

## **Key Factors Influencing Academic Performance of International Students' In UK Universities: A Preliminary Investigation**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examines the extent to which international students from selected countries were satisfied with their academic performance. The study aims to give an insight into international students' learning experience by exploring factors influencing students' academic performance. The study adopted qualitative method. More specifically, semi-structured interview was adopted with a total of 10 participants. The findings suggest that International students studying in the United Kingdom encounter certain challenges which tend to constrain their academic performance. The most significant of these barriers include the foreign language, which particularly concerns inadequate acquaintance with the English language; adjustment barriers, such as such as motivation, application, performance and satisfaction with the academic environment, as well as making friends, being part of social activities or being able to work in groups; academic issues, such as prior academic preparation, adjustment to foreign teaching methodology and pressure from performance expectations and work load issues, student teacher relationship, study skills, plagiarism and group work; and Culture. The major contribution of this study is the framework for understanding the critical factors influencing academic performance of international students in the UK, which shows the order in which these factors interact to constrain learning and ultimately the academic performance of international students.*

**KEYWORDS:** Academic Performance, International Students, UK Universities

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### **INTRODUCTION**

An immense number of UK higher institutions make valuable educational and economic contributions from international students. Studies suggest that UK universities and the higher education become increasingly dependent on foreign students, as they contribute to the UK economy. International students boost the UK economy, as calculated by the British Council in 2007, through the addition of a direct value of nearly £8.5 billion per year (APPG Migration Briefing, 2011). In recent years, UK universities have witnessed an enormous steady increase in international student enrolment. According to UKCISA (2011), it was estimated to be a total of four hundred and twenty eight thousand two hundred and twenty-two for the year 2010-11 compared with four hundred and five thousand eight hundred and ten in 2009-10 showing an increase of six per cent. Due to increasing educational costs, international students' contribute extensively to the financial resources of universities in the UK. UKCISA (2011) indicates that international students' fee income enables colleges and universities to invest and expand their facilities. Furthermore, international students account for over forty per cent of UK

postgraduate students and fifty per cent of those doing full-time research degrees (UKCISA, 2011).

However, there is fierce competition and a growing competitiveness in the global marketplace for international students as they provide an immeasurable academic, cultural, and social benefit to the UK generally. Each foreign student is estimated to be worth more than fifteen thousand pounds (£15,000) to the UK in fees and living expenses. UK universities prove increasingly popular, with demand being driven by strong performances in international league tables and a growing number of English speakers around the world. The number of foreign students has doubled since 1998, when seventy-seven thousand (77,000) arrived. The total in 2011 showed an increase of 18,000 over the value in 2005. China is by far the largest source of foreign students' studying at British universities, with more than fifty two thousand (52,000) people coming to study in the UK in 2005-06. Indian students make up the second-largest group with nearly sixteen thousand (16,000) students, ahead of the US, with fourteen thousand (14,000) (Morris & Russell, 2007). Adenekan (2011) observes that Internationalisation within UK universities is an emerging field which universities should take seriously. He further emphasises that internationalisation within the UK is equally important and can offer similar impact if both the formal and informal curricula are appropriately internationalised and the contributions made by students from other countries and cultural backgrounds are embraced.

Therefore, it is crucial that universities offer the best possible educational experience for international students to ensure that they do not lose their competitive advantage to other universities. The economic dependence of universities on fees from international students makes it critical for universities to have a clear understanding of the issues that confront students during their study abroad and underscores the importance of studies on the academic performance of international students. It is significant that the universities understand the challenges and issues with regards to their academic performances. This is because majority of international students have a different academic background in comparison to that of the UK Higher Education. However, it should be considered that many international students enter directly into the undergraduate degree without the benefit of the training or transition period. The increasing number of international students travelling to the UK for higher education has raised a growing interest in exploring the factors that influence their academic performance whilst studying abroad. Researchers have conducted studies to determine both negative and positive influences (Carroll and Ryan 2005). Other reviews (e.g Bailey 2006) within this area of research have raised concerns with regards to the academic performance of international students. These studies implied that international students are outperformed by their fellow home students due to difficulties ranging from language to cultural adaptation. However, despite a growing literature in this area of study, an integration of research is still not yet well developed (Carroll and Ryan 2005), to guide universities and policy makers in the UK. Given concern over this lack of integration and interest in understanding the nature of the academic issues affecting international student performance, this study examines the extent to which international students from selected countries were satisfied with their academic performance using *data driven thematic analysis approach* (Boyatzis, 1998). This study aims to give an insight into international students' learning experience by exploring factors influencing students' academic performance.

