

The experience of international students in Iran: Investigating the role of cultural affinity in intercultural adaptation of international students of University of Tehran

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article Main Object: Culture</p> <p>Received: 25 January 2023 Revised: 26 March 2023 Accepted: 27 March 2023 Published online: 22 May 2023</p> <p>Keywords: cultural affinity, intercultural adaptation, intercultural competence, language capability, religious affinity.</p>	<p>Understanding factors affecting intercultural adaptations of international students is very significant. This study aims to investigate the level of intercultural adaptations of international students studying at the University of Tehran, Iran. In addition, it investigates the most important factors affecting intercultural adaptation, in particular the article aims to focus on cultural, religious and language affinity. Moreover, personal and psychological characteristics of students as another important factor affecting intercultural adaptation will be examined. The article also investigates the barriers to intercultural adaptations of international students. In doing so, survey was conducted and data was collected among 284 students studying at the University of Tehran. The results show that the level of intercultural adaptation of international students is higher than average. The results also indicates that there is a significant relationship between students' level of intercultural adaptation and their familiarity with the Persian language. It is also deduced from the study that there is a significant relationship between students' level of intercultural adaptation and their religious and cultural similarity between Iran and their host country. The results of the study also indicate that there is a significant relationship between students' level of intercultural adaptation and their personal and psychological characteristics such as positivity, flexibility, resilience, persistence, patience, resourcefulness, controlling emotions, self-confidence, adapting to new situations and building constructive relationships with others.</p>

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Extended Abstract

Background and Aims

Understanding factors affecting intercultural adaptations of international students is very significant. It is important because understanding these factors can later affect on the process of attracting more international students to Iranian Universities. Reviewing the literature shows that there are different factors influencing this issue. The factors such as demographic characteristics of the students, e.g. age and gender, level of education and other factors such as prior knowledge towards the host country and having a companion during stay are influential factors. This study aims to investigate the level of intercultural adaptations of international students studying at the University of Tehran, Iran. In addition, it investigates the most important factors affecting intercultural adaptation, in particular the article aims to focus on cultural, religious and language affinity. In addition, personal and psychological characteristics of students as another important factor affecting intercultural adaptation will be examined. The article also investigates the barriers to intercultural adaptations of international students.

Methods

In doing so, survey was conducted and data was collected from 284 students studying at the University of Tehran. The survey was conducted both online and offline. The questionnaire consisted of four main parts: (1) socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents; (2) socio-cultural adaptation measurements of international students; (3) factors affecting intercultural adaptations such as cultural and language affinity of international students and their personal characteristics; and finally (4) the barriers to intercultural adaptation. Before conducting the main survey, pretest was conducted among a group of international students from the Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran. The cronbach alpha was 0.95 which shows a good reliability of the questionnaire.

Results

The results show that the level of intercultural adaptation of international students is higher than average. The results also indicates that there is a significant relationship between students' level of intercultural adaptation and their familiarity with the Persian language. It is also deduced from the study that there is a significant relationship between students' level of intercultural adaptation and their religious and cultural similarity between Iran and their host country. The results of the study also indicate that there is a significant relationship between students' level of intercultural adaptation and their personal and psychological characteristics such as positivity,

flexibility, resilience, persistence, patience, resourcefulness, controlling your emotions, self-confidence, adapting to new situations and building constructive relationships with others. The final part of results showed some of the barriers to intercultural adaptations of international students including the lack of information about the Iranian culture, lack of guidance and unfamiliarity with the Iranian customs.

Concluding remarks and novelty

This study was an attempt to understand both the most important factors influencing intercultural adaptations of international students as well as the barriers to the aforementioned issue. As the results indicate the level of intercultural adaptation of international students is more than average. It can be deduced that throughout their studies in Iran they were able to adapt well with the Iranian society and academic sphere. Based on the results, it can also be concluded that attracting the international students from countries that have more cultural similarity in terms of language and religion is easier. They can pass the process of cultural shock easier and faster and can adapt to the Iranian situation better. The novelty of the article relates to the factors such as cultural and language affinity in the Iranian context that have been unexplored in previous studies.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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