

Exploration of the Experiences of International Students at International Islamic University Islamabad

Hira Nawaz¹, Dr. Shazia Naureen²

¹ MS Scholar, International Islamic University Islamabad

² In-charge, Department of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: ¹hira.msedu370@iiu.edu.pk, ²drshazia.naureen@iiu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Foreign students are temporary residents in a foreign country in order to participate in international educational exchanges as students. Foreign students come from different countries with different backgrounds and knowledge. They have different types of skills and level of knowledge of English. They face difficult and new situations to cope, every day. They face a variety of challenges in terms of cultural and communication problems, loss of social support, language difficulties, academic problems, financial, psychological, health and recreational issues. The present research was designed to explore the experiences of International students at International Islamic University, Islamabad. Quantitative research method was employed in order to conduct the present research. 234 female foreign students were taken as sample. The researchers developed a questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed, collected and data was analyzed using univariate analysis. The results conclude that most of the foreign students face language problems. Most respondents were satisfied with the university rules and regulations. International students faced eating problems. Most respondents experienced climate issues.

Keywords

Exploration, International Students, Islamic University, Islamabad

Introduction

Foreign students study at thousands of universities around the world. They contribute to the diversification and globalization of their classrooms, campuses, and communities. These students add different perspectives to the classroom and develop an understanding and appreciation of the diversity found around the world (Kojima, 1998). International students face physical, psychological and more serious problems than local students. There are a few researches available in Pakistan regarding the problems of foreign students. However, most of the problems that foreign students face are more or less similar, around the globe (Furnham, 2004). Many studies explore that foreigner students face challenges as they pursue higher education abroad. They deal with issues, such as different diets, unfamiliar living conditions, financial problems, balancing work and study schedules, learning styles, and many difficulties related to language, culture, and personal barriers. A series of temporary hardships can range from everyday life to cultural change (Wong, 2004).

Foreign students also deal with mental health issues. Some of the mental health problems foreign students' face includes depression, self-esteem, complaints, anxiety and fearful reactions.

Other problems faced by international students revolve around difficulty in learning, home sickness, financial constraints and cultural differences. Many students feel homesick and foreign students find it difficult to cope. Many of the South African students make frequent visits home to reduce the feeling of homesickness (J.Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Each year a large number of Chinese students come to another country to pursue higher education. During the 2008-2009 academic years there were 98 students, 235 Chinese students who studied abroad, accounting for 14.6 percent of foreign students abroad. Moving far from home to a new country, with the exception of family and close friends, Chinese students have to face the challenge of loneliness and build a new network of friendships. According to the Open Doors Report (2004), the number of foreign students studying at US universities in 2003-2004 is 572,509. The number of foreign students dropped by 2.4 percent from the previous academic year. Prior to 2003-2004, the number of foreign students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions it had increased steadily for more than 50 years despite a slight increase (0.6 percent) in 2002-2003. The majority of undergraduate students (81 percent) rely on personal and family financial resources while a small percent of

graduate students (52 percent) rely on personal and family resources (Qayyam, 2013). Most of the students faced major difficulties during their early adjustment period including educational diversity, cultural differences, language challenges, food allergies, lifestyles, time management, social integration and emotional and psychological problems (Zhai & Lijuan, 2002).

There have been many common answers to this question concerning the pressures that can contribute to mental health problems for students. Previous research shows that foreign students face challenges in online learning environments in a variety of ways, especially for overseas Asian students who participate in non-Western cultures, have language barriers, and are transformed into well-structured lessons and strong teacher guidance. The emphasis on self-directed learning within the online learning environment in Western culture can be intimidating. However, certain details about how Asian students receive online courses and how the experience affects their learning are not in the literature (Tu, 2001).

To better understand the process of preparing foreign students, it is important to understand the problems they face. Although overseas students are a different group of students, it is still possible to do the whole view. Like natural students, they face challenges such as "educational challenges, and the pressures associated with moving to a new school or university" (Ward, Bochner, & Bochner, *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, 2001)

Language is a major problem for foreign students. It has become the central language of business, political, administrative, scientific and educational communications, as well as being the most important language in international advertising and popular culture. When there are small cultural differences, there is a lot to learn from (Bennett, 2001). It is said that students of different cultures learn in different ways and that they differ in styles of understanding, expression and communication styles (Bennett, 2001).