## METHODOLOGY

Most previous studies that seek to explain factors influencing international students' academic performance utilized inferential statistics and are thus quantitatively inclined. Some of the methods and the analytical techniques include Melnick, Kaur, and Yu (2008), Multivariate Regression analysis; Li, Chen and Duanmu (2008), Multiple regression; Rienties, Beusaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet & Kommers (2012), correlation and regression; Nasir (2012), Correlation and ANOVA, among others. Although these inferential techniques have their own merits, we believe that given the nature of the research problem, the quantitative techniques may not fully capture the relationships between some of the factors under investigation; most of which are qualitative. Furthermore, the research tends to be more explorative because its key objectives are to seek deeper and new insights into the critical factors affecting the academic performance of international students. This is consistent with Lee (2003) on qualitative technique approach as one that serves a useful alternative and provides rich insights and results.

This study adopts the qualitative approach to fulfil the research objectives. More specifically semi-structured interview was adopted. This approach is appropriate for the study as it concerns the context in which the event is taking place (Saunders, Thomhill & Lewis, 2009). The participant has the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail, in turn the researcher has the opportunity to respond immediately to what the participants say by tailoring subsequent questions to the information provided by the participants. An exploratory approach was used to examine themes and categories that emerge from the research data. The emergent themes then allow for the development of the appropriate research theories and recommendations.

The population of the study consisted of international students within the UK and the sample consisted of international students within the University of V. The sampling method chosen for this study was purposive sampling. A purposive sampling was considered most appropriate for this study as it selects the most productive sample to answer the research question as well as enable access to particular subset of people and provides the greatest insight into the research question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Furthermore, purposeful sampling facilitates the selection of units of analysis (individual based) that enable the researcher to make a reasonable comparison in relation to research objectives and not for statistical generalisation (Mason, 1996). 15 interview questions were developed to form a detailed interview guide to cover the area. This study utilized a face-to-face semi-structured interview technique to collect data due to the nature of the study. The sample included only 15 international students from ten different countries. The collected data were recorded, transcribed and analysed. All participants who contributed to the purpose of the study were international students at the University of B. Following the guidelines for research practices some ethical considerations had to be considered. The consent of all participants informed was required before carrying out the research. Prospective participants were informed of the procedures involved, reasons and purpose of carrying out the research. Most importantly participants were assured that the research was conducted under the assumption that research findings would be used for the purposes of research only and kept under the condition of privacy and anonymity.

The main questions asked during the interview were: *“describe your transition from your previous schooling in your home country to that of the university”* this triggered other questions such as *“What barriers did you encounter whilst making this transition? How would you*

