

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURE SHOCK ON NIGERIAN STUDENTS' FIRST THREE MONTHS OF ACCULTURATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

EZE OgbonniaEze, OSELEBE Chisom Cherish and IGWE Prince Benedict

Department of Psychology and Sociological Studies

Ebonyi State University Abakaliki

Correspondence Email: ezeogbonnia@gmail.com

Abstract

The exponential growth in Nigerian students' migration to the United Kingdom has given scholars reasons to explore the kind of migration and acculturation experiences they have while pursuing their overseas education. This qualitative research aimed at exposing culture shock and acculturation problems and the psychological implications of these experiences in the lives of Nigerian students in UK universities. 50 participants (10 from each university) were conveniently selected from five universities in the United Kingdom. The universities included the following; Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge University, Loughborough University, University of Lancaster and University of Bedfordshire. They were sampled using convenience and purposive sampling technique. The study was designed as a narrative inquiry and data was collected through telephone interviews. Narrative analysis was conducted and member checking was used to ensure that authentic information was analyzed. Findings revealed that the Nigerian students felt like a fish out of the water in the first three months of their migration to the United Kingdom. The result from the narrative analysis further indicated that the participants experienced psychological discomfort, a near feeling of depression, anxiety and a feeling of impotency all of which were attributed to culture shock. These findings imply that having appropriate and adequate information about a proposed host culture was important to help cushion the overwhelming effects of culture shock which are sometimes inevitable for sojourners abroad.

Keywords: Acculturation, Culture, Shock, International, Psychological, Implication

Background

Travelling to a novel and unfamiliar cultural environment has never been easy for international students just as with other migrants abroad. Petkova (2009) posited that, because international students spend a minimum length of time (six months to five years) at a place, usually intending to return back home, obviously puts the international students in the group of migrants called sojourners (Petkova, 2009). Owing to the increasing number, the cost and benefits that are accrued from Nigerian students studying in the UK, it has long become important to understand the cross-cultural needs of these teeming students. This will help to develop an empirical understanding of the motivations, expectations and experiences of international students.

Encountering diversity can be threatening and unsettling and can pose a threat to international students' sense of who they are (Montgomery, 2010). Almost everyone who study, live or work abroad will experience some degree of culture shock as an adaptive response. It is a period of cultural adjustment which involves everything from getting used to the food, weather, language and other peculiar changes in the new cultural milieu.

Notwithstanding how patient or easygoing and flexible one may be, adjusting to a new culture can sometimes be difficult and frustrating. It quite easy for people to get lost, get depressed and feel homesick and in severe cases, some of the sojourners will wish to return back to their home countries. As Ward, Furnham and Bochner (2001) noted, there are many complex challenges facing students travelling to other countries to undertake university or other educational courses, particularly if their home country culture is strikingly different from the host country culture. The result of such challenges are felt both physically, socially, intellectually and psychologically and form a basis for studying international student experience abroad.

Often, students from developing countries spend time in educational institutions of relatively more developed countries so that, upon returning, they can make enriching contributions to their economy, health care system, social conditions, and the technology of their home countries (Hanboyan & Brya, 1995). However, Pederson (1994) described the concept of culture shock as affecting individuals in different manner such that they develop new ways of constructing new perspective in their self, others and the new environment. Experiencing culture shock aboard sometimes for international students to better understand how their culture shock experiences can help to shape their personalities to take up new challenges in life. Although as Pederson (1995) noted, culture shock takes a process and shouldn't be seen as a single event because such experiences can be a continuous response to the unfamiliar culture.

The United Kingdom is the second largest destinations for international student resident after the United States. This increases the level of intercultural contact between the countries where these teeming populations of students come from and the UK culture. Consequently, these students face a lot of problems regarding adjustment and coping with the norms, values, of the culture of their hosts. The problems may escalate to some major psychological problems as depression, identity crisis and lack of confidence on the realization of their sojourn and educational goals among other problems. For instance, the students are expected to adjust to a new and different lifestyle, food, climate, time zone, and often learning a foreign language or accent to be able to succeed in their new environment (Furnham, 2004). Some of the students end up adjusting to the new cultural environment for the entire period of their study. This is reflected in their academic performance and their consistent uncertainty about what progress the new culture holds for them.

Culture shock

Despite some contradictory findings, international students' researches and literature have shown some known patterns of adaptation and acculturation nature of sojourners' overseas experiences. For instance, some researchers have shown that foreign students appear to experience more physical and mental ill health than native students, as well as encounter more academic problems (Ward et al, 2001). When foreign students arrives the host culture, they are faced with conformity with new cultural etiquettes and loss of the familiar cues, signs and symbols of social intercourse, breakdown of interpersonal communication and identity crisis leading to anxiety (Waver, 1994). This feeling of deficiency sometimes poses a serious challenge for the sojourners to surmount because the cultural values and lifestyle has changed such that all that was known may become unimportant in the new culture. As Turner & Trumpenaars (2000) observed, people in their culture sometimes do not think of losing these familiar cues until they travel out of their culture.

When international students move to another country and experience another culture, they experience what is commonly known as 'Culture Shock.' The word culture shock was first used officially by Kalervo Oberg, (Ward et al, 2001) to describe a psychological disorientation experienced by people

when they enter a new and different cultural environment to live, work, school or for such other purposes. At that point, everything seems unfamiliar and it takes time to adjust. Someone was once asked to describe what this culture shock felt like and he said, it's like arriving London with the map of New York (Max, 2001). Further explanations of the concept of culture shock are rooted in the psychological understanding of how it affects the personality and emotional adjustment of the people who experience it (Ward et al, 2001). In one description, Admin (2009) submitted thus:

Preparing for a two year overseas assignment in Lagos, Nigeria, a U.S. business person during the 1970's submitted to no fewer than 27 shots as a protective measure against everything from yellow fever to hepatitis. Although he managed to avoid any dreaded tropical disease during his assignment, he contracted one malady for which there was no vaccination. The disease was 'culture shock (Admin, 2009).

