders (2010), neoliberal ideology, as well as, globalization have manifested in institutions of higher education in the United States; but have also affected higher education worldwide. Symptoms of globalization and neoliberalism have crept into higher

education and have been gradually contouring people's way of thinking on what is common sense, commodities and markets; thus, influencing international students and the internalization of higher education. Torres and Schugurensky (2002), contend how the political economy in Latin America has influenced higher education. Marginson (2004), states how markets and competition are affecting higher education in Australia and New Zealand. The need to increase international students at institutions of higher education has become an essential component; since, tuition, fees, and financial aid propagate students as consumers. This trend most likely will continue with the expansion of globalization. Carnoy and Rhoten (2002) argue that globalization is reorganizing the world economy and its main resource is knowledge and information. Knowledge and information is usually transmitted and shaped by social institutions (local and national); therefore, educational institutions become an essential instrument in globalization. Moreover, the quality of educational systems is being compared on an international level. Information technology is slowly being introduced into educational systems, "partly to try to expand the quantity of education at lower cost through distance education and partly to deliver higher-quality education (at higher cost) through computer-assisted instruction and the use of the Internet" (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002, ¶12). Globalization and its elements of greater competition, pressure to innovate, create worldwide markets, production options and concerns over cultural and environmental degradation have created a perception of knowledge societies. This has resulted in increasing demands on institutions of higher education to develop new ideas, concepts, products, methods, and services for the future and develop an international perspective for the creation and transfer of knowledge (Wood, 2012). Similarly, the growing competition among universities and other educational institutions are persuading academic leaders to find unique ways to differentiate their programs from other programs being offered based on

institutions that develop, distribute and market education (Wood, 2012). Education has become a market commodity.

Internationalization of higher education is expanding. Assisting international students in adjusting and adapting to the host country and the university is indispensable; since, this trend is most likely to increase in the future. Saunders (2010) attests the social and cultural benefits of education “which have been used as a rationale for continued financial support of higher education, are of little interest to the neoliberal regime who views education just as any other social program – one in which the individual receives the benefits and as such should bear the responsibility”(p. 65). Unfortunately, globalization and neoliberalism have redefined the purpose and role of education and the social, cultural, and political institutions (Apple, 2001; Aronowitz, 2000). Institutions of higher education in conjunction with faculty, scholars, researchers, and students must find avenues to ameliorate these changes. Wenger (1998) and Clerehan (2007) suggest that higher education must find conducts in dealing with boundaries, finding new meanings, transform the university’s ability in participating on a larger scale, and involving the local and the global communities in meaningful ways.

International Students’ Adjustment

International students have been a source of academic and economic contributions to the host university. Higher education is becoming more diverse due to the students’ cultural and educational backgrounds (Janjua et al, 2011). Once students are admitted to the institution it is of utmost importance that administrators provide the support services international students need to ease their adjustment process and in retaining them (Astin, 1993; Jensen, 2011; Tinto, 2012).

International students confront not only academic and personal challenges in the host country but also language, social, and cultural barriers, and new living environments (Perrucci &

Hu, 1995; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009). Most research on international students has been on academic adjustment (Pirosca, 2011). English language proficiency presents several challenges since many foreign students choose to study in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada (Clerehan, 2007; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Özturgut & Murphy, 2009; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010; Tran, 2011). In the case of Puerto Rico, international students come from English and Spanish speaking countries. Native English speakers are required to learn Spanish and native Spanish speakers are required to learn English. This situation presents a challenge for institutions of higher education in Puerto Rico. Because of international students' diverse backgrounds, culture, customs, beliefs, educational systems, and ways of life each student's experience in adjusting face different challenges. International students need to adjust to academics and the socio-cultural aspects of the host country.

Many international students face academic challenges in the host country. Educational systems differ from one country to another. Students face language barriers (Lacina, 2002; Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Prescott & Hellsten, 2005) need to adjust to different teaching and learning styles (Rizvi, 2000; Thi, 2008); different forms of evaluation and assessments, and academic writing among others (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2004; Koehne, 2005; Lee & Rice, 2007). According to Janjua et al. (2011) some students experience "learning shock" (p1359); because they are comparing and bring their learning experiences from their native countries. Therefore, academics must adapt teaching practices to the needs of a diverse student population. Students that confront difficulties with teaching styles and the classroom environment may suffer from "learning shock" defined by Griffiths et al. (2005) as "...experiences of acute frustration, confusion and anxiety felt by some students...[when] exposed to unfamiliar learning and teaching methods, bombarded by unexpected and disorienting cues and subjected to ambiguous and conflicting expectations"(p. 277).

