Empirical Article

'Those First Few Months Were Horrible': Cross-Cultural Adaptation and the J-Curve in the International Student Experience in the UK and Norway

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1970s, international students have represented a growing proportion of the global student body, yet how they adjust and how universities can support them is relatively unexplored. We conducted a qualitative study of 36 international students of 11 nationalities studying in Norway and the UK and found that their experience did not fit the dominant 'U-Curve' of adaptation that suggests there is a honeymoon period on arrival. Confirmed with conversations with student wellbeing staff, who suggest that anxiety and culture shock are the norm, the data allows us to suggest factors that trigger adjustment and interventions to improve students' experience. Our contribution is a 'J-Curve' model comprising cultural challenge, adjustment, and mastery, to reflect the reality of the international student experience.

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization is the most revolutionary development in higher education in the twenty-first century (Seddoh, 2001), and universities that shut themselves off from global events risk becoming "moribund and irrelevant" (Altbach 2004, p. 6). International student numbers are growing (UNESCO, 2016), and to keep up with changing markets, students need to gain knowledge and skills by studying abroad (Yu & Moskal, 2019; Brown, 2009). Changes in student populations influence intercultural contact, understood as 'direct face to face communication encounters between or among individuals with different cultural backgrounds' (Kim, 1998, p.12); fostering intercultural interaction can prepare students for an international workforce, yet studies (for instance, Volet & Jones, 2012) confirm that international and host students have little interaction.

We define international students as individuals who move to another country to study. Two terms are used in the literature: cross-cultural adjustment and cross-cultural adaptation. The adjustment refers to making minor changes, and adaptation to larger changes (Haslberger & Brewster, 2007). This study adopts these views.

How international students adjust and how universities can support them is a relatively unexplored area. We responded to this with a qualitative study of 36 students of eleven nationalities at three universities, two in the UK and one in Norway. Participants were interviewed about three issues: why study abroad, what happened, and why stay, underpinned by our research questions: What is the lived experience of international students in the UK and Norway – does it align or challenge the U Curve? What are the benefits and problems encountered by international students?

The paper makes three contributions. First, it exposes the leading model of cross-cultural adaptation, Lysgaard's (1955) U-Curve with its focus on an initial honeymoon period as obsolete and posits a new model, the J-Curve. Second, it contextualizes student reported experience within their own expectations of international study at the point at which it is experienced, and like Brown (2008), investigates the role of psychological and social factors in modulating adjustment. Third, it exposes the conceptualization of students as passive recipient of general interventions and invites universities to create purposeful solutions to facilitate adaptation.

We begin by grounding our analysis within the literature on studying abroad, in particular around the theoretical construct of the U curve, followed by the methodology, findings, and discussion around factors affecting adaptation. We propose the J-Curve, posit interventions that trigger improvements, and end with suggestions for further research.

CONCEPTUAL ARGUMENT

The U-Curve

Lysgaard's (1955) U curve, Oberg's (1960) seven-step acclimation process, Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) W curve, and Adler's (1975) five-step developmental process are among the approaches used to explain cultural adaptation, and the U curve has held a dominant position for over half a century. Originally developed by Lysgaard in a study of Norwegian scholars in the US, the U curve portrays the lowest point of adaptation, called Crisis, but is more commonly associated with its emphasis on the initial honeymoon phase during which newcomers tend to feel optimistic about making new friends in their new culture. Lysgaard has stated that the adaptation processes of individuals who have to live in a different culture change in time, underscoring the U curve with four stages of adaptation; namely the honeymoon, culture shock, adaptation, and double culture (or recovery). According to Oberg too, cultural adaptation starts with a honeymoon stage. Both authors assert that the honeymoon is followed by a culture shock, what Lysgaard originally called the crisis, and at this stage newcomers are likely to suffer from anxiety and stress. The final stages focus on recovery, during which cultural differences are managed, and finally the full adaptation stage, where individuals are able to function well.

