

## **ACADEMIC RESILIENCE AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION**

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An augment in student's demand for obtaining education in foreign country has posed many challenges before teachers, educational institutions, and students as well. A major concern for these international students in particular, lies in their adjustment related issues, which may be related to resilience that may ultimately affect their academic performance. Often it is observed that international students are more susceptible to experience greater stress and anxiety during the time of their study in foreign land. They expected to adjust to the new environment and overcome challenges. The resilience level of students is very important as it can help them adjust their life pressures and stresses. There are many factors that exert major influence on international student's academic resilience level i.e their adjustment in society they live in and level of educational aspirations they possess. The mental anguish that people, especially international students, feel when they live in a new culture often comes from a barrage of small cultural differences that can have a dominant emotional impact on students, so these international students face multiple challenges at the academic front. Here comes the role of teachers or inhabitants of host country to enable these students to land up in comfort zone. Somewhere deep critical analysis of the situation highlight key areas where improvement is required especially development of intervention strategies to deal with international students.

Every year numerous students make efforts to fulfill their dream of pursuing education in foreign land. Many universities are now encouraging students to pursue their education from abroad. Most of the universities have welcoming attitude towards international students, some because they believe it promotes global understanding, others because of the financial boost which international students offer. The reasons for studying abroad can be multiple. Every year thousands of students approach Indian universities to pursue their education

In the past few years India has witnessed developments in many areas like industry, politics, Information technology and media etc. Education sector is one of them. Earlier the trend was that only Indian students used to visit foreign lands to pursue further studies, still this practice is in continuation but time has transformed and nowadays there are thousands of international students who visit India to pursue their education.

Although India is one of the country, which always extends warm welcome to foreign students but still many challenges like change in the educational set up, cultural diversity, linguistic variation, change in ways of social interaction and emotional response to their new life etc., are being faced by these students

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frequently. It is generally observed that initially these students feel that their learning style and the teaching styles are incompatible with Indian context, particularly those from the Far East. Sometimes these students are too shy to express the difficulties which they experience; further condition of culture shock aggravates the problem of social adjustment leading to poor mental health. In such circumstances it becomes very difficult on the part of these international students to survive and maintain their academic focus. As educational set up and transaction strategies are quite different so international students definitely require time to adjust with them. Now the question arises that how soon and how much time will they take to adjust and how well will these students be able to assimilate with the educational as well as social set up of the host country. Here comes the need for the assessment of academic resilience on the part of international students. It is the ability on the part of students to be successful in education even in the presence of challenging conditions. In the field of education, conceptual and experimental work on resilience has gained acknowledgment as a framework for examining how far some international students are victorious in school/colleges/universities whereas others from the same cultural backgrounds and communities are not able to do so. How far these students succeed also decides about kind of mental health they will possess and vice a versa. Introduction with new culture, distinct norms and unique language poses threat for the social adjustment as well as mental health of students.

However, the psychological distress that people, especially international students, experience when they face a new cultural set up usually comes from a barrage of small cultural differences that can exert a powerful emotional impact on students, so these international students face multiple challenges at the academic front. Performing everyday things which were easy for students in their native land no longer remains easy, and because of academic, societal, and sometimes monetary problems, students can begin experiencing multiple emotions like isolation, bewilderment, irritation, resentment, and gloominess which ultimately results into poor mental health. When this happens, then these students sometimes see the host culture with mistrust and discard cultural differences. However, with the passage of time, many students adapt, and they gain self-confidence and turn more emotionally firm. But not all students progress through the process in the similar manner. Some may adapt quickly while others are not able to adapt completely at all. Others feel well adapted, and remaining ones are left with the feeling of culture shock after experiencing a continuous sequence of new challenges. Same problems are faced by the international students at the academic front also; some students are able to succeed despite, while others are left perplexed. This ability to succeed in academic life despite barriers is termed as academic resilience. In other words it means the capability to bounce back and conquer the academic pressure or successful adaptation to the difficult and intimidating circumstances or

environment. Resilience helps to succeed academically despite barriers that make it difficult for them to succeed (Benard, 1991).