Meaning making and insights to solving the problems of culture shock sometimes require adjustment skills which are sometimes learnt in the face of the culture shock. Furnham (2004) has identified among others the primary causes of culture shock among international students to include: strain in psychological adaptation, being rejected or feeling of being rejected by members of the new culture, anxiety, surprise, and a feeling of impotence in the new culture. Likewise, Herdi, &Handayani (2020) added that there culture shock was affected by six factors which include; culture shock on weather, culture shock on food, culture shock on language, culture shock on social life, culture shock on etiquette and culture shock on the dress. The feeling of impotence can make the sojourners see others in the new culture as strange people and are seen as strangers by those in the host culture (Alred, Bryan and Fleming, 2003), all of which affects the psychological adaptation of the sojourners unless they are properly adjusted.

When Nigerian students arrive in the United Kingdom for their studies, they always have in mind that they have come to a place better than their home country in terms of development and quality of education obtainable from the new environment, but suddenly they differences between their culture with that of the new culture becomes apparent and from there their problem begins. Consequently as the students grow in their experience, the excitement of travelling to UK will be suddenly dampened by uncertainties. Their worries are further directed towards how they will adapt to the new changes they see in the new culture and how these changes will affect their personal life (Marx, 2001). All of these suggest that the sojourners are experiencing culture shock. Likewise, Srichurat (2023), in a study of culture shock among Thai and other foreign students revealed that they experienced culture shock difficulties in areas of language barriers, the food and the habits of the local people. It is worthy to note that culture shock can affect life satisfaction when people sojourn to stay in an unknown culture (Jurásek, &Wawrosz, 2023).

Marx (2001) noted that the problems of culture shock may be more serious that it degenerates from exhilaration and confidence to serious intercultural problem and even a nervous breakdown. This is why it becomes so important that there is an understanding of Nigerian international students' adaptation problems and how they can effectively navigate culture shock challenges socially for their psychological wellbeing. Again, as Brown& Holloway (2008) opined, moving to a new environment can be among the most traumatic event in a persons' life as culture shock is almost inevitable for most sojourners overseas. It is also on record the difficulties and stressors associated with transition to a new school or university in a new culture, hamper and affect students' learning (Ward et al, 2001). Learning is the primary objective and reason why international students sojourn abroad but culture shock experience may affect how this objective is realized. Although, experiencing culture shock can be an important aspect of cultural learning, self development, and personal growth (Ward et al, 2001).

Culture shock has been explained from different theoretical viewpoint especially with regards to how migrants encounter and navigate new cultures. Among the notable and comprehensive explanations of culture shock is the ABC model which considers the affective, behavioral and cognitive impact of culture shock on migrating individuals' adjustment (Ward, et al, 2001).

Nature of culture shock

Culture shock has been seen as phenomena that affect people that travel to a foreign land with their various values, attitudes and different ways of life (Dagus et al, 2024). International students like other foreigners experience culture shock at varying degrees. Karlevo Oberg, is known for the concept of culture shock and Oberg explained that culture shock follows a stage where happiness in a new culture is experienced, followed by problems and discomforts and back to happiness-again in the same culture. Adapting to the culture of the receiving society has been a major problem of international students overseas (Aydinalp, 2023). However, to adapt to a new culture, one needs to overcome culture shock (Lovin, Busila, & Sava, 2023). Culture shock and cross-cultural adaptation are symbiotic such that culture shock problems can influence adaptation while adaptation will rely on surmounting culture shock problems.

Davy (2008) noted that there are four stages of culture shock and argued that every individual must experience culture shock but might not sequentially experience the four stages. The four stages of culture shock are the honeymoon stage, the difficulty stage, stability stage and adjustment stage Davy (2008).

Honeymoon stage: Marx (2001) noted that Oberg the originator of the phases of culture shock and adaptation pointed out that the first encounters of sojourners abroad is always full of excitements, positive feelings and stimulating. At this stage, everything is new, different and delightful, with the euphoria and the happiness that can be compared to that of buying a new house or marriage otherwise known as honeymoon (Marx, 2001). In this stage, the sojourners new experiences in the few days of arrival in the new culture is full of excitements and happiness, thus viewing life as providing endless opportunities and leaving them in a state of exhilaration. Then comes the fall when the shine wears off and all those once-amusing local characteristics become frustrating and a pain in the ass. This position has been argued by some scholars as not having the strength of generalization as some people who travel abroad start having their shock from the first day of their arrival in a new culture. This coincides with the argument that the manner at which sojourners or international students experience culture shock differs among individuals. The honeymoon phase comprise of the first three months in a new country (Ward et al, 2001).

Negotiation stage: As the international students move away from the happiness and exciting period, they face a more critical period of the novel cultural experience. The excitement experienced during the first stage begins to disappear for anger, and unpleasant moments become the order. Some scholars refer to this phase as the distress stage because at this second phase, sojourners become aware of the values and the way of life of the host people (Petkova, 2009). The researcher noted that the sojourners at this period begin to actively compare the values in their native countries with those in the host country (Petkova, 2009). A major aspect of their experiences at this stage is based on comparison such that they begin to practice ethnocentrism.