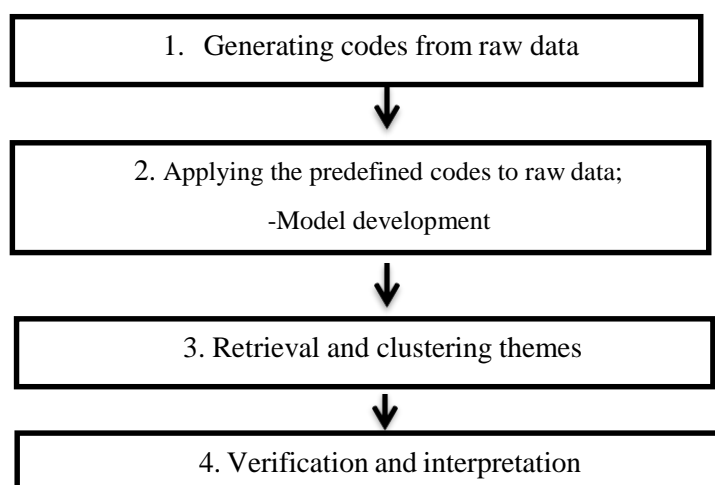
*describe your experience so far as an international student within the University of Bedfordshire? What kind of difficulties have you had with your studies, and why do you think you have encountered these difficulties? Is the English language a major issue for you in your studies? What aspect of the English language do you find most difficult? Please give examples: Please describe your English language skills in social settings, how about in an academic situation? Tell me about a problem you faced with your academic performance and how you were able to resolve the problem? Do you think you've been given the appropriate guidance to producing the best of your ability? What strategies do you use to help yourself cope with stressful academic situations? Did you experience "cultural shock" when you first came to the UK? Explain what it was like? What difficulties have you faced adapting to the English academic culture? How stressful are the demands and expectations of the English academic culture for you, and if you could explain to me using some examples. What types of student support mechanism are in place at your university that benefit or help you adjust in the system? How would you describe the British culture, does the culture fit in with your expectations?*

**TABLE 1: INTERVIEWEE PROFILE**

<b>Interview Participant</b>	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>Discipline</b>
A <sub>1</sub>	Nigeria	Marketing
A <sub>2</sub>	Nigeria	Public Health
A <sub>3</sub>	Cyprus	Computer Science
A <sub>4</sub>	Sri Lanka	Business Studies
A <sub>5</sub>	Pakistan	Psychology
A <sub>6</sub>	Bangladesh	Accounting
A <sub>7</sub>	India	Information Systems
A <sub>8</sub>	India	Computer Engineering
A <sub>9</sub>	Kuwai	Human Resource Management
A <sub>10</sub>	Saudi Arabia	Supply Chain Management

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis involves searching, identifying, analysing and reporting themes that are important in the phenomenon of being investigated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis process, which is consistent with thematic analysis, involved six stages as described in figure 1. We adopted data driven thematic analysis approach since the codes were generated from the raw data. This is consistent with Boyatzis (1998) and involves the creation of codes by the researcher based on data generated from the interviews, the themes were clustered empirically based on the characteristics of the four codes (factors that affect the academic performance of international students in UK) generated from the raw data.

**Data Analysis Process****Figure 1: Data Analysis Process**

The data analysis process involves 4 stages. Stage 1 forms the bases for exploring the raw data and developing the initial codes. The definitions and characteristics if these codes were simplified using code names; as well as the definition of what the codes are and how to identify the occurrence of the theme associated with the codes. These formed the basis for categorising the raw data. And sought to ensure that the codes generated would be applicable to the raw data. Thus, the transcribed interviews were manually coded into post defined categories. The practical guide is shown in table 1. In stage 2 all the transcribed data (10 Interviewees) were imported into NVIVO. NVIVO was used to facilitate the analysis because of the volume of data involved. This helped in the application of codes to the raw data. In stage 4 data that were imported into the SPSS in stage 3 were analysed. Further in stage 4, verification of the research instrument was carried out to test for reliability and validity. The verification included the presentation of codes and quotes to an expert in the area who compared the quotes against the codes and themes. The result of the reliability test indicates in table 3 below shows reliability result of 0.87(87%) which is consistent with Miles and Huberman (1994).

**TABLE 2: CODING MANUAL**

CODES	COLOUR	DEFINITION	DESCRIPTION
Language Barrier	<b>Blue</b>	These are issues international students' faces who are non-native speakers of the English language	by observation or use of colour coding
Adjustment Issues	<b>Red</b>	individual's inability to adjust to the demands of interpersonal and stresses of daily living	by observation or use of colour coding
Academic Issues	<b>Green</b>	issues affecting international students academics transitioning into a new academic environment	by observation or use of colour coding
Cultural Issues	<b>Orange</b>	are issues international students face transitioning between two different cultures	by observation or use of colour coding

**TABLE 3: RELIABILITY ANALYSIS**

The study was validated by presenting the data to an expert in the field who further crosschecked the patterns in the data against the themes that emerged during the study (Boyatzis, (1998). The data analysis process was part of design method which revealed how data was analysed and reported (dependability check) followed by a conformability checks to ascertain how tightly the raw data is linked to the interpretation.