Resilient students face one or more complicated life situations or distressing events, but by some means discover the control to triumph over their adverse impact (Bryan, 2005). Resilience aids student community in dealing successfully with academic hindrances, hassles, and study related pressures during the learning process. Academic resilience on the part of international students is characterized with attributes like adaptable temperament, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, Optimistic attitude, anticipation of problems, solving problems logically, finding creative solutions to challenges, curiosity, internal locus of control and achievement-oriented attitude. So academic resilience which is affected by many factors like emotional maturity, social adjustment, educational aspiration, social intelligence is of utmost importance for international students

Resilience is the capacity that young students obtain in order to adjust or recover from adverse environmental circumstances such as failure in school, college or university, child abuse, delinquency, poverty, and violence. It is generally conceptualized as an interactive process between individuals and their environment. Richardson (1990) concluded that resilience is “the course of dealing with troublesome, taxing, or challenging life events in a manner that offers the individual with supplementary defensive and coping skills than preceding to the trouble that results from the particular event”. Resiliency, or resilience, is commonly explained and studied in the context of a two-dimensional construct concerning the exposure of adversity and the positive adjustment outcomes of that adversity (Luther & Cicchetti, 2000).

Lifton (1994) considers resilience as the human capability to alter and revolutionize, no matter what type of risks it involves. It refers to an innate “self-righting mechanism” (Werner & Smith, 1992). “Resilience skills” mainly includes the ability to shape social associations (social competence), to solve out problems (met cognition), to build up a sense of individuality (autonomy), and to plan and expect hopefully (a sense of purpose and future).

Resilient students do face one or more complex life circumstances or traumatic events, but somehow they are able to locate the power to conquer their unpleasant brunt. Although this is inbuilt strength, it can be greatly enhanced by social supports, like that provided by the teacher who while narrating any story promotes the development of coping mechanisms. These social supports help the students in their adjustment not only to survive, but to thrive.

There are few main characteristics which the students, who possess academic resilience holds like:

- Adjustable temperament
- Flexible; are able to tolerate uncertainty
- Hopeful

- Foresee tribulations; are able to solve problems with logical approach
- Locating creative solutions to complexities
- Affirmative self-esteem
- Able to locate humour in self and life realted situations
- Inquisitive; learns from varied life experience
- Understands people well
- Durable and independent
- Internal locus of control
- Achievement-oriented attitude

To develop such traits in students is really a challenge. A common finding in the research related to resilience is the capacity of teachers. Teachers/mentors provide certain defensive factors that safeguard risk and facilitate positive development by meeting youth's fundamental requirement for safety, affection and belonging, esteem, power, achievement and wisdom (Benard, 1991). The factors are:

1. Caring Relationships: Teaching community can exhibit love and support to students by listening to them and authenticating their mindset or thoughts, and by showing compassion, consideration, and reverence (Higgins, 1994; Meier, 1995). Those who realize the true value of their teaching profession refrain from judging, and do not take student's behaviour personally rather they empathize with them.
2. Positive and High Expectations: High expectations of teachers from their students can structure and guide behaviour, and can also test students away from what they believe they can do (Delpit, 1996). Teachers identify student's strengths, mirror them, and facilitate students to see the areas where they are strong. They especially assist beleaguered youth, who have been labeled or subjugated by their family members, schools, and/or communities at large, in using their personal power to mature out from damaged victim to resilient survivor by helping them to
  - (1) Not take personally the hardship in their lives
  - (2) Not see harsh conditions as everlasting
  - (3) Not view hindrances as all-encompassing (Seligman, 1995).

There are certain teachers who are student-centered as they make use of the student's strengths, interests, goals, and dreams as the starting point for learning, and they tap student's intrinsic motivation for learning.