Studying in a foreign country involves many challenges. Foreign students need to find a place to stay, choose banks to borrow and withdraw money, get buses or buy cars, and a credit card account. Foreign students face these issues in the beginning of their stay and can be time consuming with the effort of new international students who

may not be familiar with rental events, credit cards, banking systems, or even driving. In addition to these difficulties, students may feel excluded from their normal support environments, removed from normal weather and diet, under pressure, and severe financial hardship. First aid for international students to overcome daily difficulties is very important for their preparation (Adelegan, 1985).

Coming to a new place, students face great stress and anxiety, which can affect their health. Researchers also point out that health concerns about foreign students are a major factor. Foreign students point out that, in general, the daily challenges stem from language barrier, lack of money, lack of social network to maintain emotional and physical well-being, and difficulty in adapting to a new environment (Altbach, 1991).

Foreign students must not only adapt to the culture, but also adapt to different educational styles. Changes in education often involve adjustments in a variety of areas, including changes in educational culture, curriculum, and language (Dolan, 1997). International Islamic University, Islamabad (IIUI) has a multi-cultural environment. Students from all over the world come to study in this university.

Statement of the Problem

The study aims to explore the problems of international students which they encounter during their degree completion period at International Islamic University Islamabad. The purpose of the study was to explore how international students make acquaintances during their degree program.

Objectives of the Research

Following Objectives were formatted.

1. To investigate social, cultural issues and allied issues of international students at IIUI;
2. To explore the settlement issues of foreign students.
3. To explore the problems of international students in making acquaintances.

Methodology

In current study quantitative research approach was used. Research instrument was developed and survey method was used as research tool for collecting data. Data were presented in the form of

tables. Target population was Female International students of International Islamic University Islamabad. Total number of international students taken as sample was 234. Research instrument was five point Likert scale questionnaire. Questionnaire comprised of 21 statements. The data was collected through questionnaire by personal visit. Simple random sampling technique was used. Frequencies and percentages were calculated in SPSS for data analysis. Due to the covid-19 situation some of the data was collected online.

Data Analysis

As the research was quantitative therefore, for data analysis SPSS was used. The data was presented in tabular form and figures with explanation, description and interpretation.

Table 1: Academic qualification

Academic Qualification	Frequency	percent
BS	160	68.4
MSC	53	22.6
M.Phil.	12	5.1
PhD	5	2.1
Urdu Diploma	4	1.7
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 1 elaborates that the academic qualifications of the respondents with BS was 68.4 percent, MSC was 22.6 percent, M.Phil. was 5.1 percent, PhD was 2.1 percent and Urdu diploma was 1.7 percent. This table shows that qualification of majority of the respondents was BS.

Table 2: Family Income

Family income	Frequency	percent
Below 10,000	12	5.1
11,000-20,000	26	11.1
21,000-30,000	43	18.4
31,000-40,000	91	38.9
More than 50,000	62	26.5
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 2 shows that 5.1 percent respondents had less than 10,000 rupees income, 11.1 percent respondents had an income between 11,000-20,000 rupees, and 18.4 percent respondents were in the category of 21,000-30,000 rupees. 38 percent of the respondents reported that their monthly income was 31,000-40,000 rupees. Respondents that had more than 50,000 rupees income were 26.5 percent. Thus, it is deduced that majorly the family income of the respondents was between 31,000-40,000 rupees.