So while the U curve has held an important place in the literature on international student adaptation and provides a strong heuristic approach to understanding the adaptation pathways, it is by no means universal to every individual in every situation (Moghaddam, 2011). Nevertheless, it enabled a time frame to be used in managing adaptation and encouraged consideration of both positive and negative that impact international students. In turn, this enabled universities to adapt inductions and international student activity accordingly.

Rather than lacking detail the fault line with the U curve is its order of adaptation. In this paper, we assert that culture shock and its associated high levels of anxiety and stress ought to precede a honeymoon period in any model describing international student adaptation. While there has been some acknowledgment of the crucial importance of those first few weeks and months for international students and a growing recognition of just how overwhelming they can be (Brown & Holloway, 2008), there is a paucity of research into the actual lived experience of international students during this vital first period. Wang et al. (2018) suggest a two phase U-curve that accounts for the fact that most culture shock lasts for the first 9-24 months. While this might be the case, since many students become international students for

one or two years only, we posit that a model that enables adaptation problems to be acknowledged and resolved as they occur early in the student's experience is both urgent and timely. In turn, Many universities are likely to respond the anticipated honeymoon with activities that might be quite out of step with what is actually needed.

According to Chien (2016), many students' adaptation is a much more complex process of adjustment than the U curve depicts. Chien argues that the U curve ignores context, cultural experiences, attitudes, and global developments that all influence student experience. It is likely the case that the scale of the challenges is much bigger than can be met by any model. The U-Curve underscored with honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment and recovery, has assumed a dominant position for over 60 years. Its most extensive critique is over 20 years old (Ward et al., 1998), and highlighted how problems were highest on entry to a new culture, yet like Schartner and Young's (2015) intersectional approach that combines adjustment and adaptation, did not posit a new model. Opposition to the U-Curve can be found in the integrative communication theory of cross-cultural adaptation that provides a model to explain how people are changed by relocating from a familiar home culture to a new culture. Kim et al.'s (2017) integrative process model presents the stress-adaption-growth dynamic to describe an individual's gradual transformation towards being able to function in the new culture. Of course, a model is not essential but since it does influence behavior we assert that it is important and therefore ask What is the lived experience of international students in the UK and Norway – does it align or challenge the U Curve? Or is a J-Curve, with its focus on the anxiety of adjustment more accurate?

Study Abroad: Benefits, Problems, Wellbeing and Culture Shock

Benefits

Benefits include: better career opportunities, academic attainment, language skills, international knowledge, understanding of different cultures (Freedman, 2010; Deardorff, 2006), that can last a lifetime (Gullekson & Tucker, 2013), and remain pertinent for contemporary international students (L. Bennett, personal communication, 8 January 2020). International students facilitate cross-cultural understanding (L. Bennett, personal communication, 8 January 2020; Marangell et al., 2018), and enrich a country financially (Ploner, 2017) – with figures of £10 billion for the UK (Sachrajda & Pennington, 2013) and A$20 billion (Deloitte Access Economics, 2016) for Australia. International students have the potential to change the content and process of education. Choice of a particular university enhances its reputation and encourages networks of international peers (Pittaway et al., 1998); networks ripe for marketing, recruitment, research, and knowledge transfer.

Problems

In the 1930s Stonequist's The Marginal Man (1937) considered the difficulties facing individuals caught between two cultures. Two decades later two new concepts were developed, the U-Curve of adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955), and culture shock (Oberg, 1960). The U-Curve posits that international students go through four phases: honeymoon, culture shock, adjustment, and recovery, while Oberg's 'culture shock' captured emotional problems encountered in a new culture.

Studying abroad can be a challenge. Problems include homesickness and loneliness (L. Bennett, personal communication, 8 January 2020; Oberg 1960), loss of support (Cho & Yu, 2015), language difficulties (Marangell et al., 2018; Mori 2000), culture shock (Torbiörn 1982; Oberg, 1960), poor mental health (Forbes-Mewett & Sawyer, 2019), unfamiliar academic approaches (Barton et al., 2019), and peer pressure to remain in a 'monolithic [cultural] ghetto' (Brown, 2009, p. 184).