Coding theme	Number of Judges	Reliability Level
Critical factors affecting the academic Performance of international students in UK	4	87%

**TABLE 4: KEY ACTIVITIES AT EACH STAGE OF CRITICAL FACTORS AFFECTING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE UK**

Critical factors affecting the academic Performance of international students in UK		
Supporting Cases	Total Supporting Cases	
	A <sub>1</sub> A <sub>2</sub> A <sub>3</sub> A <sub>4</sub> A <sub>5</sub> A <sub>6</sub> A <sub>7</sub> A <sub>8</sub> A <sub>9</sub> A <sub>10</sub>	
Stage 1. Language barriers	A <sub>1</sub> A <sub>4</sub> A <sub>6</sub> A <sub>7</sub> A <sub>8</sub> A <sub>9</sub>	6/10
Stage 2. Adjustment barriers	A <sub>4</sub> A <sub>5</sub> , A <sub>6</sub> , A <sub>7</sub> , A <sub>8</sub>	5/10
Stage 3. Academic issues	A <sub>3</sub> A <sub>4</sub> A <sub>7</sub> A <sub>8</sub> A <sub>9</sub>	5/10
Stage 4. Cultural barriers	A <sub>1</sub> A <sub>3</sub> A <sub>4</sub> A <sub>5</sub> A <sub>8</sub>	5/10

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### Language Barrier

Language issues are issues faced by international students who are non-native speakers of the English language. Most participants identified language barrier as a major issue in their studies. Findings from the semi structured interview revealed that English language proficiency was a significant barrier causing acculturative stress among international students. As indicated by a student: *“I remember when I first came to the university my biggest difficulty was language and the university.....”* (A8); *“You know when I came to the UK I didn’t speak English that well yeah I couldn’t make a sense in English”* (A9); and *“one of the major barriers was the language.... is the accents that particularly causes the problem for me because people have different accents”* (A7). Similarly, it was suggested during the interview that language barrier was a significant barrier for most of the participants. Understanding English language seems to be the biggest issue for most students, particularly for students from both the Middle East and Asia. *“Of course for international students the English language is an issue...it’s a bit difficult because the difference*



*between back home and England is very different..... so the biggest issue is the language barrier” (A2).*

The results are consistent with literature as language has been identified as the centre of many problems for international students. For instance Carroll and Ryan (2005) observe that international students’ prior experience of learning and their struggle to adapt to the new environment brings with it a set of challenges which affects their academic performance. Wilton and Constantine (2003) describe language as major a acculturation challenge for most international students. Language seems to play a major role in determining international students’ learning within Higher Education. Foley (2010) argues that a significant number of international students come from countries where English is neither an official language nor a medium of instruction. This therefore proves to be a barrier which most international students need to work on in order to overcome. Language barriers have been highlighted by a number of writers (Carroll & Ryan 2005; Bamford 2008; and Foley 2010) as the biggest challenge for the majority of international students. Other authors who see language as a barrier to the academic performance of international students include Andrade and Evans (2009), Gutierrez (2010) and Cammish (1997) who see language as the centre of many problems international students face whilst studying in a country other than their home.

### **Adjustment Barriers**

Adjustment issues are individual’s inability to adjust to the demands of interpersonal and stresses of daily living. The semi-structured interview indicates that international students face barriers whilst making a transition into Higher Education. For the participants in this research the notion of the transition barriers faced by international students whilst making a transition into Higher Education has a negative impact on their academic performance. The picture is very clear that most of the participants have issues with adjusting in a new environment and such adjustment difficulties constrain their academic performance. For example: *“when I came here I had to speak only English and I had to adjust myself and adapt to the environment I mean language, culture, the life and I started to be independent since I left high school but I was in the same country its different in another country” (A5).* Similarly, *“Settling down is a problem since you have no family support or anything it’s like a new place, new people, every body’s like just doing their own thing and it’s hard to blend in. it takes you time before you can adjust into it and you calling it your new home” (A7).* This views were consistent with participant (A4, A5 and A8). This findings are in line with empirical studies in this area. According to Zhai, (2002). Adjusting to academic demands tends to present the greatest difficulty for international students. Andrade and Evans (2009) point out that the uncertainties about university life are magnified for international students. According to Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005), living in another country other than your own creates problems of adjustment for international students as they encounter different and unexpected problems such as: educational system custom, obtaining a suitable accommodation etc. Lebcir, Wells and Bond (2008) see learning that communicate across academic cultures, cultures of communication and cultures of learning as a great problem for most international students.