Respondents' Nationality

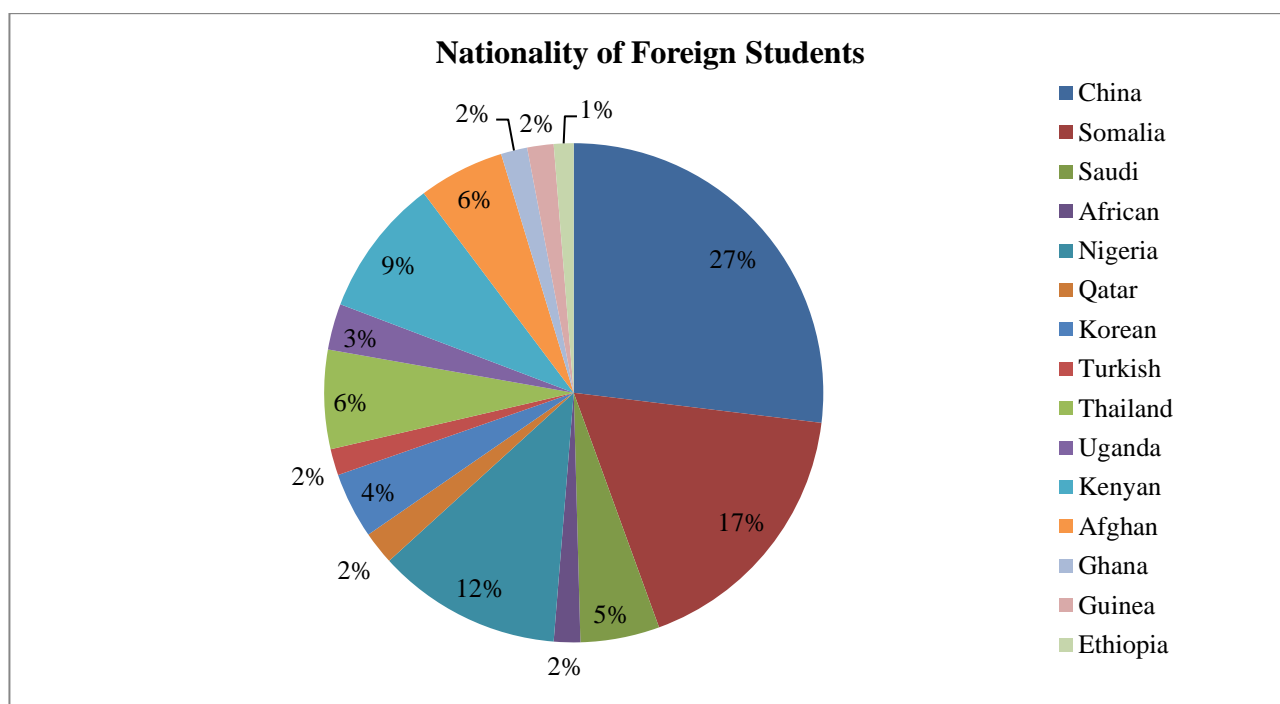


Figure 1: Respondents Nationality

The above figure shows that most of the foreign students were Chinese i-e 27 percent, Somalian

were 17.5 percent 12 percent were from Nigeria.