The second stage of culture shock which is also the difficult stage can be very regretful such that there is indication of culture clash as the sojourners begin to perceive, judge and interpret signs, symbols and behaviours in the host culture using their local meanings (Petkova, 2009). Meanwhile, Furnham

(2004) argued that the intensity of culture shock at this stage depends on the correlation between the sojourners' expectations before they sojourned to the host country and their true experiences in the new culture as time progressed. For Furnham (2004), having a previous experience can contribute to the quick recovery from culture shock. While this viewpoint may be contested, international student who are first time travelers to new cultures are likely to considerably show more symptoms of culture shock than the returning students.

Re-integration stage: This stage can be compressed into the stability and adjustment stage as the sojourners begins to make plan to accept what they cannot change as this phase. In the third phase of culture shock individuals are fully aware of the cultural differences and might have been affected in varying ways by culture shock. Most of them would have made considerable shifts in their understanding of the social roles, attitudes and behaviours in the host country. This stage is also called the adjustment stage (Lina & Setiawan, 2017). In the adjustment stage, adaptation and recovery gradually become embraced as the foreigners begin to tolerate those cultural differences in the host culture that were initially perceived as stressors. Generally, people encounter psychological difficulties during initial settlement periods when they migrate to a new culture as they try to assimilate to the social and cultural norms of the new culture (Hakak & Anton, 2020). The reasons are because people usually are unaware of the huge impact that culture plays in their lives when they are surrounded by people who they share the same assumptions and valued with until they leave their culture to a foreign culture (Munira, Intizorxon, & Umida, 2024).

Psychological acculturation

Acculturation is process or adapting to a new culture that is different from ones original culture. Acculturation has been used to refer to a process of psychological change that takes place when there is contact between two or more cultural group and their individual members (Berry, 2005). Al-Omari and Pallikkathayil (2008, p. 129) defined psychological acculturation as a “voluntary and comfortable modifications that occur in the individual’s lifestyle, behaviours, beliefs, values, and identity as a result of continuous first-hand contact with different cultural groups”. Meanwhile, the modification in cultural acculturation sometimes are not because acculturation presents psychological problems since there are alterations in the individual’s lifestyle, behaviours, beliefs, values and identity (Berry, 1980).

Acculturation occurs to enable an individual to fit in into a particular culture that is different from their indigenous culture. It can be considered as a similar process to the natural process of adaptation of fitting in behaviorally to a new physical environment (Chirkov, 2009). Acculturation is also a process of cultural change, that occur due to contact between members of two or more cultural groups (Berry, 1980). Some researchers see acculturation as a process of changing from one's original culture to a new culture where behaviour and attitude in line with the acculturation process (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006). Psychological acculturation does not happen without difficulties and Haasen and Reimer (2008) have noted that during acculturation, people may experience loss of their original society’s norms and values in favor of those of the host culture.

In John Berry’s theory of two-dimensional acculturation, culture maintenance and culture contact (Ward and Kus, 2012), acculturation was conceptualized as a factor in either maintaining one’s own original cultural values or maintaining contact with another culture and developing a bicultural identity. Therefore, given the above, an individual who migrates to another culture can choose between the following four types of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization, based on Berry’s two dimensions of acculturation (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987). Berry and colleagues added marginalization to explain that some individuals may not have

interest in either adhering to the dominant host culture's behaviours and attitudes or their native culture's values (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987). These four forms of acculturation are accompanied by cross-cultural difficulties as they involve sometimes uncomfortable changes in the lives of sojourners to the host cultures (Berry, 2005).

Psychological acculturation may involve familiarizing oneself with the members of the host culture which becomes the popular dominant culture. Among the challenges sojourners face during acculturation is language barriers. Although language is part of the changes sought during acculturation, adjusting to new language can also be very overwhelming and emotionally disturbing. One thing is paramount during acculturation, which is the point that the host culture is dominant. It is considered the popular culture and its values and attributes will surely override those of foreigners visiting that culture. As Constantine et al (2005) have noted, the populous or dominant nature of the host culture can be overriding such that the sojourners and migrants learn to adapt to the dominant host culture at the expense of their own previously held behaviours or values. Situations as this contribute to acculturative stress among other psychological consequences.

During acculturation, integration is preferred over the other three styles of acculturation mentioned; assimilation, separation and marginalization (Ward & Kus, 2012). Integration as an acculturation style leads to the development of biculturalism as a new blended identity in the host culture. This style of acculturation is considered to enhance adaptation into the new culture (Berry, 2005). Psychological acculturation can be challenging because of personal problems associated with acculturation. For instance, there are problems of choice of ethnic identity in the host culture as the individual tries to integrate between their original values and those provided by the host cultures. This condition has been found to play a role in the development of depression (Jung et al, 2007). These problems can be exacerbated where there is confusion about the identity to during such intercultural contact (Berry et al, 1987).

Scholars maintain that acculturation is a critical life event (Berry, 1997). This is so because changes made in the lives of those undergoing psychological acculturation may affect the individuals' adjustment and previously held values. This is just as Haasen and Reimer (2008) stated that the problems individuals and families encounter during acculturation in a new culture could cause mental health problems. Acculturation therefore presents the acculturating individuals with complex problems traceable to the interactions between social, psychological and biological stressors in the host culture (Haasen & Reimer, 2008). Similarly, Lee, Koeske & Sales (2004) argue that acculturative stress is induced by the challenges in the adaptation process. Meanwhile, it is worthy to mention that the mental health implications of acculturative stress experienced by sojourners should be examined to ascertain the degree of acculturative stress experienced during acculturation.