### **Academic Issues**

International students also face academic concerns. Academic concerns represent the major transition issue faced by international students (Walker, 1999). Academic concerns commonly expressed by international students include prior academic preparation, adjustment to foreign teaching methodology and pressure from performance expectations and work load issues. The

responses elicited from the respondents showed that the academic issues are among the problems most of these international students face studying in the University of Bedfordshire. The issue of factors affecting international student's performance was discussed by the majority of the participants. Consistent with participants A 4, A7, A8, other participants talk about how they had to get familiar with the English academic culture. *"When I had been to my lecturers sometimes I didn't use to understand the accent of lecturers" she emphasise further that the "the biggest issues is understanding the lecturer"* (A3). In a similar vein, *"academically is the most difficult, just writing... Because academically when you are in university and you are writing a report and assignments you do them academically... that's the biggest challenge"* (A9). In support of these findings, Edward and Ran (2006) emphasise that most international students face academic issues such as student teacher relationship, study skills, plagiarism, group work etc. due to cultural differences in terms of confusion in ideology and the limited understanding of the cultural expectation of the British academic system. Grant (2010) observes that international students may face difficulties associated with understanding assessment strategies and the marking system. Carroll (2008) argues that in many countries the main form of assessment for students is the end of year examination which most international students might be used to. Consequently, they may be unfamiliar with tasks such as group work, reports, oral presentations and essays. Due to academic culture, international students who perform academically well in their home country become depressed and stressed when they are no longer keeping the grades they are used to achieving, in a foreign country. Arthur (2004) points out that some students rank in top levels of school programme in their home countries and these students are used to being top achievers. The challenges of a new curriculum may disrupt prior levels of academic success and create added pressures for redefining personal competence.