3. Opportunities to Participate and Contribute: As an outgrowth of a strengths-based perspective, teachers are expected to let the students articulate their

opinions and imagination, select alternatives, resolve tribulations, work with and be of assistance to others, and offer their gifts back to the community in a physically and psychologically safe and controlled environment. They are expected to treat students as responsible individuals, allowing them to contribute in all facets of the school's functioning (Rutter *et al.*, 1979; Rutter, 1984; Kohn, 1993).

A study conducted by Bergstrom *et al.* (2003) comprising in-depth interviews with 120 Native students from across the United States and Canada, identified associations of parents, community members, teaching fraternity, and educational institutions as major contributors to the development of resilience in youth. But students in this study also identified another peculiar feature as they reported that being well grounded and connected to their culture was a big rationale behind their stay in educational institution. The students in the study who were doing well (even after being victim of serious adversity) shared three positive characteristics in particular namely: good self-concept, a strong sense of direction, and tenacity.

Feeling good about their culture was a consistent theme among these students, who talked about their capability to feel contented living in both worlds (the Native community and mainstream schools); participation in cultural activities; strong positive feelings of belonging to a Native community and family; appreciation of the influences of elders, grandparents, and parents all leads to development of resilience amongst students. Similarly Nettles, Mucherah, and Jones (2000), along with findings from The Center for Research on the Education of Student Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), examined the control of parents, teacher, and school support on student's resilience power. In this way, it is quite obvious that development of academic resilience is of utmost importance for student's success.

There are many factors which play conspicuous role in the determination of academic resilience among international students. It is generally termed as an interplay between Social Adjustment and Educational Aspiration. In today's world, education is a necessity, and for that reason, it has acquired an increasingly essential role in prospective plans, especially for young people. During the educational process people gain necessary skills and competencies to be able to function on different competitive markets. Higher levels of education are connected with higher level of income, a more esteemed career avenues, lower risk of redundancy and an improved over all happiness.

Education is also an important factor in endorsing and sustaining economic augmentation and technological expansion. The main motivations are economics ones - the higher earnings and the better career. This view is shared among all socio-demographic groups, and therefore, the educational ambitions are equally spaced in the society. However, among groups with lower education and income levels, support for education is slightly lower. So nowadays people aspire to get

higher education. It is believed that student's educational and career aspirations are the most relevant factors determining their future educational attainment.

Individuals have aspirations at all phases of life as they always make efforts for self enhancement. The aspiration level during student life influences students behavior to the most. The term educational aspiration or vocational choice is based on knowledge of traits. The aspiration level of an individual is an important motivating factor. It is a frame a reference comprising self esteem or alternatively experiences, that is the feeling of failure or success (Singh, 2011).

Aspirations start being shaped in early phase of child's life, but are modified by experience and the environment. Aspirations tend to turn down as children turn mature in response to their growing understanding of the world and constraints imposed by previous choices and achievements. This decline is particularly visible in those students, who confront multiple barriers.

The level of educational aspiration among students is determined by many factors, like background factor, personal factors and environmental factors.

Background factors are comprised of social and demographic attributes such as age, gender, socio-economic status and family structure.

The personal factor is psychological in nature and includes an individual's personal approach towards education, school and work at large. The environmental factors consist of aspects of social support in the form of parental involvement which affects the individual at large. Educational aspirations are highly influenced by varied intrapersonal and systemic factors (Gottfredson, 2002). Some individual factors are concerned with student's aspiration mainly comprises student's level of intrapersonal skills, self-reliance, self-control, self-concept and level of responsibility acceptance. (Marjoribans, 2002). Systematic variables related to educational aspirations mainly includes student's socio-economic status (SES), the level of family's involvement in their ward's education, ethnicity, race, familial aspiration and level of education of parents. It is imperative to find out student's level of educational aspiration especially who have come from foreign lands to India to pursue their dreams.