Respondents from different departments of IIUI

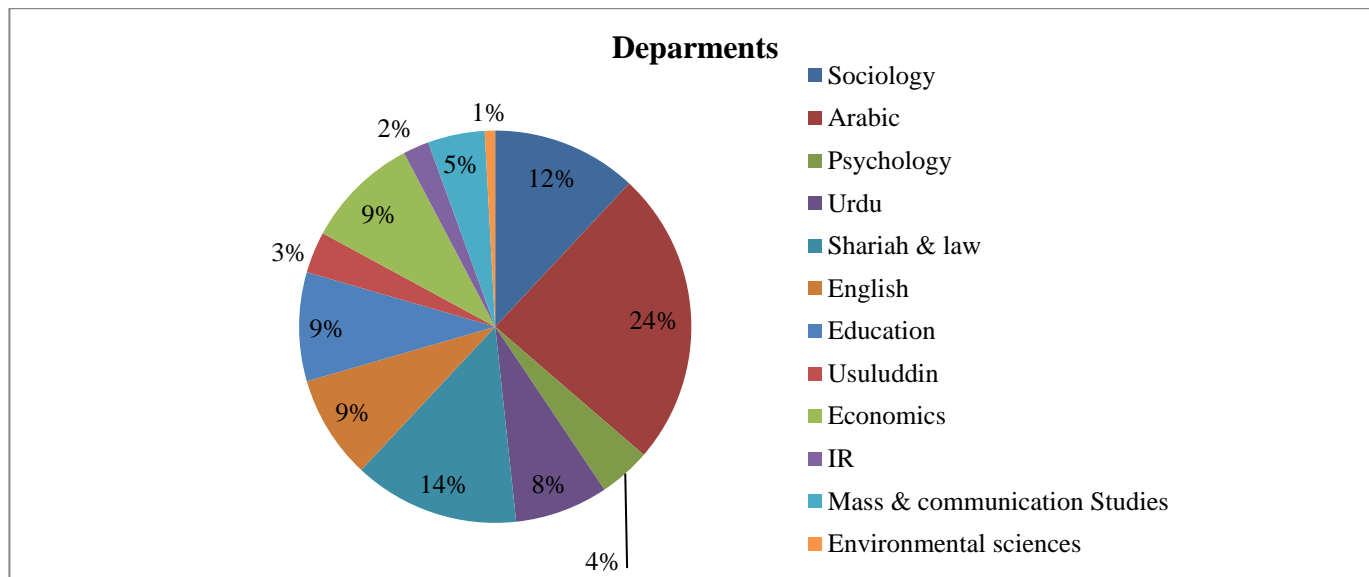


Figure 2: Departments

Figure no. 2 shows number of respondents from different departments. The respondents belonged to Sociology were 12.0 percent, Arabic were 24.4 percent, Psychology were 4.3 percent, Urdu were 7.7 percent, Shriah & law were 13.7 percent and English were 8.5 percent. Education were 9.0 percent, Usuluddin were 3.4 percent, Economics were 9.4 percent, and IR were 2.1 percent. Mass & communication were 4.7 percent and Environmental sciences were 9 percent. Majority respondents belonged to Arabic department.

Table 3: Respondents Accommodations

Hostels	Frequency	Percent
IIUI hostels	171	73.1
Rental room	23	9.8
Private hostels	22	9.4
own home	18	7.7
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 3 showed the category of the respondents living in hostels. In this table respondents living in IIUI hostels were 73.1 percent and rental room were 9.8 percent and private hostels were 9.4 percent and mostly respondents had own home 7.7 percent. In this table majority of respondents lived in IIUI hostels.

Table 4: Respondents Comfortable with Residence

Comfortable	Frequency	percent
To great extent	101	43.2
To some extent	87	37.2
Not at all	46	19.7
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 4 shows the respondents who were comfortable with their residence. In this table 43.2 percent respondents said that they were comfortable with residence to great extent and 37.2 percent respondents said that they were comfortable with residence to some extent and 19.7 percent respondents said that they did not comfortable with residence. This table shows that to great extent were comfortable with residence.

Table 5: Respondents Monthly Living Cost

Monthly cost	Frequency	percent
10,000-20,000	116	49.5
21,000-30,000	90	38.5
31,000-40,000	28	12.0
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 5 shows the monthly living cost of respondents. In this table the respondents of 10,000-20,000 monthly cost were 49.5 percent and 21,000-30,000 were 38.5 percent and 31,000-

40,000 were 12 percent .In this table majority of

respondent's Monthly cost were 10,000-20,000.