It is important to note that acculturation literature is crowded with studies conducted with migrants and refugees when compared to those on international students (Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Meanwhile, different migrants are exposed to different stress levels. For international students, their acculturation process influence their stress and anxiety experiences in the host culture (Fritz, Chin & DeMarinis, 2008). Available literature on international students' psychological acculturation experiences highlights the sources of their acculturation stress to include: "academic challenges, second language anxiety personal and vocational challenges and sociocultural issues" (Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero, & Anderson, 2012 p.576). All of these are collectively referred to as acculturative stress of international students (Constantine et al, 2005).

Acculturative stress has been identified as having the potential of affecting the mental health of international students (Furnham and Trezise, 1983), and can reduce their abilities to connect and articulate their integral psychological functioning. The reason for this is because of loss experienced by their immune system caused by the stressful life events experienced during overseas sojourn (Furnham and Trezise, 1983). Other researchers argue that international students may experience depressive disorders during acculturation (Haasen and Reimer, 2008). Psychological acculturation affects the sojourners' emotional integration and wellbeing as well as their sociocultural stability.

International student's psychological/emotional problems of acculturation

Davis et al (2010) note that during acculturation, depression, anxiety and stress may become the common outcomes and by-products of foreigner's experiences. The psychological problems have negative impacts on the overall wellbeing of the sojourners and reduce their optimal functioning in the host culture. In support, research by Amy, Baker and Curtis (2007) shows that youths face significant difficulties while adjusting to new settings or environment due to separation from their prior social support networks. The significant nature of these networks accounts for transition distress with overwhelming emotional impacts on the wellbeing of the youths (Amy et al, 2007). Likewise Lee, Koeske and Sales (2004) opined that international students experience loss of natural social support leading to excessive stress and further argued that the sojourners are likely to develop psychological distress.

Jung, Hecht & Wadsworth (2007, p. 391) notes that international students are a "vulnerable group whose members are at risk of depressive symptoms and depression". The vulnerability of these sojourners can be measured by their inability to perform tasks they previously did before they sojourned overseas which might affect their sense of being and psychological wellbeing. Conditions as these can lead to problems of identity confusion because Jung et al (2007) have long argued that problems of depression are reported to be related to self or identity crises. This could cause a shutdown of the sojourners engagement with both their inner and outer worlds. When acculturation stress is not well managed, it may also lead to suppressing of depressive emotions.

Research by Gill (2007) revealed a number of processes international students from China had to go through during their time of study in a British university. The study showed that international students suffered stress and anxiety arising from encountering strangeness for the first time. This was due to their lack of preparation and having little practical knowledge and understanding of British culture, learning contexts and norms (Gill, 2007). Conditions as this pose a serious threat to the sojourners acculturation and learning experiences.

International students' psychological problems of acculturation affect their emotional and psychological wellbeing with implications of impacting their mental health (Furnham and Trezise, 1983). This is due to high levels of psychological and emotional distress experienced during the period of their migration to study abroad. Meanwhile, researcher Weirs-Jenssen (2003) writes that scholars draw a somewhat gloomy picture of being a student abroad through their studies. This is not to say that being an international student abroad is exhilarating because the psychological and emotional problems involved may shatter the sojourners such that their psychological wellbeing is threatened. This is so because Research by Bradley (2000) suggests that the difficult experiences of international students ranging from academic pressure, economic problems to social problems could trigger mental health issues in extreme cases.

Church (1989) notes that during acculturation, people experience anxiety, helplessness, irritability, insecurity and a longing for a more predictable and gratifying environment. These are acculturation challenges that create emotional tensions due to cultural changes and unfamiliarity that lead to further

psychological distress (Pantelidou & Craig, 2006). Psychological challenges of acculturation affect the international student's physiological homeostasis. Bovin and Marx (2011) noted that emotional stressors can lead to physiological reactions such as increased heart rate, dizziness, shallow breath, hot flashes, nausea and sweating. During this period, adrenalin is intermittently secreted into the system because of high level of fear and uncertainty present during such emotional conditions (Charney, 2004). Therefore, problems of psychological acculturation also impact physiological states of the sojourners as the bodily functions are interconnected.

Acculturation stress encountered by international students leads to several psychological difficulties and can be very challenging. Hwang and Wang (2011) noted that these experiences occur due to life-threatening events in the lives of international students that affect their individual functioning overseas. Findings from studies on Taiwanese international students' adjustment suggest that stressors affected and reduced their adjustment abilities in the host sociocultural environments and affected their learning performances (Hwang and Wang, 2011). Psychological and stressful emotional problems of acculturation experienced by sojourners may also impact on their academic goals of sojourn overseas.

Theoretical Framework

The U-curve of Adjustment Theory

The U-curve model of culture shock developed by Lysgaard in 1955 as a framework for explaining the adjustments trajectories grounds this study. The model explains the culture shock experiences of international students wherein the arrival period is interesting, the culture shock stress sets in and then followed by recovery from the shock. The U-curve model of culture shock for explaining sojourners adjustment has continued to gain remarkable popularity despite its controversial status (Viol & Klasen 2021). While they may exist controversies as to the general acceptability that adjustment of international students takes a U shape, the current study is only interested in the psychological implications of experiencing culture shock which as Ward, et al (2001) is inevitable within the first three months of sojourn to an unfamiliar culture. The U-curve model of culture shock assumes that when sojourners enter a new country, they experience euphoria characterized by exhilarations akin to honeymoon experience which is at the upper left of the curve. This is the ginning point when the sojourners are yet to come to terms with the cultural differences that exist between their home cultures and those of their host (Proyrungroj, 2023).