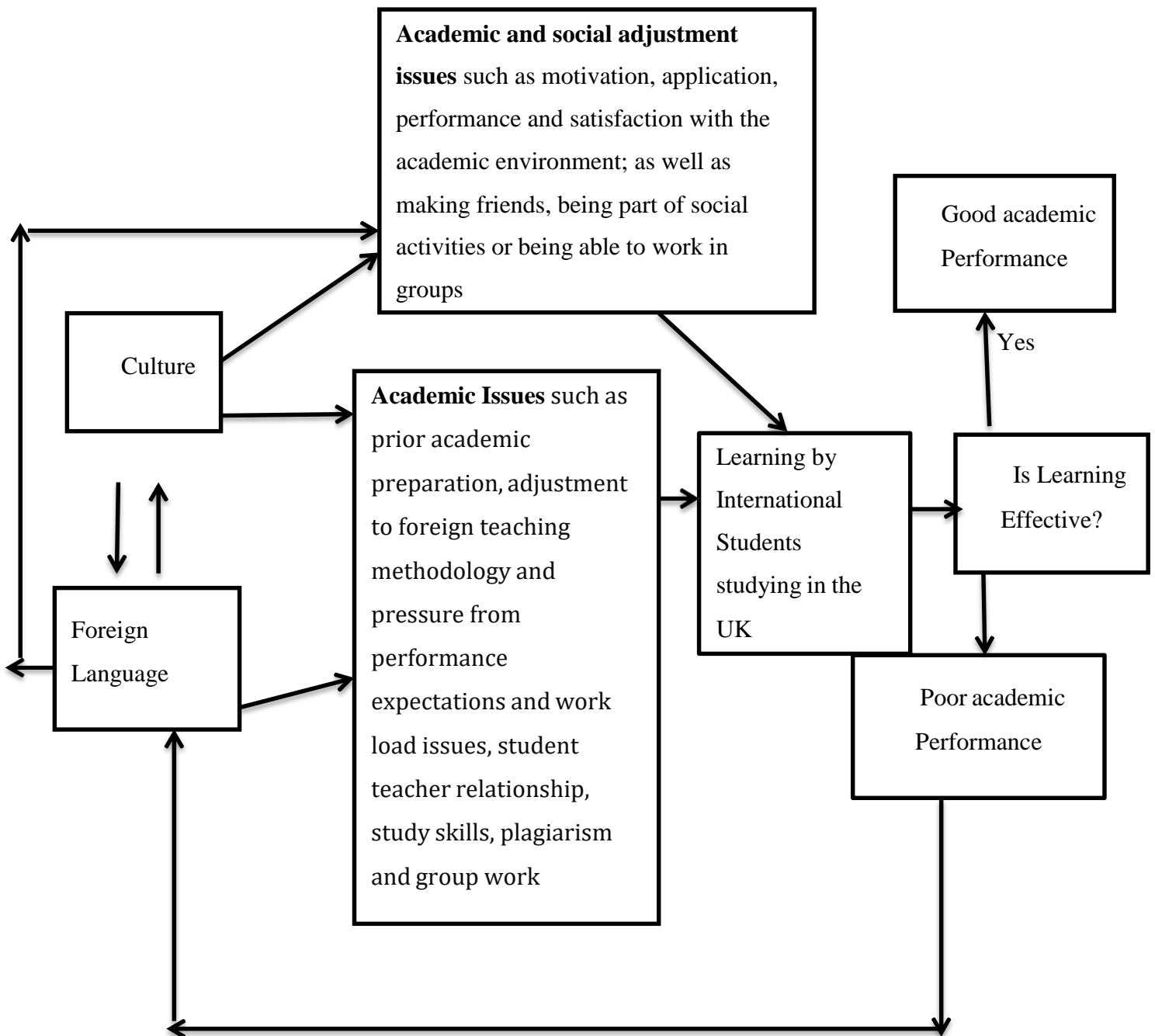
### **Cultural Issues**

The majority of participants also outlined cultural shock as one of the biggest issues they face as they assert that the sharp differences between the culture of the United Kingdom and that of their countries had significant on their behaviour and study. For example, *"Over here culture is quite different from India, and like friends, People like everything is like quite different from India over here"* (A1). Similarly, *"It was really hard for me to cope with the culture. To work with women such things wasn't really easy. But now it's ok to work with women"* (A10). Other participants that support the findings are ( A3 A4 A5 A8). This finding is consistent with previous empirical studies in this area. Major constraint that international students have to contend with is cultural change. Kim (2001) argues that a move to a new cultural environment for most international students signifies a distressing experience which in some cases results to culture shock. Hall (1959) describes the term culture shock as a traumatic condition that results from the removal of familiar cultural cues and substituting with other cues that are strange. Cardiff Metropolitan University (2011) emphasise that most international students experience cultural shock due to the shock occasioned by living in a new environment, meeting lots of new people and being away from their family etc. In addition, the biggest challenge for most international students is to correlate coming to live in a new country with a different culture. Some international students may suffer in silence rather than seek help as some educational cultures value silence and passivity. Grant (2010) indicates that international students may have little or no experience of self-directed/autonomous learning and it may cause them to feel isolated and uncertain as some students may be used to a more passive style of learning which could be interpreted as lack of engagement. The increasing number of international students coming to study in the UK Higher Education has implications for many institutions as there



are factors that will influence their choice of study. Therefore it is very significant that institutions make available good facilities and services and in turn incorporate their particular needs to attract these international students into enrolling.

