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## **A Study on Adjustment, Homesickness, and Cultural Intelligence in Indian International Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In current times of increasing globalisation, moving abroad for education is the most preferred option for many students and their parents. As exciting as the option seems, it is embedded with its own problems and challenges. One of the predominant challenges is adjusting to a foreign culture which adds to an individual's anxiety and distress. Cultural relocation can also increase levels of homesickness among international students, which can aggravate pre-existing mental health issues or trigger new mental and physical health challenges. It might also lead to withdrawal from college or university. The current study aims to examine the effects of homesickness and cultural intelligence (CQ) on an individual's general psychological adjustment. The study was conducted on 39 international students from the age range 18-25 years who have been studying in Canada for less than a year. Standardised measures of homesickness, cultural intelligence, and psychological adjustment were administered to the participants. The result found out that homesickness and psychological adjustment (higher scores on the measure of psychological adjustment indicate lower psychological adjustment) are positively correlated, and there is no significant correlation of cultural intelligence with homesickness and psychological adjustment. Understanding the adjustment experiences of international students provides an important guide to enrich the educational experience of students and actualise their potential.

**Keywords:** Psychological adjustment, homesickness, cultural intelligence, international students

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### **Introduction**

“Our destination is never a place but a new way of seeing things.” – Henry Miller

Globalisation offers students immense opportunities to travel overseas, earn a degree from transnational institution and seek employment abroad (Vasilopoulos, 2016). According to the Ministry of External Affairs, despite the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, 261,406 students studied abroad. MAE currently reports that 71,769 students are studying overseas between now and February 28, 2021. A considerable number of Indian students choose to study overseas because the Western countries' education systems and work prospects are more attractive than the options available in India. With the surge in popularity of education abroad among Indian students, it is becoming a means for them to fulfil their potential while developing their personalities to enhance their chances of having lucrative careers and satisfying quality of life.

In recent years, Canada has significantly gained prominence as a preferred location for higher education. It is one of the most desired options for Indian students. A combination of high-quality education, internship opportunities, low cost of living, cultural diversity, and liberal government laws on post-study jobs and immigration creates the ideal situation. According to Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 156,171 study permits were given to students from India in 2021, which is almost twice the number from 2020. According to Rao Consultants' (2020) survey, 35% of Canada's international students are Indians, followed by Chinese students, who make up 22% of the student population.

However, this promising journey of an international student is filled with certain challenges, the eminent one being Adjustment. According to Thomas and Althen (1989), international students can experience many adjustment issues such as depression/helplessness, hostility towards the host country, anxiety, withdrawal, homesickness, and loneliness. A student's failure to adapt to a new and different environment could lead to psychological difficulties such as stress and depression in addition to physical implications like headaches, posing severe challenges to academic achievement (Poyrazli et al., 2001). A study by Kukatlappalli (2016) showed that Indian students initially found it difficult to adjust to the academic system and new

social environment in New Zealand, owing to a lack of proper understanding and information.

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### **Cultural Intelligence**

Taylor (1871) defined culture as a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society. Earley and his colleagues introduced the construct of cultural intelligence (CQ) to explain cross-cultural disparities in the efficiency of individual interactions (Earley, 2002; Earley & Ang, 2003). Cultural intelligence is a construct referring to an individual's ability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings and is conceived as an aggregate multidimensional construct. (Gozolli & Gazarolli, 2018). Cultural intelligence is an outsider's seemingly natural ability to interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures the way that person's compatriots would. (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). It refers to the ability of an individual to understand, function, and manage effectively in diverse cultural settings (Ang et al., 2007). It relates to a set of abilities that enables an individual to deal effectively with different cultural environments making it a culture-free construct (Ang, Rockstuhl & Tan, 2015). CQ consists of three components: the physical CQ, the emotional/motivational CQ, and the cognitive CQ (Earley, 2002; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Earley & Peterson, 2004). Therefore, people high on cultural intelligence acquire an emotional sense of the culturally novel and unfamiliar situations and are physically motivated to act upon this new understanding of the cues (Harrison & Brower, 2010).

A study conducted by Lin, Chen & Song (2012) on international college students showed that CQ positively affected cross-cultural adjustment. In a study conducted by Malek & Budhwar (2013), it was found that the expatriate's cultural intelligence has a direct influence on the general interaction and work adjustments. Harrison & Brower (2010) found that students with high cultural intelligence were less homesick.

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### **Homesickness**

Homesickness refers to the distress or impairment caused by an actual or anticipated separation from home (Thurber & Walton, 2012). Stroebe et al. (2015) defined homesickness as a negative emotional state primarily due to separation from home and attachment persons, characterised by a longing for and preoccupation with home, and often with difficulties adjusting to the new place. It is a complex cognitive-motivational-emotional state concerned with grieving for, yearning for, and being occupied with thoughts of home (Fisher & Hood, 1998). Brewin et al. (1989) reported that there were no gender differences in homesickness as a risk factor. Homesick students are dependent on parents and family (Carden & Feicht, 1991). The feeling of homesickness is associated with loneliness, distress, and depression, which might be the antecedent factors (Stroebe, van Vliet, Hewstone & Willis, 2002). Communication with their families alleviated the feeling of homesickness among most international students (Kelly, 2010).