At the base of the U is the moment the sojourners will experience culture shock. Lysgaard (1955) considered this stage as the rejection stage because of the feelings of impotency and other acculturative stress that are experienced at this stage of their overseas sojourn. The stage is also seen as the stage of confusion due the frustration that the foreign environment creates which makes the sojourners unhappy (Gohi, Wang, Gohi, Bohou, Traore, 2022). The third stage which is at the upper right of the U-curve is seen as a period of adjustment and recovery because the sojourners at this period begin to deal with the cultural differences that caused them trouble (Gohi et al, 2022). The U-curve model of acculturation supports the several arguments that acculturation and encounter with a foreign culture present some challenges which must be surmounted for people to survive in a foreign culture. The framework suggests that the diversity encountered during such cross-cultural contact could induce risks and demanding challenges which are perceived differently by individuals (Bender, 2022).

Method

O'Leary (2010) noted that the major method of a successful research work is highly intertwined with the means of achieving the research objectives. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of

particular populations (Dey, 1993). Thus, this study is designed as a qualitative narrative study with the objective of obtaining rich and thick description of the psychological problems encountered by Nigerian international students in UK universities during acculturation.

Participants

The participants in the study comprise of 50 undergraduates and postgraduates Nigerian international students studying in five selected UK universities. Qualitative research relatively uses small samples unlike quantitative research. As Mason (2010) noted, in qualitative research, one occurrence of a piece of data or code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. The narrators were students who sojourned to the United Kingdom three months ago for their overseas studies. Participants were selected through purposive and convenient sampling techniques. The inclusion criteria was determined by their time of arrival to the UK because it is argued that culture shock experience is at its peak in the first three months of sojourn to the new culture (Ward et al, 2001).

Instrument and data collection

Just as with other qualitative researches, researchers in this study made use of narrative interview guides. The data were collected through telephone interviews and video calls. As Drabble et al (2016) noted, the potential of in-depth telephone interviews for qualitative research has been documented by a growing body of literature. This method of data collection was adopted because of logistics conveniences since the participants are classified as 'hard-to reach population' because they were residing in the United Kingdom and the cost of travelling to collect one to one data was not feasible. The participants were contacted and their interview sessions were arranged base on their own convenience. Oral consent was obtained and those who obliged to video calls were interviewed through this means while those who did not oblige were interviewed through voice telephone calls. Telephone interviews are less intrusive when compared to in-person interviews and the participants in the study were informed that they had the freedom to decline or withdraw from the study when they feel uncomfortable to continue.

Each telephone interview lasted for 30-45 minutes and they were recorded after permission was obtained from the participants for transcription purposes only. The researchers approached the interviewees with an opening statement such as "please tell us about your first three months experience of living in the United Kingdom when you arrived for your study". The researchers used some follow up questions to probe more into the participants culture shock and psychological acculturation experience with statements such as "please tell us how the experience made you feel". The participants started and ended their narratives without further persuasion. This is because as Mason (2010) noted, in qualitative data, more data sometimes does not necessarily lead to more information.

Data analysis and result

Narrative analysis was conducted through pattern recognition and theme coding. Content analysis was conducted on the participants' narratives. Data was organized and managed using the qualitative software Nvivo. Data was coded to compare, categorize and recognize patterns of responses in relation to the experiences of culture shock and psychological acculturation. The researchers independently read the transcript and arrived at consensus patterns of responses which were subjected for further cross-thematic analysis.

Results

The following overarching themes emerged and are further subjected to cross-thematic analysis: felling like a fish out of the water, psychological discomfort, a near feeling of depression, anxiety and a feeling of impotency from culture shock. Words and phrases that were common in the narratives are *stressed, depressed, sleeplessness, loss of identity, feeling of inadequacy insecurity, lack of self confidence, anxiety, uncertain, emotionally down.*

Like a fish out of water: This metaphor was used by the participants to make sense of their culture shock experiences in the United Kingdom. Participants' culture shock experiences in the UK affected their lives in manner that they felt like they were no longer safe as their lives were threatened. Some vignettes from their narratives suggesting the theme include: *"...immediately I reached the London Heathrow airport, the cold and everything made me know that all is not well"*[narrator 10], *"...once you enter here you will know that levels has changed for you, it downed on me that I am no more in my comfort zone"*[narrator 40], *"...when I got here things really changed and I felt lonely"* [narrator 5], *"...I arrived this no man's land and realized that I am on my own now"*[narrator 9], *"...it was difficult when I first got here because I felt helpless to be honest"* [narrator 33], *"...the feeling that first time is like that of a fish thrown out of water that needs help"*[narrator 1]. The narratives of the participants in this study showed evidence of feeling of helplessness as they used this to make sense of their initial experiences when they sojourned the UK for their studies. That experience brought their thoughts to the reality of the new environment which was different from their previous home country.

Psychological discomfort: Making sense of their UK experiences with a feeling of psychological discomfort weaved through the narratives of the participants in the study. Some of phrases and statements suggesting psychological discomfort are seen the vignettes from the narratives below:

"...my initial experience of the UK culture was full of sadness and I was so confused and helpless as to what to do"[narrator 9], *"...my first few weeks here was hell for me, there no body to run to, I became nervous and I felt strange because things has changed from what it used to be"*[narrator 18], *"...it was really a terrible experience for me, fear of surviving the new environment made me cry almost"*[narrator 34], *"... few days when I arrived the joy of coming abroad disappeared and I felt helpless, couldn't sleep or concentrate because of excessive worry"*[narrator 45], *"my experience was one of sadness because I felt down in spirit"*[narrator 17], *"...it was a situation of low energy for me because I was always awake thinking of how to cope in this strange land"*. A major theme in the narratives of the participants was the feeling of psychological discomfort orchestrated by new cultural contact, a condition known as culture shock. Their psychological acculturation process was accompanied by psychological discomfort which affected their psychological wellbeing and meaning making.