International students may possess norms and patterns of behavior that conflict with host students (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002), and negative perceptions around lower entry requirements and pass marks persist (Baron, 2006; Strauss et al., 2014). Relations with host students might be difficult due to language issues (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009), perceived discrimination (Russell et al., 2010) and host established friendship networks (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Lack of friends can create emotional pain for international students and lead to self isolation (Wang et al., 2018).

Wellbeing and Culture Shock

Wellbeing during adjustment is an indicator of successful adaptation and encompasses sociological and psychological factors (Ying & Liese 1991). Bierwiaczonek and Waldzus (2016) identified five antecedents of social adaptation: cultural distance (e.g. degree to which the new culture differs from one's own culture), social interaction (e.g. quality and frequency of contact), social resources (e.g. social support from peers), social stressors (e.g. perceived discrimination) and family related variables (e.g. marital status). Psychological well-being is influenced by personality (Ward & Kennedy, 1999; McIntyre et al., 2018); students with what Van der Zee and Van Oudenhoven (2000) call multicultural traits of empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, and flexibility adjusting more easily. Tomich (2000) adds that cultural similarity or distance from home is a powerful determinant of psychological adaptation.

Immersion in a new culture causes culture shock (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988; Oberg, 1960), a period of anxiety highest among international students (L. Bennett, personal communication, 8 January 2020; Furnham, 2004), characterized by feelings of helplessness, anger, loneliness, and homesickness (Oberg, 1960). Lack of social support increases culture shock, some authors posit that most international students have poor social support (L. Bennett, personal communication, 8 January 2020; Marangel et al. 2018; Brown, 2009), contributing to stress, anxiety, and depression (Yeh & Inose, 2003) and isolation into 'monolithic ghettos' (Brown, 2009, p. 184).

Oberg (1960) suggests that the best way to overcome culture shock is to get to know local people. Suggestions to invest in international students through organized events are not widely applied (L. Bennett, personal communication, 8 January 2020; Gautam et al., 2016). Host students' support can ease adjustment, though challenged by attitudes that range from 'indifference' to 'racial and Islamaphobic prejudice' (Brown, 2009, p. 439).

METHODOLOGY

Applying a qualitative methodology as better suited to exploring lived experiences and individually constructed meanings (Golafshani, 2003), the data gathering method was semi structured interviews, with convenience sampling used to select cohorts from the three universities. Out of 140 full time undergraduate or postgraduate students contacted by email, 38 agreed to participate, with over 30 aged between 18 -24. Two subsequently dropped out citing work pressure. Interviews took place between May and September 2018, with each participant interviewed once for approximately 40 minutes, tape recorded with permission, and transcribed verbatim. A pilot interview served as a 'practice run', helpful since for all participants, the host country language was not their first language.

We kept interviewing until we stopped generating new themes, signaling that we had approached theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our final sample consisted of 36 students: 24 female and 12 male. Twelve came from the EU, four from Africa, four from the Middle East, and the rest from China and Pacific Rim countries. Over half the participants had spent less than one year in their current institution, a quarter between one and two years, and the rest a little over two years.

Participants were interviewed to elicit responses to why study abroad, what happened, and why stay? Broad questions gradually focused on narrower areas as data collection and analysis progressed in parallel (Spradley, 1979), with follow-up questions used for clarification. For example, the interplay between cultural adjustment and getting to know people emerged early on as a significant topic, so we oriented our questions accordingly, guided by the following:

1. How long have you been in the UK/Norway?
2. Do you have any previous international experience?
3. Why did you choose to study abroad?
4. Why did you choose the UK/Norway?
5. What has been the best/worst part?
6. Have you experienced any stress, culture shock, or homesickness?
7. Has it lived up to your expectations?
8. Do you think studying abroad will affect your employability?