Prescott and Hellsten (2005) state academics must be in a constant critical evaluation, modification, and transformation of teaching practices in order to meet the needs of international students. Additionally, reflecting on the needs of international students and ways in which educational practices can assist these students. Ryan (2000) suggests that “universities need to respond to the needs of international students by opening not just their doors for them, but once in, making sure that the curriculum is also accessible” (p.5). Academic writing is crucial in higher education and plays a fundamental role in student success. Some international students have a difficult time with academic writing, especially if writing in their non-native language; thus, writing practices become a significant area. Lillis (2001) and Phan (2001) contend that research in higher education is moving towards examining writing issues among international students in order to provide professors with an awareness of international students as learners and offer opportunities to develop their academic writing skills. International students face complex and multilayered issues in adapting to the writing process as Tran (2011) argues. Consequently, faculty is under more pressure to meet the particular needs of international students while maintaining the institution’s academic standards and expectations. It is critical that the university and faculty support and include the national and cultural differences among their students. Several studies on international students in higher education, especially in English-speaking countries, relate language proficiency and academic writing to cultural differences (Lacina 2002; Andrade, 2006). Moreover, language barriers and academic difficulties cause fear and anxiety; thus, influencing international students’ adjustment process.

Regarding personal adjustment international students face several challenges upon arrival. Many students have deal with housing, finances, food services, transportation, obtaining proper governmental documentation and registering for courses (Pirosca, 2011). Furthermore,

students need to search for information on basic necessities such as medical services, government offices, stores, laundry among others. Another issue some students may contend with is health issues. Ryan and Twibell (2000) attest that health issues may hamper students' ability to participate in learning activities, study, and complete assignments on time; hence, emotions such as loneliness, stress, frustration, and homesickness may increase. All the aforementioned may influence adjusting to the country and university. Personal safety is another personal issue students may confront that may affect their adjustment. Students may feel unsafe at certain times at the university premises or surrounding neighborhood. Ryan and Twibell (2000) suggest that certain ethnic and religious minorities may feel threatened or anxious due to the September 11 events. Spencer-Rodgers (2001) state that many times students and faculty on campus do not understand or take into consideration the demands international students confront in adjusting to a new environment.

Financial difficulties may present insecurity and distress for students (Forbes-Mewett, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2009). Finances are a major culprit for international students for several reasons. First, students encounter a "deficiency of pre-arrival knowledge on the cost of living [of the host country], monetary exchange rates, and budgeting" (Forbes, et al., 2009, p. 144). Second, some international students cannot work outside of campus due to their type of Visa. Third, finding a job on campus is difficult due to the competition between other international students and home students (Mokua, 2012). Finally, most international students rely on loans, help from family members, and a few find part-time employment outside of campus (Colón Delgado, 2014). Financial difficulties among international students are a common factor in their adjustment to process. Forbes et al. (2009) study revealed that "significant numbers of international students experience serious financial difficulties" (141). Additionally, students who

encountered hardships were those who were self-funding, or had a mixture of self-funding with other resources. Among personal issues some international students confronted problems and difficulties in obtaining visas and required documentation to study at the host country (Chen, 2006). Although many universities in the United States search for international students, it is becoming more difficult to apply for student visas. The process of obtaining a visa can be time-consuming (Ward, 2002).

International students are starting over, beginning a new life. Students need to search and find comfort, daily routines, living quarters, and food, which is part of adjusting to a new country. Social needs are considered in issues relating to peer support, friendships, social networks, cultural and social integration, and personal and emotional support (Bartam, 2008; Kisang, 2010; Sumer, 2009). For some students, separating from family, relatives, and friends can be cumbersome. Students may worry about who they left behind in their native country. Komyia and Eells (2001) state some students may feel homesick and feel sad, alienated, or depressed. Other students may feel guilt and fear because they are losing touch with family and their home culture (Lewthwaite, 1997). Another issue some students may confront is feeling like a visible minority. Lewthwaite (1997) asserts this may be a difficult situation for students who are from the majority group in their home country and suddenly they are minorities at the host country; thus, affecting social adjustment. According to Ryan and Twibell (2000), some students may face problems sleeping, eating, and organizing their daily activities at the beginning of their academic year. Establishing friendships is crucial to some international students. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) contend it can be a challenge to make new friends in a different culture and growing a new social support system. Friendship is viewed and related to differently in from one culture to another. Piroasca (2011, P.90) states “misunderstanding can result.” Some studies claim

that a proportion of international students have difficulty socializing in their host country (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Particularly making friends with home students and more so with the wider community. Chen (2006) noted the importance for international students feeling accepted by peers and not feeling discriminated. Sam (2001), states that international students who connect and have satisfactory contacts with locals of the host country tend to be more satisfied with their overall educational experience and face less adjustment problems. Accordingly, institutions of higher education should not expect international students to decipher and increase their social interactions in a new country, new environment, and new educational institution while adjusting and adapting to academics all on their own.