A study was conducted by English et al. (2017) on first-term college students. The results showed that freshmen with a higher level of homesickness exhibited worse overall adjustment to college. In a study regarding incidence and determinants of homesickness in a sample of Indian international students attending a U.S. university, Tochkov, Levine & Sanaka (2010) found that Indian students felt significantly more homesick than the control group of American freshmen. Kambouropoulos (2014) studied the adjustment journey of South-East Asian, Indian, and European students at Australian University Campuses. He found that loneliness, homesickness, and inadequate accommodation were the main adjustment problems of 50% of the participants.

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### **Adjustment**

Adjustment is the process of finding and adopting modes of behaviour suitable to the environment or the changes in the environment (Good, 1959). Adjustment is a subjective/psychological state, and it refers to changes that individuals actively engender or passively accept to achieve or maintain satisfactory states within themselves. (Torbiorn, 1982) According to Al-Sharideh & Goe (1998), adjustment can be viewed as representing a transitional process that unfolds over time as students learn to cope with the exigencies of the university environment. Sociocultural adjustment refers

to the extent to which international students can fit within the new culture; psychological adjustment can be regarded in terms of emotional well-being (Araujo, 2011).

A study conducted by Ward & Kennedy (1993) on cross-cultural transition of international students revealed that psychological adjustment was predicted by homesickness, life changes, locus of control, and socio-cultural adaptation. Yusoff (2016) conducted a study on undergraduate international students studying in Malaysia. His findings revealed that self-efficacy and support of friends significantly contributed to the psychological adjustment of an individual. In a study conducted by Harrison & Brower (2011) on undergraduate students in the United States, it was found that cultural intelligence significantly predicted psychological adjustment, and out of the three dimensions of cultural intelligence, emotional CQ has the strongest relationship with psychological adjustment.

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## **Purpose**

The purpose of the research is to study adjustment, homesickness, and cultural intelligence in Indian international students in Canadian universities in the age range of 18-25 years.

## **Hypothesis**

There will be no correlation between adjustment, homesickness and cultural intelligence in Indian international students.

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## **Method**

### *Sample*

A convenience sample of 39 students (males=17 and females=22) with an age range of 18-25 years was taken. Most of the participants were from Ontario and British Columbia. Only students residing in Canada for less than a year could participate in the study.

### *Measures*

The standardised tools used for the study were:

1. **Homesickness questionnaire (HQ)** was developed by Archer et al. (1998). It is a 33-item questionnaire measuring two main factors: (a) dislike of the university and (b) attachment to home. The scale is a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Higher scores indicate more symptoms of homesickness.
2. **Diagnosing your Cultural Intelligence** was developed by Earley and Mosakowski (2004) to assess three different aspects of cultural intelligence: cognitive, physical, and emotional/motivational. It consists of 12 items, 4 in each subscale, on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
3. **Brief Adjustment Scale-6 (BASE-6)** is a self-report measure of general psychological adjustment used in measurement-based care (MBC). It assesses an individual's perception of emotional distress and related interference. The six items of the scale are scored based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely), with higher scores indicating lower psychological adjustment.

### *Procedure*

The participants were administered standardised psychological tests through google forms. The form was circulated among colleges in Canada. Informed consent was taken from each participant prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of responses were assured to obtain honest answers from participants and to eliminate chances of social desirability or hesitation.

## Analysis of Data

### Results

Table 1: shows N, Mean, and Standard Deviation

	Cognitive CQ	Physical CQ	Emotional/Motivatio nal CQ	Psychological Adjustment	Homesickness
N	39	39	39	39	39
Mean	3.37	3.29	3.59	17.7	86.2
Standard deviation	0.850	1.06	0.899	8.05	17.9

Table 2: shows correlation between all variables

	Cognitive CQ	Physical CQ	Emotional/Motivatio nal CQ	Total CQ	Psychological Adjustment	Homesickness
Cognitive CQ	—					
Physical CQ	0.59 2 ***	—				
Emotional/Motivatio nal CQ	0.70 8 ***	0.681 ***	—			
Total CQ	0.85 7 ***	0.877 ***	0.897 ***	—		
BASE-6	- 0.26 6	- 0.128	-0.183	-0.219	—	
HQ	- 0.14 1	- 0.085	-0.155	-0.145	0.58 8 ***	—

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Discussion

The results found that there is a significant positive correlation between the scores psychological adjustment (higher scores on the measure of psychological adjustment indicate lower psychological adjustment) and Homesickness ( $r=0.588$ ,  $p<.001$ ). However, we found out that there is no significant correlation between CQ and psychological adjustment and CQ and homesickness.

A study conducted by Polay (2020) found that homesickness led to mood swings, anxiety, and physical health changes in Global South expatriates. Another study by Kukatlapalli (2016) showed that Indian students found it difficult to adjust to the academic system and new social environment in New Zealand owing to a lack of proper understanding and information.

## Conclusion

The current research was done to study the relationship among adjustment, homesickness, cultural intelligence in Indian international students in Canadian universities for less than a year. The study was conducted on 39 students, age range 18-25 years. Standardised measures of psychological adjustment, homesickness, and cultural intelligence were administered to the participants. Results indicated that homesickness and psychological adjustment had a negative correlation, and there were no significant correlations between homesickness and cultural intelligence and psychological adjustment and cultural intelligence. The universities should initiate programs to attenuate the feeling of homesickness in order to provide a valuable learning experience and a conducive environment for overall development. In addition to this, social support in the form of relationships with people

from the host country and one's native country could also lead to a sense of belongingness in the foreign country. Social support acts as a buffer and is a beneficial coping resource in times of stress (Mallinckrodt and Leong, 1992).

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