Data Analysis

Lincoln's work (Lincoln, 2005, 2010) – with her intent to understand the lived experience of participants – guided the analysis process. The transcripts were analyzed through a flexible approach of moving backwards and forwards (Mason, 2002), the aim being not only to explore connections but to ensure that key themes emerged from participants. Following lengthy analysis, conceptual codes were extracted from the data and grouped into themes and the final analysis, similar to the constant comparison method Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015), was used to seek connections between themes. The emerging concepts were classified and grouped into categories for comparison in the analysis process (Birks & Mills, 2011). To achieve credible research there is an audit trail to evidence the analytical process (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Wherever possible, we used in–vivo codes, drawn from participants' descriptions of their experiences (Locke, 2001). For example, raw data describing participants' search for support collated under categories titled 'triggers to acclimatize'. In stage two, the categories were interpreted at a theoretical level, and in stage three, we thread the theoretical elements that emerged in stage two. After around ten hours of meetings focused on ten interviews, we had a preliminary coding theme. We returned to this stage three times: after initial data collection, after feedback, and after second data collection. During our first iteration, we were struck by the precariousness and determination of participants' attempts to settle, and the data called for a deeper look into what triggered adjustment.

FINDINGS

We present our findings under three headings: Why go? What happened? Why stay? Country code, gender and age are in brackets after the quote – for example, 'In F 21' is Indonesian Female 21yrs old – table 1 below lists nationalities and the code used in the referencing. All sections are illustrated with verbatim quotations.

Table 1: Nationalities Interviewed, and Abbreviations Used in Referencing

Nationality	Abbreviation
Slovakia	Sl
Swedish	Sw
Vietnamese	Vi
Spanish	Sp
Mongolian	Mo
Swiss	Sz
Indonesian	In
Jordanian	Jo
Chinese	Ch
Nigerian	Ni
Norwegian	No

Why Go?

Family expectations were a major driver for studying abroad, with a few commenting that they could not remember a time when it was not part of their family's plan. Comments included: "My family and my school, it was all about going for an international education, especially in the UK" (Ni F 21).

There were echoes of Trower & Lehmann's (2017) study of Canadian students' shift away from 'hard' drivers such as career enhancement – to softer aspects, the '… potential of personal growth, to get away from their everyday lives, to see somewhere new, challenge themselves to gain independence and have new cultural experiences' (ibid:281). For instance: "The course looked good but the chance to get away, be independent was just as important" (Ch F 20).

Social or softer aspects of studying abroad were mentioned frequently. For many participants, there was a desire to gain "a wider view of things…" (Sp M 27) and that study abroad gives an experience of

"being in a different place is the best part of being an international student …the culture and the language…" (Vi M 24) "…learning more Western culture…" (Mo F 18). There were frequent references to meeting new people "the student villages [student flats] … help to meet new people" (No F 23) and developing new skills to help with: "understanding people, what's happening in their life…" (Mo F 18). International students in Norway were more positive about meeting locals than those in the UK, although there were shared frustrations: "I wanted to experience studying abroad with locals, it's why I came really but it's not happened. They don't seem interested in international students." (Mo F 18).

While the majority referred to the social side of international study, most also spoke quite negatively about that aspect that was overwhelmingly disappointing. Words and body language highlighted how many participants had struggled: "…It was worse than I imagined…I did research … but when I came here, it was different, it's hard to make friends…" (Vi M 24). Even when participants had tried actively to meet others there had been setbacks, for example: "… I expected to make more friends than I have; I've joined things but it hasn't worked. This side has been a big disappointment…" (Sw F 22).

Studying in a new language was a concern for some (Sl F 31) whilst for others "… worries disappeared after the first day…" (Sw F 22). Language was both positive (particularly beneficial to future careers) and negative: "…hard to fully understand what the teachers are saying…" (Vi M 24). Language difficulties "…feel kind of like a disability…" (Sz F 24) and misunderstandings lead to "…mistakes when doing some papers … but that's part of the learning…" (Sp M 27).