Feeling of depression: The narrators had storied experiences that coincided with those of depressive feelings in their first three month of their sojourn to the United Kingdom. Depressive themes weaved through their narratives as seen in some the vignettes below.

"...in fact I was depressed when I first arrived the UK because the loneliness and the tough times I met was unbearable"[narrator 6], *"...because of the way I felt when I came here, I lost interest in everything apart from worrying and sleeping and waking up to worry again"* [narrator 3], *"...life almost became meaningless and I will not forget to tell you that I had so much regrets as to why I spent that huge money to come and disturb my life"*[narrator 9], *"...the joy of jappa disappeared almost immediately"* [narrator 18], *"...the way people the white people behaved towards me that period made me not to be interested in anyone or even attend events"*[narrator 50], *"...I became worried with all that experiences whether I am still the same person because everything seemed tough for me"*[narrator 45], *"...yeah first two to three months of me here was something else, I was always feeling tired, having low mood"*[narrator 13], *"...the hope of survival was becoming slim, money was finishing, no work yet, different learning environment, all that took some better part of me"*[narrator 1].

The early days of the sojourners in the United Kingdom was filled with stressful life events that affected their mood and was recurrent as their stories revealed. The narrators within the first here

months of their sojourn to the UK has began to express incongruence between their mood and their culture shock experience which made them to use depressive episodes to male sense of their experience.

Anxiety, feeling of impotency and Homesickness: Experiences that resembled those of feeling of anxiety were seen to be a major theme in the pattern of responses obtained from the participants. Their acculturation trajectories were occupied with a feeling of tension, impotency and homesick as they navigated the new cultural environment as evidenced in their narratives. See some of the vignettes of some of the vignettes from their narratives below.

...I felt fear indeed knowing that it was not going to be easy surviving in the UK when I first got here then I missed Nigeria [narrator 43], *...omo I could sleep for long time because am always awake feeling like maybe I will not make it here, I felt like running back home* [narrator50], *...for me it was mainly the fear of the unknown because at that time everything was irritatingme such that I was always thinking about home and people I left there* [narrator 12], *...the fear of not knowing how it will end engulfed my own experience even though it is better now but that time I wished I could abandon everything and come back home* [narrator 21], *...it was not easy at all because even me I was afraid of whether things will change and then I asked myself are you not better at home* [narrator 37], *...my experiences was filled with fear and I could not concentrate due to too many things to worry about, the joy of coming here has disappeared ans felt homesick* [narrator 11], *...these people here are very personal, so you have no friend, no brother and that can be very threatening especially if you have problems, I really missed Nigeria* [narrator 18], *...from the airport I was emotionally down because you just know that you are now on your own and you appreciate where you are coming from* [narrator 20], *...I became nervous, confused, feeling strange and in fact I thanks God I survived what was happening to me at that time as I even thought of coming back home* [narrator 16], *...I was scared to ask question, nobody cared about me unlike back home and I kept worrying myself knowing that this is the beginning of what I am yet to encounter with these people for my study period* [narrator 4], *...the white girls in the same accommodation with me did not even help me with my load or give me a proper greeting when I arrived my accommodation, I was again isolated and I told myself that I was in for big trouble and then I realized there is no place like home and wished I was back home* [narrator 27], *... for me I felt rejected and always stressed out, because I was thinking and panicking on how I am going to cope with these people that does not care about me which is opposite of our homeland* [narrator 30].

The experiences of culture shock as storied by the narrators in relation their first three months in the United Kingdom from the narrative analysis indicates that they experienced conditions of intense fear, having sense of an impending danger from the acculturation stress they underwent. The overwhelming challenges they encountered made them to feel homesick with a great desire to return back home. They also had troubles with concentration and felt irritable all of which characterized their anxiety experiences.

Discussion

The major objective was to explore the psychological implications of culture shock experiences among Nigerian international students in United Kingdom universities within their first three months of sojourn. Research findings indicated that the psychological distress experienced by the sojourners affected their overall psychological functioning. Studies have shown that significant emotional stress accompany culture shock experience of migrants overseas (Hack-Polay & Mahmoud, 2023). Narrators in this study storied having anxiety feelings and severe psychological discomfort. Other

studies conducted by Qun, Syihabuddin, Mulyati, and Damaianti (2018) revealed that Chinese-Indonesian student's experience of culture while living in Indonesia was characterized by a host of psychological and social problems with lots of inconveniences. This is akin to the feeling "like a fish out of water" experienced by participants in this study which symbolizes severe feeling of loss and psychological breakdown.

Research by Aulia, Fitriisa, & Haqqu (2023) demonstrated that the affective, behavioral and cognitive domains of foreign students who experienced culture shock were affected in diverse ways. It was also found that the culture shock experienced by foreigners whose culture is far different from those of the host culture is always more intense (Aulia et al, 2023). This is of course the case with Nigerian international students in UK universities whose cultures are far different from those of their host, a factor that contributed to their high level of psychological distress in their acculturation journey. The result from the narrative analysis of our study indicated that the participants experienced psychological discomfort, a near feeling of depression, anxiety and a feeling of impotency all of which were attributed to culture shock. This is in line with discoveries of Ikafa, Hack-Polay, Walker, and Mahmoud (2020) that the stress experienced by people who are away from their homeland leaves them to continually experience poor sleep, problem with eating, feeling vulnerable and anxious. Our narrative analysis further discovered that participants had longing feeling of going back home otherwise known as homesickness in their culture shock experience. Meanwhile, homesickness is negative impact felt from relocation and has been seen to lead to pathological states with far reaching consequences (Hack-Polay, 2020).