Here teacher's role turns most important. Teacher should render extraordinary attention to students who possess high educational level of aspirations and intelligence to augment their performance in academics. Teachers are expected to be oriented to take special care of international student's characteristics especially with regard to educational aspiration in order to make teaching learning process more interesting and effective for them. It is assumed that students with low level of intelligence have low level of educational aspiration. In order to enhance the educational aspiration of such students, teachers should give due importance to such strategies which will prove helpful in increasing the intelligence level of student community at large. (Kaur, 2012).

Not only educational aspiration rather kind of social environment in which these international students reside also play crucial role in determining their ability to resiliate.

It is seen that many teachers at all academic levels, make sincere efforts to provide students with a high quality education at the same time maintains an environment that promotes learning as well as the health and well-being of each individual. For maintaining good mental health it is very important that adjustment of an individual should take place. It becomes even more imperative for the students who come to foreign land to pursue their dreams. Even though India is that country which has always welcomed international students. However, despite all this still, it is imperative to note that the state of foreign students in their host country is not that much satisfactory . In fact, several researches have pointed that these students are subjected to face variety of problems like poor command over English, social isolation, acculturative stress and academic complexities and last but not the least social maladjustment. To lead a peaceful life social adjustment is of utmost importance. Adjustment is mainly referred to a process relating to interaction between the personal characteristics of the students together with the structure of the host community (Sadrossadat, 1995). In other words, the greater the similarity between characteristics of students and the host community, the easier the interaction between them.

Every being make their best efforts to act as per the norms of the society so that one can easily adjust with others. But it is not that simple as it appears from surface because the personality of each individual is a unique organization in itself. Every individual has to make special efforts to adjust with other unique organization which is termed as society. Social adjustment is the ability which, the teachers should try to instill in their students especially those who have come from foreign land. Teacher should accentuate on the adjustment of the student in the school. With the help of counseling services, teachers should help the student cope up with the existing school situations. On the other hand sincere efforts should be made to improve the social environment of the school.

Psychologists make use of the term adjustment in varying conditions of social and interpersonal relation in the society. Hence adjustment can be termed as the reaction to the demands and pressures of the social environment imposed upon the individual. Apart from academic adjustment, another important factor which is related to persistence and success in university is ability to adjust socially (Gerdes & Malinckrodt, 1994). Amalgamation into the social environment was found to be an indispensable factor which influences one's commitment to the academic system of foreign country. (Tinto, 1975).

Social adjustment is a psychological process which commonly involves ability to cope up with new standards and values. As per technical language of psychology, getting along with the members of the society in one's best manner is termed as

social adjustment. Well adjusted people have learned such social skills as the ability to deal diplomatically with others-both friends and strangers-so that others attitude towards them will be favourable. People who make good social adjustments usually develop favourable social attitudes such as willingness to help others even if they are personally unconvinced. They are not self bound.

Making good social adjustment is not as convenient as it seems. As a result many individuals are poorly adjusted both socially and personally. Similarly if students are unhappy and unless they learn how to overcome their difficulties, they will grow up to be unhappy, maladjusted individual. There are many conditions which contribute to the difficulties that individuals experience in making good social adjustments, but four are paramount.

*Firstly*, if poor patterns of social behavior are developed in the home, children will find difficult to make good social adjustments outside the home, even though they may be strongly motivated to do so.

*Secondly*, if home provides poor modals for children to imitate, they will be seriously handicapped in their social adjustments outside the home. Children who are rejected by parents or who imitate deviant parental behavior may develop unstable, aggressive personalities which may push them into revengeful acts or even criminality as they grow older.

*Third*, lack of motivation to be social is often a result of unfavorable early social experiences in the home or outside the home. For example children who have been teased or bullied by older siblings, or have been made to seem unwanted in their play, will have little motivation to try to make good social adjustments outside the home.

*Fourth*, even when children have strong motivation to learn to make good social adjustments, they may have little guidance or help in this learning. For example if parents believe that children will outgrow their aggressiveness as they become older and have more experience in social contacts, children may not associate their aggressiveness with their lack of peer acceptance and as a result, they will make no effort to be less aggressive. (Hurlock, 2005).

