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ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS EXPERIENCES OF ASIAN INDIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT A RESEARCH LEVEL II UNIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

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Academic Adjustments Experiences of Asian Indian International Students at a Research Level II University in the United States

Synopsis:

This study was conducted to explore the academic adjustment experiences of six Asian Indian International students pursuing their graduate studies at a Research Level II University in the United States.

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Abstract

This qualitative research was conducted to understand the academic adjustment experiences of six Asian Indian international students who had been in the United States for less than a year and were pursuing their graduate degrees at a Research Level II University. The focus of this research was on the academic adjustment problems the participants experienced, the strategies they used to overcome the problems, the factors that hindered and helped their academic adjustment and suggestions the participants had for the host institution and future Asian Indian international students to facilitate their learning. Data for this study was collected through a demographic survey questionnaire, three focus group interviews and six follow-up interviews. Categories and themes were identified through the constant comparative method. Participants reported problems in the areas of academic integrity, approach to education, critical thinking, course selection, English accent, financial difficulties, instructor student relationship, less competitive academic environment, time management, and registration. The strategies and coping mechanisms used by the participants and the suggestions provided by them for the host institution and future Asian Indian international students were also discussed.

Summary of Paper (Introduction, Background, and Objectives of Study)

For years, the United States remains an important place to pursue higher education for international students from China and India followed by other countries. However, the rising number of international students does not imply that international students do not have problems adjusting to the U.S. higher education system. Rather, international students have more difficulties than domestic students because of differences in cultural, social and educational backgrounds. This study was conducted to explore the academic adjustment experiences of six Asian Indian International students pursuing their graduate studies at a Research Level II University in the United States.

International, Cross-cultural, Comparative, or Transnational Aspects of Research

International student population in institutions of higher education in the U.S. has increased from 34,232 in the year 1954-1955 to 819,644 in the year 2012-2013 with China and India being the leading countries of origin (Open Doors, 2012-2013). This number is expected to increase to eight million by 2025 (Altbach, 2004). Although most international students at the graduate level are adult learners, the differences in the requirements and expectations of the U.S. higher education system pose new and difficult challenges. These students have to work even harder to make a successful transition. Hence, it is important to study this population.

Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

There exists a great deal of research on international students in general, ranging from their overall adjustments to specific adjustments like academic, social, cultural and others. Research has also been conducted on some ethnic groups like Asians, Africans, and Europeans. Among Asians, there exists plenty of research on the academic adjustments of Chinese international students (Wang, 2004; Xu, 2002; Li, 1993, Lin, 1997), but there was none found related to the academic adjustment experiences of Asian Indian students in particular, to the knowledge of the researcher. Though there had been a steady increase in the number of Asian Indian international students in the United States, there was a paucity of research related to the academic adjustment experiences of this group of students.

Research Methods or Modes of Inquiry

Participants completed a demographic survey, participated in three focus group interviews and a follow up interview which was conducted with each participant individually. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling to ensure that the sample was representative and informative about the topic and from whom the most could be learned (Merriam, 1998). Focus groups were the main source of data collection in this study because they are considered to be an excellent qualitative method for exploring an issue from the personal perspective of the participants (Creswell, 1994). Each focus group lasted anywhere between 2-2.5 hours.

Data Sources

Participants for this research were six Asian Indian international students (three males and three females, aged between 20-35 years) pursuing graduate degree in the fields of electrical engineering, health administration, computer science and clinical psychology at a Research Level II University in the United States.

Methods of Analysis

Data analysis for this study consisted of analysis of the demographic survey questionnaire, transcription of the recorded data from the focus group interview tapes, and follow-up interview responses. Data was analyzed using constant comparative analysis to identify themes by constantly comparing units of data and grouping them based on the commonalities (Merriam, 1998). The researcher constantly compared units of data—the bits of information, obtained from the participants' in the form of remarks, comments, expressions etc. and sorted them into groups that had something in common (Merriam, 1998). These bits of common information were then assigned to categories.

Findings

Findings indicate that participants viewed a big difference between the education system of the United States and India in terms of approach to teaching and learning, and expectations of the instructors from students. Expectations of the instructors from the students in terms of in class participation, independent learning, meeting the standard requirements of written assignments, using citations, and other formatting requirements were tough, but acceptable for the participants. Having to participate in classroom discussions created educational anxiety and discomfort for participants because they were trained to listen to the instructors rather than to speak in the class.

Conclusions and Implications

The study reveals that although international students in general, have some common academic adjustment problems but understanding the problems which are specific to individual group of international students can make their academic adjustments much easier and can lead to positive academic experiences. In spite of coming from a highly competitive academic environment and being academically successful, the participants struggled to overcome some academic problems which were specifically related to their cultural beliefs, family ties, gender, elite family backgrounds, and differences in the education systems. They felt that their academic adjustments would have been much easier had their problems been identified and dealt appropriately.

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