Conclusion

Cross-cultural contacts have presented several physical and psychological issues among sojourners who seek foreign education in more civilized Western countries. Accordingly, this study has revealed that experiencing culture shock can have far-reaching psychological consequences which can affect the overall wellbeing of international students studying overseas. The implication can be felt in the adaptability trajectories of the sojourners which may also impact adversely on their sojourn objectives. The U-curve model seems to apply to sojourners overseas knowledge because the first three months have been characterized by both euphoria and of course culture shock with psychological concerns. Thus, navigation from their comfort zones to the new zone in the first three months of sojourn present compounded barriers for the international students that should be of psychological concern.

Recommendation

Major among our recommendation is adequate information and cross-cultural knowledge which will help to ameliorate the effects of culture shock. Likewise, universities hosting international students should step up their support network for international students in the first three months of their sojourn to them. Social and cultural supports are needed at the early sojourn stage which has been seen to be a time of confusion and homesickness. Counseling and psychotherapeutic interventions should be prioritized for the sojourners at the rejection stage.

References

- Admin (2009). *Culture Shock* [Online] Available at: [http:// www.thematicessay.com/?p](http://www.thematicessay.com/?p)
- Alred, R. Bryan, M & Fleming, M. (2003). *Intercultural experience and education*. Britain: Cromwell Press Ltd.
- Al-Omari, H & Pallikkathayil, L. (2008). Psychological acculturation: a concept analysis with implications for nursing practice. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 19*(2), 126-133.
- Amy, J. Baker, M & Curtis, P. (2007). Youth characteristics associated with behavioural and mental health problems during the transition to the residential treatment centres: the odyssey project population. *Child Welfare League of America, 86*(6), 1-29.
- Aulia, M., Fitriasia, D., & Haquq, R. M. (2023). Understanding culture shock and its relationship to intercultural communicative competence. *Studies in English Language and Education, 10*(3), 1420-1433.
- Aydinalp, E.B (2023). Cultural difference/cultural shock dichotomy in language teaching. *Humanities and Social Sciences Modern Analysis and Researches, 51*.
- Berry, J. (1997). Constructing and expanding a framework: opportunities for developing acculturation research. *Applied Psychology: An International Review, 46*, 62–68.
- Berry, J. (1980). Acculturation as varieties of adaptation. In: M. Padilla, ed. 1980. *Acculturation: theory models and some new findings*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Berry, J. Kim, U. Minde, T. & Mok, D.(1987). Comparative studies of acculturative stress. *International Migration Review, 21*, 491-511.
- Berry, J. (2005). Acculturation: living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(6), 679-712.
- Bovin, M & Marx, B. (2011). The importance of the peritraumatic experience in defining traumatic stress. *Psychological Bulletin, 137*(1), 47-67.
- Bradley, G. (2000). Responding effectively to the mental health needs of international students. *Higher Education, 39*(4), 417-433.
- Brown, L & Holloway, I. (2008). The initial stage of the international sojourn: excitement or culture shock? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 36* (1), 33-49.
- Bender, F. (2022). Dealing with Acculturative Stress and Cultural Adjustment. In *A Roadmap to Intercultural Proficiency: Navigating Through Cultural Diversity and Inclusion* (pp. 43-54). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Charney, S. D. (2004). Psychological mechanism of resilience and vulnerability: implications for successful adaptation to extreme stress. *American Psychiatric Association, 11*(3), 368- 391.
- Chirkov, V. (2009). Critical psychology of acculturation: what do we study and how do we study it, when we investigate acculturation? *International Journal of Intercultural Relation, 33*(2), 1.
- Church, A.T.(1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological bulletin, 3* (5), 540-572.
- Christenson, O. D., Zabriskie, R. B., Eggett, D. L., & Freeman, P. A. (2006). Family acculturation, family leisure involvement, and family functioning among Mexican-Americans. *Journal of Leisure Research, 38*(4), 475-495.