Some felt that they had underestimated the pressure of learning and socializing in a new language: "I thought my English was good … not being a native speaker was a massive problem" (Vi M 24). Pressed to expand his point: "Academically I worked twice as hard, and socially, it's hard work so we stay in our mini groups and don't mix".

The drive to develop a multi-cultural perspective was important: "I know about more cultures than just an English person or just a Kenyan…" (In F 21) and "…I know about Asia and the culture, but also the culture here" (Mo F 18). Varied experiences were attractive to many: "I want to keep living away and understanding other ways to live…" (Sp M 27) "…Hong Kong or Singapore… I want to change my job many times…, and travel and meet different people…" (Vi M 24).

A picture emerged of students shopping around for best value, based on reputation and cost, and choosing to study in the UK or Norway because of the "…good [international] reputation..." (In F 21) of their qualifications (Vi M 24; Mo F 18), and that "…the education system is pretty good…" (Mo F 18). Others were critical, one saying that UK qualifications are not so esteemed nowadays: "… the internet means that employers know exactly the rank of your university so it's not as straightforward now…" (Ch F 28).

Financially, UK study was "Good value" (In F 21), "… much better value than other countries..." (Sw F 22). One illustrated with a comparison: "…if you study masters in Australia it takes two years, in the UK one year…you save time and money…" (Vi M 24)

Excitement about engaging with new teaching and learning styles engaged some participants. There were frequent references to "…different ways to learn … to understand a discipline" (Sp M 27) such as tutors using "…real life or real cases… it motivates me and makes sense" (Sp M 27). Discovery style teaching (Kirschner et al., 2006) was well received: "… I love the action learning sets that we work in…" (In F 21) and the relaxed environment, and "less formal teaching than [at] home…" (Ch F 20).

What Happened?

Loneliness, isolation, and, uncertainty were common at first, with little support in their new environment compounded by an unwillingness to confide in the family: "I would probably be seen as a bit of a failure if I had moaned about being lonely" (Ch F 28). There were suggestions of fairly strict family backgrounds where homesickness would not be regarded as serious enough to stop studying: "My family would think I wasn't studying enough if I told them I was homesick" (Sz F 24).

Asked if they experienced an initial honeymoon period, most responded with incredulity. For instance: "Honeymoon? It was horrible. I felt so homesick and miserable. I was contacting my family all day." (Mo F 18). Homesickness was common, some finding it difficult to adapt to a "… different culture … I miss my family and friends…" (Sl F 31). Worse at the beginning of the course, holidays and weekends

when many "…always feel like going home…" (Sw F 22). Asked about initial university support "…the induction program was ok, but didn't give chance to get to know each other…" (No M 23).

Another said they may not be experiencing homesickness, rather: "… culture shock… how people talk to each other…you can just meet someone and talk…in China you don't bump into each other and talk, that's weird…so there was culture shock…" (Mo F 18). Stress was an issue, with some having "…two jobs and studying fulltime…" (Sl F 31). Many recognised that all students experience academic stress, but emphasised that "…international students are affected more…" (Vi M 24) explained by the "…time it takes to know a new culture, language, communicating, new academic styles…" (Ni M 23).

To increase wellbeing, some practiced self care and sought solace within their own culture. Prayer, daily meditation, running were mentioned frequently in the context of managing their new environment. For most, the relative hostility or disinterest felt in their new environment found gravitating to students from their own country or region imperative: "I made my room like home, and invited other Nigerians back" (Ni F 21).

Time and purposeful interventions were helpful, exemplified in the following quote: "With time, and especially through the activities where we had to mix, things became easier". (Vi M 24). When pressed about the types of activity they added: "Socially, the group work when we met outside of class time was good. Things were getting easier for me by then anyway …. I wish the activities had been sooner ….. I wasted a lot of time being lonely".