**Framework for understanding critical factors influencing Academic Performance of International Students in the UK**



**Figure 2:** Critical Factors Affecting the Academic Performance of International Students in the UK

## **EXPLANATION OF THE FRAMEWORK**

The model shows that the critical factors affecting the academic performance of international students in the UK are language, culture, academic issues as well as academic and social adjustment. Deficiency in English language impedes acculturation; academic issues such as adjustment to foreign teaching methodology and student teacher relationship; as well as academic and social adjustment issues such as performance and satisfaction with the academic environment, and making friends, being part of social activities or being able to work in groups. On the other hand, academic and social adjustment coupled with academic issues combine to constrain learning by international students studying in the UK. The overall effect is that learning by international students may prove ineffective and thus precipitate poor performance. When that happens, the student must, of necessity, go back to the drawing board to perfect his/her understanding of the English Language so that the constraints to vital issues in the system are eliminated or significantly minimized. If the language barrier is overcome, the tendency is that cultural, academic and social adjustment issues will be adequately addressed and learning will be effective. If learning is effective, the likely result is good academic performance.

## **DISCUSSION**

Andrade (2006) focuses on how specific adjustment variables such as language proficiency, study habits, educational background and personal characteristics affect achievement, and examine interventions and methodologies that promote academic success. Language proficiency does affect the academic achievement of international students but results vary. Research indicates that the achievement of international undergraduates may be less affected by English proficiency than that of graduate students, and also that language proficiency has a modest effect on achievement for undergraduates. Findings also demonstrate that TOEFL scores and strong writing skill correlate well with achievement, and that some language skills have a greater effect on achievement and adjustment than others. Research on the advantages of learning English in the native country as compared to English high schools is inconclusive. Other factors that affect the academic success of international students include motivation and academic skills and age and years of study. Content-based ESL courses, learning communities, support courses, comprehensive programming and peer study partnerships have been successful in providing international students with academic support.

Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet & Kommers (2012), observe that academic performance is affected positively by academic integration. Correlation analyses indicate significantly that academic performance after one year is positively correlated with three of the four academic integration scales of Baker and Siryk (1999): academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and attachment. They further observe that Western students score better than Dutch students on academic integration and study-performance and Western students who study abroad are in general one or two years older than their domestic peer students (Russell, Rosenthal, D., & Thomson, 2010) and their reason to study abroad is a more conscious choice. As a result, Western students' motivation and learning attitudes are significantly more adjusted to the demand of higher education than those of domestic students (Tempelaar, Rienties, & Gijsselaers, 2006). Non-Western students have more adjustment issues, which leads to lower personal/emotional well-being. By adding criteria for social integration, we could detect that non-Western students receive less support from family and friends, be it in the form of encouragement, emotional or financial support. In other words, non-Western students face

more obstacles before they can actually integrate in academic life compared to the other student groups. Despite these impediments, non-Western students perform equally well after one year of study as domestic students, which is primarily due to the successful academic adjustment of non-Western students.

Melnick, Kaur, and Yu (2008) observe that an important predictor of student well-being and academic performance in an international program is the students' prior exposure to international living and/or schooling. Students who have faced social and cultural challenges before appear to adapt better in an international graduate program. Besides, providing structured work groups and team projects facilitates learning and improved English communication. They also observe that students who participate in social events feel more socially integrated, and those who feel that their English proficiency has improved while in the program tend to be more socially integrated.

Adjustment of international students to foreign language was found to influence degree of acculturation, academic and social adjustment as well as academic issues. This is consistent with the findings of Andrade & Evans (2009); Bamford (2008); Cammish (1997); Foley (2010); Gutierrez (2010); as well as Wilton & Constantine, 2003), among others. Results of the study also found that academic issues affect the performance of international students. Such academic issues include student teacher relationship, study skills, plagiarism, group work etc. (Edward & Ran, 2006) due to cultural differences in terms of confusion ideology, limited understanding of the British academic system, difficulties associated with understanding assessment strategies, and the marking system (Grant, 2010), unfamiliarity with tasks such as group work, reports, oral presentations and essays (Carroll, 2006). Academic writing and particularly the use of referencing which had been highlight by the majority of the international student's interviewed, unfamiliarity with the use of plagiarism system and researching for relative assignments all affect the academic performance of international students. Adjustment to a new environment with challenges such as motivation, application, performance and satisfaction with the academic environment; as well as making friends, being part of social activities or being able to work in groups was also found to be a barrier to academic performance of international students. This is consistent with Baker and Siryk (1999). Lastly, culture was found to be a major constraint to the academic performance of international students. This is consistent with Lebcir, Wells and Bond (2008)