- Constantine, M. Anderson, G. Berkel, L. Caldwell, L. & Utsey, S. (2005). Examining the cultural adjustment experiences of African international college students: a qualitative analysis. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(1), 57-66.
- Dagus, M. M., Lacambra, V., Mindano, J., Magalona, J., Narvaez, R. A., & Paredes, M. K. (2024). Culture Shock in Nursing: A Concept Analysis. *World Journal of Nursing Research*, 1-35.
- Davey, G. (2008). *The international student's survival guide: how to get the most from studying at a UK University*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Davis, P., Headley, K., Bazemore, T., Cervo, J., Sickinger, P., Windham, M., & Rehfuss, M. (2010). Evaluating impact of transition seminars on missionary kids' depression, anxiety, stress, and well-being. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 38(3), 186-194.
- Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: a user-friendly guide social scientists*. New York: Routledge.
- Drabble, L., Trocki, K., Salcedo, B., Walker, P., and Korcha, R. (2016). Conducting qualitative interviews by telephone: Lessons learned from a study of alcohol use among sexual minority and heterosexual women. *Qual Soc Work*, 15(1): 118–133.
- Fritz, M. Chin, D & DeMarinis, V. (2008). Stressors, anxiety, acculturation and adjustment among international and North American students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 32(2), 244-259.
- Furnham, A. (2004). Education and culture shock. *Psychologist*, 17(1), 16.
- Furnham A. & Trezise, L. (1983). The mental health of foreign students. *Social Sciences and Medicine*, 17(6), 365–370.
- Gill, S. (2007). Overseas student intercultural adaptation as intercultural learning: a transformative framework. *Guerand Hermes's Foundation UK*, 37(2), 167-183.
- Gohi, L. G. C. S., Wang, W., Gohi, B. V. M. L., Bohou, B. H. G. F., & Traore, D. E. W. (2022). A Review of Cross-Cultural Training Research: The Past 10 Years and Implications for Moving Forward. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 10(4), 653-671.
- Hakak, Y., & Anton, S. (2020). Smooth sailing with the occasional 'culture shock': The experiences of Romanian social workers in England. *European Journal of Social Work*, 24(1), 1097-1108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1838451>
- Haasen, C & Reimer, D. (2008). Acculturation and mental distress among Russian and Iranian migrants in Germany. *European Psychiatry*, 23 (1), S10-S13.
- Herdi, H., & Handayani, T. (2020). Taking a Look into the Culture Shock Experienced by Foreigners at Rumbai, Pekanbaru. *Elsya: Journal of English Language Studies*, 2(3), 77-81.
- Hamboyan, H., & Bryan, A. K. (1995). International students. Culture shock can affect the health of students from abroad. *Canadian Family Physician*, 41, 1713.
- Hwang, P. Sodanine, S & Wang, M. (2011). The effect of stressors, living support, and adjustment on learning performance of international students in Taiwan. *Social Behaviour and Personality: an International Journal*, 39 (3), 333.
- Hack-Polay, D. (2020). Global South expatriates, homesickness and adjustment approaches. *Public Health Rev*, 41, 11.

- Hack-Polay, D., & Mahmoud, A. B. (2023). Beyond culture shock: entering the complex world of Global South expatriates' adaptation. *Qeios*.
- Ikafa, I., Hack-Polay, D., Walker, J., & Mahmoud, A. B. (2022). African migrants and stress coping strategies in Australia: Implications for social work. *International Social Work*, 65(6), 1166-1183.
- Jurásek, M., & Wawrosz, P. (2023). What Makes People Abroad Satisfied? The Role of Cultural Intelligence, Cultural Identity, and Culture Shock. *Social Sciences*, 12(3), 126.
- Jung, E. Hecht, M & Wadsworth, B. (2007). The role of identity in international students' psychological wellbeing in the United States: a model of depression level, identity gaps, discrimination and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 31(5), 605-624.
- Lee, J. Koeske, G & Sales, E. (2004). Social support buffering of acculturative stress: a study of mental health symptoms among Korean international students. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 28 (5), 3399-414.
- Lina, D., & Setiawan, D. B. (2017). An analysis of culture shock from west to east as seen in Reilly's The Tournament. *Teknosastik*, 15(1), 14-20.
- Lovin, D., Busila, A. V., & Sava, V. (2023). Culture shock, adaptation, and organizational performance in sport: A psychological perspective. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 190, 122403.
- Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a Foreign Society: Norwegian Fulbright Grantees Visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin*, 7, 45-51.
- Montgomery, C. (2010). Universities into the 21st Century: understanding the international student experience. England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research*, 11, (3).
- Marx, E. (2001). *Breaking through Culture Shock: what you need to succeed in international business*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Munira, M., Intizorxon, K., & Umida, N. (2024). CULTURE SHOCK AS A SOCIAL ISSUES. *World scientific research journal*, 25(1), 71-78.
- O'Leary, Z. (2010). *The essential guide to doing your research project*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Petkova, D. (2009). Culture shock and it's perception by sojourners in the USA: an exploratory study. *European Journal of Cross Cultural Competence and Management*, 1(1), 97-115.
- Pedersen, P. (1994). *The five stages of culture shock: Critical incidents around the world*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Proyrungroj, R. (2023). Travelling back home and becoming a stranger. *Revista Turismo & Desenvolvimento (RT&D)/Journal of Tourism & Development*, (44).
- Pantelidou, S., & Craig, T. K. (2006). Culture shock and social support: A survey in Greek migrant students. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 41, 777-781.

Qun, W., Syihabuddin, S., Mulyati, Y., & Damaianti, V. (2018). Perceiving and dealing with culture shock: The study of Chinese Indonesian-language students. *International Journal of Education*, 11(1), 18-26. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ije.v11i1.12390>

Rice, K. Choi, C. Zhang, Y. Morero, Y & Anderson, D. (2012). Self-critical perfectionism, acculturative stress, and depression among international students. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 40(4), 575-600.

Smith, R & Khawaja, N. (2011). A review of the acculturation experiences of international students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35(6), 699-713.

Srichurat, T. (2023). Handling of culture shock of foreign student when studying abroad..archive.cm.mahidol.ac.th

Turner, C. H. & Trompenaars, F. (2000). *Building Cross Cultural competence: how to create wealth from conflicting values*: England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Viol, C. U., & Klasen, S. (2021). U-Curve, Squiggly Lines or Nothing at All? Culture Shock and the Erasmus Experience. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad*, 33(3), 1-28.

Ward, C. Bochner, S. & Furnham, A. (2001). *The psychology of culture shock*. 2nd ed. East Sussex: Routledge.

Ward C & Kus, L. (2012). Back to and beyond Berry's basics: the conceptualization, operationalization and classification of acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relation*, 36(4), 472-485.

Wiers-Jensen, J. (2003). Norwegian students abroad: experience of students from linguistically and geographically peripheral European country. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(4), 91-111.

Weaver, G., ed. (1994). *Culture, communication and conflict: reading in intercultural relation*. Needham: Ginn Press.