Respondents' Mother Tongue

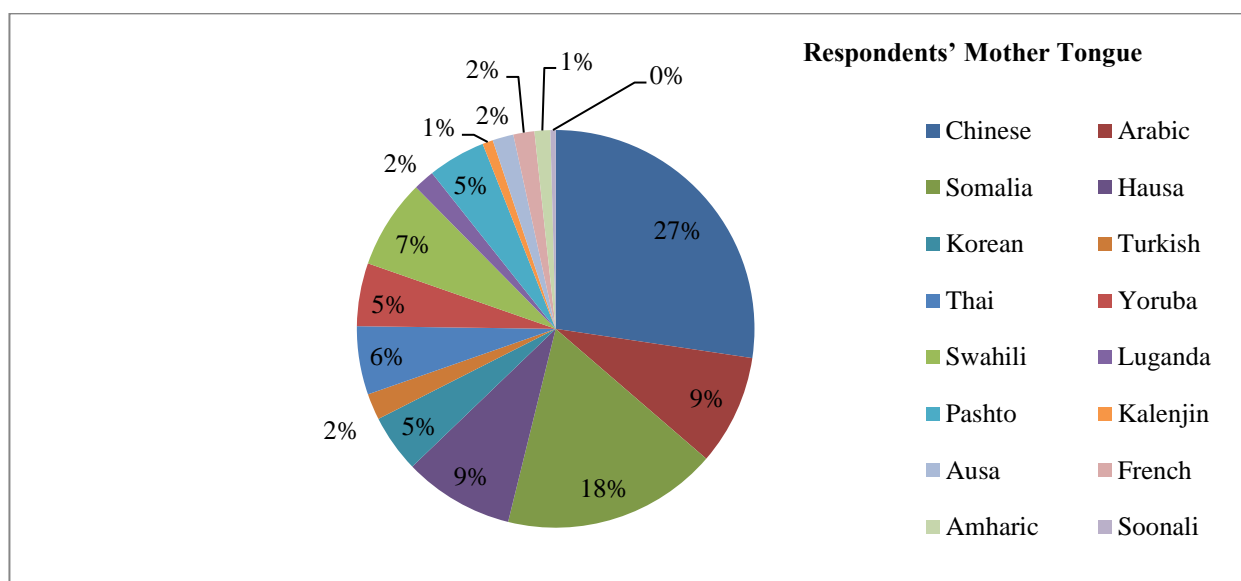


Figure 3: Respondents Mother Tongue

Figure no. 2 shows the mother tongue of the respondents. In this figure the mother tongue of 27.4 percent of the respondents was Chinese and 9 percent was Arabic and 17.5 percent was Somalian. The figure indicates that the mother tongue of majority of respondents was Chinese.

Table 6: Respondents Speaking English Frequently

Speak English Frequently	Frequency	percent
Yes	172	73.5
No	62	26.5
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 6 shows the respondents who speak English frequently. In this table 73.5 percent of respondents said yes they speak English language frequently and 26.5 percent of respondents said that they can't speak English Language, frequently.

Table 7: Support from Teachers

Support promoted	Frequency	percent
Extra help do	70	29.9
Through counseling	51	21.8
Attention in class	112	47.9
Not at all	1	.4
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 7 shows the support from teachers. In this table 29.9 percent respondents said that extra help was done by teachers, and 21.8 percent respondents said that teacher support through counseling and 47.9 percent said teacher pay attention in class. The above table shows that majority of respondents said that teacher pay attention in class.

Table 8: Attitude of Class fellows

Attitude	Frequency	percent
Cooperative	103	44.0
Ignorant	25	10.7
Aggressive	14	6.0
Friendly	92	39.3
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 8 shows the attitude of class fellows. In this table 44.0 percent were cooperative and 10.7 percent were ignorant and 6.0 percent were aggressive and 39.3 percent were friendly. In this table attitude of the respondent's class fellows towards each other was cooperative.

Table 9: English Vocabulary

Enough vocabulary	Frequency	percent
To great extent	57	24.4
To some extent	99	42.3
Not at all	78	33.3
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 9 shows the enough vocabulary of respondents to understand English. In this table

24.4 percent respondents said that they had enough vocabulary to understand English to great extent and 42.3 percent respondents said to some extent. This table shows that respondents had vocabulary to understand English to some extent.

Table 10: University Regulations and Students' Satisfaction

Satisfied rules and regulation	Frequency	Percent
To great extent	69	29.5
To some extent	122	52.1
Not at all	43	18.4
Total	234	100.0

Table no. 10 shows respondents satisfied with university rules and regulation. In this table 29.5 percent respondents said that they were satisfied with university rules and regulation to great extent and 52.1 percent respondents to some extent and 18.4 percent respondents were not satisfied with university rules and regulation. This table shows that the respondents were satisfied with university rules and regulations to some extent.