Culture is a fundamental component of all nations and peoples in as much it defines and molds the people within it a particular culture. It signifies a “collection of socially-learned rules, norms, values and shared meanings that influence individuals’ behaviour within a population” (Harrison & Peacock, 2010, p.881). The culture of the host country can create culture shock to some international students; thus, hindering their adjustment process. According to Andrade (2006), culture shock and cultural differences can be shocking and confusing for international students. It takes international students time to learn and understand the culture and to adjust. Stress and cognitive fatigue may hinder international students’ academic performance, learning process, socialization process; hence, students isolate themselves. However, if “uncertainty, anxiety, stress, and alienation are defined as causes of culture shock” (Lin, 2006, p.119) factors that lead to this situation must precede culture shock and influence the adjustment process. Kim (2001) states that adjustment is a long-term process in which students need time to adjust and feel comfortable in the new cultural environment. A feeling of comfort indicates successful

adaptation. Cultural differences international students may encounter include customs, social norms (etiquette), dressing, professor-student interactions, food, and friendships. These differences can be frustrating and confusing for students studying and living in different cultures (Andrade, 2006). International students feel depressed, detached, isolated, angry, and/or homesick (Redmond, 2000; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). However, Saunders (2010) states cultural differences can be managed and may lead to creative practices, better learning within the community and still the individual maintaining their own culture. It is fundamental the institution provide the support services needed so international students can develop strategies and opportunities to build positive relationships with people from other cultures.

According to Harrison and Peacock (2010), exposure is an essential tool for students learning experience; however, simple contact is insufficient to build relationships among different cultural groups. Lee and Rice (2007) state that to overcome isolation and alienation, international students are often expected to adjust to the host country's culture as soon as possible. However, this adjustment process presents serious challenges to many international students. Perceived discrimination and negative stereotyping may hinder international students' adjustment because they may isolate themselves from faculty and peers and may adversely affect students' satisfaction, academic program, and socialization (Karuppana & Bararib, 2011; Perucci & Hu, 1995). In addition, feeling alienated may affect students' educational experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore, ensuring international students feel involved with the university helps with their academic and social experiences (Astin, 1990). Students who feel alienated by discrimination, the sense of being the other, may withdraw in isolation. In addition, students may feel uncomfortable expressing themselves and communicating with host culture members (Wadsworth et al., 2008). However, a

diverse, tolerant, and multicultural environment enhances the attractiveness for international students. Carini, Kuh, and Klein (2006) claim that in tolerant and welcoming environment international students positively engage in academic performance, as well as, personal growth. Adapting to a new culture requires considerable adjustments from international students. Among these adjustments are language, attitudes, and emotions, which may create some psychological stress as the students engage in significant interaction with a foreign culture (Halualani, 2008; Lee & Rice, 2007).

To conclude, globalization and internalization of higher education will continue to increase; therefore, it is imperative institutions that serve international students must be cognizant of all the factors that directly or indirectly affect students' adjustment. Providing support services that address international students' needs is crucial to help in their adjustment process and retention. Further, the first academic year is the most important since students are learning and adjusting personally, academically, socially, and culturally. Helping them in this process is essential because it provides an emotional and social support students need to be retained and involved at the institution (Tinto, 2000; Astin, 1993). Not all international students face the same problems in adjusting since they arrive to the host country and university with diverse experiences. Several studies have demonstrated that language barriers, adapting to different teaching styles, the idiosyncrasies of the new culture, the social environment, social and emotional support, discrimination, and finances, among others are factors, may lead to culture shock and deter the adjustment process (Andrade, 2006; Befus, 1988; Cameron & Kirkman, 2010; Cottrell, & Neuberg, 2005; Halic et al., 2009; Halualani, 2008; Lin, 2006). Other factors such as biases, prejudices, and stereotyping because of lack of understanding of international students' culture and vice versa affects the adjustment process. Tinto (1987) affirms that socio-

cultural interaction of students, peers, and faculty is fundamental for student's motivation and persistence to stay in the university and complete the degree. Social isolation and difficulty establishing friendships with students from the host country can interfere with international students' social adjustment. Lastly, cultural adjustment is necessary for international students to feel they fit in, feel welcomed, and comfortable at the host university. Although many international students must adjust to the host university and country the majority do adjust and "adapt to the cultural and institutional demands" (Janjua et al., 2011, p1360).

Measures must be taken by administrators and faculty to assist international students. It would be wise that institutions of higher education create a survey for international students to learn immediately the areas in which students are seeking help. This can be through the Office of Student Affairs, Counseling, or Office of International Students. Therefore, international students' issues can be addressed properly and effectively. According to Pidgeon & Andrés, 2009; Spencer, 2003), the institution should create a welcome packet with all pertinent information (immigration, medical services, housing, resinous services etc.), produce an International Student handbook with information on academic support and cultural and social aspects of the host country. Finally, provide opportunities for international students to meet and plan social events.

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