## **CONTRIBUTION**

This study has made a bold attempt to model the factors that affect the academic performance of international students studying in the UK as shown in figure 2. The model explains how deficiency in English language impedes acculturation, academic and social adjustment as well as other academic issues. The overall effect, as indicated in the model, is that effectiveness of learning is jeopardized by these critical factors. The distortion of learning thus precipitates poor academic performance. The negative impact of language deficiency on teaching and learning is evident in the responses of the interviewees. Thus, the major contribution of this study is the framework for understanding the critical factors influencing academic performance of international students in the UK (Model), which shows the order in which these factors interact

to constrain learning and ultimately the academic performance of international students.

### **PRACTICAL IMPLICATION TO UK UNIVERSITIES**

Arising from the findings the UK universities should set machinery in motion to ensure that international students, especially those from countries where English is not spoken, are assisted to learn English language fast since English language is a major factor among the critical factors affecting the academic performance of international students in the UK. Such arrangement should ensure that remedial classes are organized for these categories of international students that are deficient in English language. Such remedial classes may serve to enhance the socialization of those concerned and thus partially address their academic and social adjustment concerns. Considering the economic dependence of UK universities on fees from international students it is not out of place for them to seek to understand the challenges and issues which affect their academic performances with a view to addressing all such challenges to ensure the “going concern” of such international programmes. Eliminating the language barrier through remedial lectures may just be the best starting point.

### **LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

As consistent with most studies based on thematic analysis, the sample size used in this study was small. This was to enable a detailed interview of the respondents. It is suggested that future studies attempt to increase the sample size with a view to reducing the discrepancies between the perceptions of the sampled respondents and those of the true population. In the same vein this study employed purposive sampling in selecting the respondents. The use of purposive sampling may prove quite difficult for the sample's representativeness of the true population since it's impossible to generalise the findings because the sample wouldn't show the representative of the population (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Consequently, future studies should attempt to utilize a sampling technique that will permit generalization of the results to the population of the study. Lastly, this study focused on the international students at the University of B, which is just one out of several universities in the UK where international students come to study. It is desirable for future studies to focus on other UK universities and attempt a comparative study of two or more institutions with a view to ascertaining any locational effect of these critical factors.

### **CONCLUSION**

International students studying in the United Kingdom encounter certain challenges which tend to constrain their academic performance. The most significant of these barriers include the foreign language, which particularly concerns inadequate acquaintance with the English language; adjustment barriers, such as such as motivation, application, performance and satisfaction with the academic environment, as well as making friends, being part of social activities or being able to work in groups; academic issues, such as prior academic preparation, adjustment to foreign teaching methodology and pressure from performance expectations and work load issues, student teacher relationship, study skills, plagiarism and group work; and Culture. To this end, it is expected that the University of Bedfordshire will become more aware of the key factors influencing international student's academic performance. In view of the research findings, the following suggestions are recommended: Admissions officers in UK institutions should give preferences to candidates who have proficiency in English language. This will help to eliminate or reduce to the barest

minimum, the problems posed by English language to international students studying in the United Kingdom; those who design the education curriculum in UK universities should consider incorporating academic skill preparation into the curricula. This will help to reduce the academic adjustment issues confronting international students studying in the United Kingdom; given the cultural adjustment problems faced by international students, the institutions in UK should provide necessary support in order to facilitate the students' social adjustment. To this end, they should be provided the opportunities to interact with their host community, among others. The educational institutions may acquaint international students with the host culture through orientation sessions and appropriate social activities. Furthermore, the host nationals, who may be the members of the academic cohort or neighbours of international students outside the institutions, owe it a duty to show understanding and recognition for cultural diversity and awareness of social justice so that the international students can easily pass through the process of adjustment with minimal constraints.

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