Table 11: Urdu Language Competency

Urdu Language Competency	Frequency	percent
To great extent	40	17.1
To some extent	55	23.5
Not at all	139	59.4
Total	234	100.0

Table no.11 shows that the respondents understand the national language Urdu. In this table 17.1 percent respondents said that they understand the national language Urdu to great extent and 23.5 percent respondents said to some extent and 59.4 percent respondents said that they did not understand the national language Urdu.

Table 12: Availability of Food Options

Food Options	Frequency	percent
Food spicy	99	42.3
Food unavailability easily	65	27.8
Not at all	65	27.8
Unhygienic	5	2.1
Total	234	100.0

Table no.12 shows the respondents faced problem regarding food. In this table 42.3 percent respondents said that food was spicy and 27.8 percent respondents said that food was not available easily in university and 27.8 percent respondents did not face any problems regarding food and 2.1 percent respondents said that food was unhygienic.

Table 13: Climate Issues

Climate issues	Frequency	percent
Too hot	126	53.8
To cold	32	13.7
Sun burns	9	3.8
Rainy	35	15.0
Not any	32	13.7
Total	234	100.0

Table no.13 shows that respondents faced climate issues in IIUI. In this table 53.8 percent respondents said that the climate was too hot in summer and 13.7 percent said that it's too cold in winter and 3.8 percent said that sun burns during summers and 15.0 percent said that rainy and 13.7 percent respondents did not face any climate issues in IIUI.

Table 14: Communication Issues

Communication issues	Frequency	percent
To great extent	59	25.2
To some extent	107	45.7
Not at all	68	29.1
Total	234	100.0

Table no.14 shows that respondents felt uncomfortable to communicate with others university students. In this table 25.2 percent respondents said that they felt uncomfortable to communicate due to language barrier with others students to great extent and 47.7 percent respondents said to some extent and 29.1 percent respondents were comfortable while communicating with other IIUI students.

Table 3: Administration's Behavior

Administration's Behavior	Frequency	percent
To great extent	72	30.8
To some extent	98	41.9
Not at all	64	27.4
Total	234	100.0

Table no.15 shows the Administration's behavior was cooperative. In this table 30.8 percent respondents said that the administration behavior was cooperative to great extent and 41.9 percent respondents said to some extent and 27.4 percent

respondents reported non- cooperative behavior. This table shows that to some extent respondents said that administration staff behavior was cooperative.

Table 16: Psychological Problems

Psychological problems	To great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total
Stress	22.6 percent (53)	47.0 percent (110)	30.3 percent (71)	100.0(234)
Pressures of work	29.9 percent (70)	39.3 percent (92)	30.8 percent (72)	100.0(234)
Depression	19.2 percent (45)	32.5 percent (76)	48.3 percent (113)	100.0(234)
Anxiety	18.4 percent (43)	32.1 percent (75)	49.6 percent (116)	100.0(234)

Table no.16 shows that the respondent's faced stress in IIUI. Respondents said that 22.6 percent faced stress in IIUI to great extent and 47 percent faced stress to some extent. 29.9 percent respondents faced pressures of work to great

extent and 39.3 percent faced pressures of work to some extent. 48.3 percent did not face depression in IIUI. 49.6 percent did not face anxiety in IIUI. However foreign students don't face any psychological problems at IIUI.

Table 17: Teachers' Behavior towards International Students

Behavior of teacher	To great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total
Harsh	13.7 percent (32)	41.5 percent (97)	44.9 percent (105)	100.0 (234)
Responsive	38.5 percent (90)	55.6 percent (130)	6.0 percent (14)	100.0(234)
Polite	43.6 percent (102)	51.3 percent (120)	5.1 percent (12)	100.0(234)
Cooperative	46.6 percent (109)	42.7 percent (100)	10.7 percent (25)	100.0(234)
Ignorant	7.7 percent (18)	25.6 percent (60)	66.7 percent (156)	100.0(234)

Table no.17 shows that 44.9 percent respondents reported not at all harsh behavior of teachers towards International Students. 38.5 percent respondents reported responsive behavior of teachers to great extent and 55.6 percent reported to some extent. 43.6 percent said that polite behavior of teachers was to great extent and 51.3

percent respondents said to some extent. In this table shows that 46.6 percent respondents said that the cooperative behavior of teachers was to great extent and 42.7 percent said to some extent. 66.7 percent said that teachers' behavior was not at all ignorant.