Postgraduate students at two institutions undertook their dissertation module in Action Learning Sets (ALS). Developed by Revans in the 1940s to unite individuals with a major piece of work (Revans, 2011), sets comprised groups of eight who met regularly over six months. For many it was a useful intercultural opportunity: "The ALS groups were great for mixing and learning about other students" (Sl F 31). Another quote exemplifies the mix of social and academic afforded by the ALS: "The ALS was about our course but became social too with food, drinking Chinese tea and tai chi. It was brilliant. I wish we worked like this for all modules" (Sp M 27). Collins and Callaghan (2018) in their research into action learning concur with these findings of the usefulness of action learning in supporting international student adaptation.

Asked if they would study abroad again, the consensus was "Yes", highlighting the emotional resilience developed: "I feel like I can do anything now … if you do this you can manage anything…it's been very hard (laughs and sighs)" (Sl F 31). Another said, "If you asked me in the first three months no no no but now maybe yes." (Ni F 21).

Why Stay?

Asked about why stay, many spoke about advantages they were accruing for their future career, and compartmentalized problems in a spirit of delayed gratification summed up by "all this suffering and frustration will be worth it for my future career". Typical attitudes included "… the best part is not now … but I hope future job opportunities…." (Ch F 28), prospective employers would see them "… as brave and open minded…" (Sw F 22), and that study abroad provides a "…good CV and good experience…" (Sp M 27). Some highlighted "…more opportunities for work in England…" (Sl F 31), whilst another contrasted his UK experience with a "…lack of opportunity at home… so should make a career here" (Ni M 35). Five participants aspired to an international career "... yes, of course, international student, international career, 100% ..." (Sw F 22), suggesting that it will make them "… more valuable when I go back [home]…" (Sp M 27).

Asked about triggers that enabled adjustment, time, and structured activity dominated, particularly sociable activity: "A couple of our assessments were group projects and reallygood socially. I got to know host students, it was the best" (Sw F 22). Another spoke about a mentoring scheme that they felt had been very well received: "We had a buddy scheme at the end…..I wish it was available sooner, like before arriving." (Ch F 20)

Language skills were mentioned many times: "…to learn English…and America is quite far so…I'm from the EU, and [this] was the nearest country where I could speak English…" (Sl F 31) and an "…opportunity to study language…" (Vi M 24) to learn "… good English for future jobs…" (Jo M 24).

Others realized   the opportunities once here: "… I started seeing it as an opportunity…to learn English better…" (Sw F 22). Some were specific about "…learning the academic language…" (Sw F 22), concerned that their "… English would be good enough" (Sw F 22), though these concerns quickly evaporated. Two commented how improving their English would benefit their careers more than their degree (Mo F 18; In F 21).