Almost every host country faces the problem of adjustment of migrant students. Similarly India is not away from it. From the time of arrival of international students in the host country, they come across many different and unanticipated challenges. Students may need to adjust to a novel educational system, which differs considerably from the methods of study in their own country. There can be some difficulties in adjustment to foreign customs or in obtaining suitable accommodation and desired food, whether for religious or personal reasons. The host country may not be able to grant satisfactory support for the overseas students. Recent research concludes that psycho-social adjustment is influenced by various cross-cultural variables, such as the amount of contact with host nationals, length of residence, finance, and accommodation. Furthermore, previous studies have suggested that



the adjustment of international students differ according to the country of origin and country of study. (Mehdizadeh & Scott, 2005).

The psycho-social adjustment of international students is a multifarious process. In order for India to preserve its attractiveness as a host country and to better accommodate the significant number of international students studying in India, it is essential to recognize and understand the factors that influence the satisfaction and retention of these students. Especially, college administrators need to be more aware of the factors that affect the quality of international student's psychosocial adjustment to university life in India. Such awareness will help the institutions to identify the adjustment requirements of international students; will trim down the frustration, disappointment, and challenge for the student affairs administrators when dealing with the transitional problems of international students; and will also provide professionals with guidelines for creating culturally appropriate services and programs.

Careful analysis of studies helps to conclude that educational aspiration determines educational attainment on the part of students (Marjoribanks , 2005). Similarly findings revealed that specific personality type, dimensions of interest, academic achievement, socio-economic status and demands from extended family are significantly related to the student's educational aspirations (Salami , 2008). Apart from this type of family also exerts influence on level of educational aspirations of students (Wang, 2011).

Resilience characteristics are key factor to the adjustment of international students, whereas traditional background factors may only be secondary. It was recommended that International students should try to enhance their resilience and universities should render assistance to them to do so. (Wang, J, 2003). There are many factors that influence level of adjustment among student . It has also been witnessed that few international students are not motivated enough to interact with the local people of the host country as they (the international students) feel that they are going to stay in the host country for a limited period of time. It is a temporary situation for them as a result of this these students do not devote much time and effort on getting friendly with the locals. Khawaja and Dempsey (2007).

International students face a range of additional challenges like adjustment, social isolation, English language skills, academic difficulties, unmet expectations, employment, culture shock and psychological distress. Khawaja (2011).

Studies have revealed that nationality for many reasons can increase or decrease the level of social adjustment in students (Seyed, 1995). The efforts of international students to adjust in new culture is also dependent on the length of stay in particular host country (Khawaja and Dempsey, 2007). It was also concluded that university structure in the form of accommodation facilities, courses offered, and student union clubs and societies, offer opportunities for integration and adjustment support to these international students (Coles, 2012). Further, academic adjustment is

influenced by social as well as psychological adjustment (Yau, 2012). Apart from this it was also revealed that resilience characteristics are central to the adjustment of international students, while traditional background factors may only be secondary. (Wang, J, 2003).

A careful analysis reveals that that student's motivation level, goal orientation, school and classroom learning environment and most importantly peer support really plays a significant role in the development of academic resilience in students particularly in the case of international students. Therefore it becomes imperative on the part of teacher to identify non –resilient behaviour in students and to work upon that seriously. When it comes to educational aspirations type of family, school environment and gender differences exert an important influence. It has been found in many researches that educational aspiration in students is highly influenced by the type of family e.g. single parents or two parents family. Many studies also highlights that international students face problem of social adjustment because of their own apprehensions regarding their limited stay in the host country. Apart from this social isolation, language barriers, academic complexities, unmet expectations, culture shock and psychological anguish also contribute towards the problem of poor social adjustment in international students. In the light of all these arguments, the question of academic resilience in international students as an interplay between educational aspiration and social adjustment becomes worth thought provoking. Therefore education system in India need to adopt certain intervention strategies to deal with international students as our job does not end with their admission in educational institutions rather major work should be done in the direction of their peaceful stay in the Indian context.

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