Table 18: Transition Issues

Problems	To great extent	To some extent	Not at all	Total
Communication gap	40.2 percent (94)	41.5 percent (97)	18.4 percent (43)	100.0 (234)
Language barrier	37.2 percent (87)	46.2 percent (108)	16.7 percent (39)	100.0 (234)
Lack of guidance	19.2 percent (45)	49.6 percent (116)	31.2 percent (73)	100.0(234)
Transportation	17.2 percent (42)	26.1 percent (61)	56.05(131)	100.0(234)
Culture shock	29.9 percent (70)	48.3 percent (113)	21.8 percent (51)	100.0(234)

Table no.18 shows transition problems of foreign students at IIUI. Table shows 40.2 percent respondents face communication gap to great extent and 41.5 percent to some extent. 37.2 percent respondents faced language barrier to great extent and 46.2 percent to some extent. 19.2 percent respondents faced lack of guidance to great extent and 49.6 percent to some extent.

56.05 percent did not face transportation problem at IIUI. 29.9 percent respondents faced culture shock to great extent and 48.3 percent to some extent.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The data shows that most respondents said that the language problem is the main reason for making

acquaintances. Most international students face eating disorders in the IIUI. Cultural adjustment for international students affects their learning success.

All students faced major difficulties during their early transition period including academic diversity, cultural diversity, language challenges, food allergies, lifestyles, time management, and social integration as well as emotional and psychological problems. Language is a major problem for foreign students. Major academic problems include proficiency in the English language, understanding the language involved in class discussions, and preparing written and oral reports. Most respondents were reportedly facing climate problems in the IIUI.

Recommendations

After conducting the research following recommendations are made:

- Comprehensive learning environment may be encouraged among students and teachers.
- Special meetings, seminars and dining halls with cultural related food may be introduced for International students
- Conducive social and cultural environment may be promoted to bridge the social and cultural knowledge gap.

References

- [1] Alavi, M., & Mansorb, S. M. (2011). Categories of Problems among International Students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. *Social and Behavioral Sciences* , 1581 – 1587.
- [2] Adelegan, F. O., & Parks, D. J. (1985). Problems of transition for African students in an American university. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 26(6), 504–508
- [3] Altbach, P. G. (1991). Impact and adjustment: foreign students in comparative perspective. *High Educ* , 305–323.
- [4] Bennett, C. (2001). Genres of Research in Multicultural Education. *Review of Educational Research* , 171-217.
- [5] Dolan, J. (1997). Advocacy and Activism: Identity, Curriculum, and Theatre Studies in the Twenty- first Century. *Theatre Topics* , 1-10.
- [6] Furnham, A., & Trezise, L. (2004). The mental health of foreign students. *Social Science & Medicine*, 17(6), 365-370. doi:10.1016/0277-9536(83)90239-3
- [7] J.Yeh, C., & Inose, M. (2003). nternational students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly* , 15-28.
- [8] Kojima, T. (1998). The Research Group of Professor T. Kojima. *Saga University* , 3-7.
- [9] Qayyam,Ch. (2013). *The Challenges of International Research Students Studying in universities*, 12(6), 230-24.
- [10] Tu, C.-H. (2001). How Chinese Perceive Social Presence: An Examination of Interaction in Online Learning Environmen. *Educational Media International* , 45-60.
- [11] Ward, C., & Masgoret, A.-M. (2004). *THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN NEW ZEALAND*. Ministry of Education.
- [12] Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Bochner, S. (2001). *The Psychology of Culture Shock*. London: Routledge.
- [13] Wong, J. K. (2004). Are the learning styles of Asian international students culturally or contextually based? *International Education Journal*, 4, 154-166.
- [14] Yeh, Christine & Inose, Mayuko. (2003). *International students' reported English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness as predictors of acculturative stress*. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*. 16. 15-28. 10.1080/0951507031000114058.
- [15] Zuai. & Lijuan. (2002). *Studying International Adjustment Issues & Social Support*, 10(6),214-230.