DISCUSSION

Participants reported positive outcomes and attributed them to participation in structured activities, particularly the Action Learning Sets. Listening to participants highlighted Action Learning's key principles of *Group work*, *Inclusivity*, *Listening*, and *Equality* that in this study provided support, countering some of the problems of adaptation. The emphasis on structured opportunity is not new; Allport (1954) demonstrated its role in supporting intercultural behavior that has been replicated in studies since (Jon, 2013; Soria & Troisi, 2014). Creating the social context for intercultural interaction, with space to collaborate, beyond and inside the classroom is key.
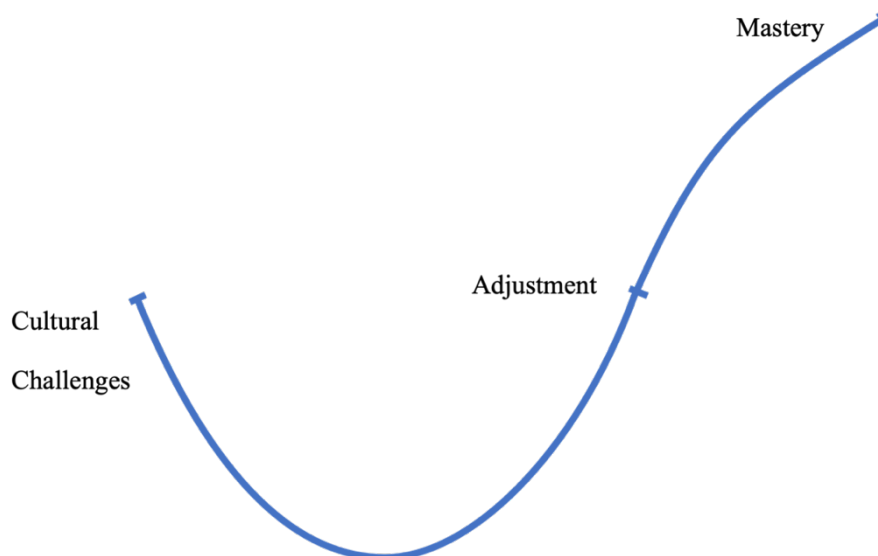
We contribute to understanding international students' expectations and adjustment, and synthesize findings into three dimensions: why go, what happened, and why stay? Family expectations underpinned key drivers to study abroad, students stayed for insights into new cultures, language improvement, enhanced career prospects, and, exposure to different learning and teaching styles. Challenges were culture shock, homesickness, and language barriers. These challenges are known (Marangell et al., 2018; Bochner et al., 1977), yet had limited address for our cohort.

Culture shock is reduced through supportive social networks (Marangell et al., 2018; Cho & Yu, 2015). Poor support increases dropout rates, loneliness, and, extended culture shock searlway to overcome culture shock is to get to know locals, yet the interaction between students and host nationals remains low (Costello, 2015; Rosenthal et al., 2007).

Overwhelmingly, answers to the question 'why stay?' focused on the utility of their endeavors for future careers. Studying abroad improves employability (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016), even a short period delivers better prospects (Di Pietro, 2013).

This study shows that adaptation can be overwhelming, and given the costs of poor adjustment, knowing more about when and how to support students is vital. Armed with the knowledge of the difficulties students experience, universities can target support and offer well-planned inductions with language, social and cultural elements.

Figure 1: The J-Curve
Theoretical Implications – J-Curve

We found that international students do not experience a 'honeymoon' period, and suggest a 'J-Curve' – first stage 'cultural challenges' where students are unfamiliar with the host country, what Lysgaard (1955) calls 'culture shock'. The second stage, 'adjustment', students have 1) a familiarity with the new culture, 2) accepted cultural differences, and 3) socially adjusted. The third stage, 'mastery', students are 1) mastering the new environment, 2) functioning effectively, 3) comfortable with the new culture, and 4) socially adjusted. Time getting to know people, practicing the language and, participating in purposeful activity trigger progression from cultural challenge to mastery, manifest in managing dual cultures in everyday life without being anxious or worried.

Practical implications

Overwhelmingly students reported homesickness, culture shock, and loneliness. Many had overcome their difficulties through self help or withdrawing into their community. However, as became clear, the organized social opportunities, across academic and extracurricular contexts, were hugely popular and successful in enabling adaptation. Interventions such as group learning, action learning, charity events, and social events were highlighted as 'brilliant' chances to network and make friends, in turn enabling the student experience to be enhanced. In the words of the student wellbeing staff member, 'it is often just the low cost simple interventions that bring people together, especially in the early days, and stop that awful loneliness that can be crippling'.

Further Research

International students contribute to universities financially, educationally, and culturally, and universities can reciprocate by understanding their expectations. This paper raises many questions. For instance, what is the impact of cultural distance from home on adaptation? We listened to participants' stories of creating a version of a home by importing home comforts. Does this offer a temporary escape or increase the cultural challenge by highlighting the contrast between the new culture and home? Do attempts to normalise the new culture amplify or reduce cultural challenge? Do some teaching and learning styles work better with international students than others? Finally, the impact of international students on host students is an area of nascent research and more understanding of this might resolve some of the tensions that can arise, leading to a better experience for both.

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